

2009

Inside the red box: North Korea's post-totalitarian politics

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INSIDE THE RED BOX:
NORTH KOREA'S POST-TOTALITARIAN POLITICS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by

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May 2009

Acknowledgements

This dissertation simply would not have been possible without the hard work of many people. First and foremost, I must thank my major professor, Mark Gasiorowski, whose thoughtful critique, clear direction, and warm encouragement shepherded this whole document – from my first notions to a finalized dissertation to hopefully a pending book manuscript. Dr. Gasiorowski consistently challenged me to think deeper, consider another angle, and provided clear and incredibly timely advice on issues large and small. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my committee – Bill Clark, Wonik Kim, David Sobek, and Charles Royster – not only for helpful comments on the proposal and defense but helping lay the foundations for this project. Dr. Clark first exposed me to regime types and encouraged my interest in concepts like totalitarianism, Dr. Kim always provided valuable insights into the state/society relations perspective as well as helped me explore East Asia history, Dr. Sobek helped me place this project in wider perspective for the discipline, and Dr. Royster reminded me to maintain relevance for a wider audience still.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank a number of my colleagues at the State Department at elsewhere in the U.S. government, think tanks, and other academic institutions. Brian Kux, Allison Hooker, John Merrill, the rest of INR's Team Korea, my many colleagues on the Korea desk, and those who preferred to not be named have taught and continue to teach me a great deal about North Korea and other topics. And though I must note that the views expressed here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Government, I have appreciated the opportunity to discuss and debate many issues with my colleagues. I am constantly amazed at the generosity of others willing to read part of all of a manuscript like this one. I benefited from productive exchanges with Andrew Scobell, Steven Kim, Stephan Haggard, Jim Hoare, Susan Pares, Bruce Cumings, Kirk Larsen, Alexandre Mansourov, Johannes Gerschewski, Alexandre Vorontsov, Piao Jianyi, Xiangrong Dong, and many others who I am inevitably leaving off this list. One should not assume, of course, that these helpful discussants agreed with my argument, making me all the more grateful they were willing to engage on this topic.

I also owe a special thank you to Tara Montelaro whose help with all things administrative and beyond from my graduate school application to submitting this dissertation has been absolutely superb; Tara consistently goes above and beyond and conducts herself with such grace, good humor, and incredible effectiveness and efficiency that she is truly exemplary.

Last but certainly not least, I must single out my loving wife, Jaclyn, for all of her support though this long process. Living with me is a much more daunting task than even writing a dissertation, and she does it with such grace and good humor. She put up with my moods and demands for rather obsessive prolonged focus that of course only seems unreasonable in retrospect. I certainly could not have completed this without her love, affection, and constant support, so it is only fitting that I dedicate this dissertation to her.

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Abstract

This dissertation proposes a radically new understanding of North Korean politics under Kim Jong Il and carefully tests this theoretical proposition. Current models describe North Korea as some form of a highly centralized state: totalitarian, personalistic, or corporatist. By contrast, I argue that these monolithic ideal types fail to capture the institutional pluralism that helps distinguish the younger Kim's rein from his father's. While Kim Il Sung's rule can be described as totalitarian, Kim Jong Il governs through a more decentralized post-totalitarian, institutionally plural state.

Kim Jong Il's government is highly centralized, but it is less centralized than his father's. North Korean politics comprises the interaction of the military, party, and cabinet with "oversight" by the security apparatus. These institutions enjoy limited autonomy in an effort to most productively leverage their expertise while retaining generalist political control over them. Kim and his inner circle of advisers have final authority, but institutional inputs set the decision-making stage and shape most policies' implementation.

These semi-autonomous groups have opportunity and cause to interact in the policy formation and execution process, creating room to discuss pluralist politics in North Korea. Kim Jong Il's focus on political survival and emergency management over ideology as a guiding force makes today's North Korean government more rational than in the past but it does not suggest that ideology is irrelevant. Bureaucratic winners and losers are defined on an issue basis. In short, institutional politics – in conjunction with Kim Jong Il's critical role – help explain political outcomes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“North Korea is a country that has a very vertically oriented governing structure to be sure... but at the same time it is place for politics. And so I think it is fair to say that there are people in North Korea who really are not with the program here, really rather continue to be producing this plutonium for whatever reason.”

-- Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Chris Hill
March 25, 2008¹

Chairman of the National Defense Commission and General Secretary of the Korean Worker’s Party Kim Jong Il hosted South Korean President Kim Dae Jung in Pyongyang for an historic summit in June 2000. One of the long-standing issues under discussion was the presences of American troops on the Korean peninsula. The DPRK ostensibly existed to protect Koreans and their special, moral, socialist way of life from the violent, greedy, and uncivilized imperialists and puppet counterparts south of the DMZ.

DPRK Party Secretary Kim Yong-sun told South Korean President Kim Dae Jung that the U.S. military must remove all its troops from the peninsula. Kim Jong Il reportedly interrupted, “What problem would there be if the U.S. military remained?” Seeming surprised, Kim Yong-sun began presenting the party line. The United States military threatened North Korea and impaired national reunification. The long-held North Korean position was simple: the U.S. must withdraw.

The North Korean Party Secretary did not get his whole line out. Kim Jong Il again interrupted, “Secretary Yong-sun, stop that. Even though I try to do something, people under me oppose it like this. Perhaps the military, too, must have the same view of the U.S. military as Secretary Yong-sun. The U.S. military should not attack us. But, in President Kim's explanation, there are some aspects I concur with. (The U.S. military) need not withdraw now. It will be good for the U.S. military to remain to maintain peace even after reunification.”

South Korean President Kim Dae Jung asked, “But in press articles, does not North Korea always demand the U.S. military withdrawal?” Kim Jong-il replied, “It is for domestic consumption. As there is the aspect that our military also maintains (discipline) through tension, I hope you will not be so concerned.”²

¹ Christopher Hill, Remarks at the Washington Forum for the Atlantic Council of United States. Quoted in “US Warns North Korean Politics Could Scuttle Nuclear Deal,” *Agence France Presse*, March 25, 2008.

² “Kim Jong-il interrupts own official to say U.S. forces may stay after reunification,” *Choson Ilbo* August 9, 2000, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 11, 2000. “Kim Jong Il could accept U.S. military presence,” *Daily*

Kim Jong Il was either making history or playing tactical games. This incident could easily have been staged. However, he also may have been expressing genuine conflict within his regime. Groups within North Korea may reveal preferences, and Kim may have to balance and placate these groups. My theory of North Korean politics laid out in the following chapter holds out the possibility that events like this one are not staged. North Korea's highest-level defector Hwang Jang Yop has described Kim as one who often publicly castigates senior officials on a whim.³ Political psychologists note he is prone to impulsive remarks and policy stands.⁴ It is possible that this display actually reflected different bureaucratic positions within the state that Kim seeks to control.

It is not uncommon for North Korea specialists, especially in government circles, to assert that Kim is the only important node in North Korean politics. However, Kim cannot rule by fiat; individuals and institutions below him matter. At the very least, they inform and execute the most strategic-level decisions and make more operational decisions based on their understanding of Kim's wishes. An important goal for any analyst of North Korean politics is to understand how this internal politics works. Whether recognized or not, assumptions about the North Korean political system shape one's view of how it reacts to its external environment. A poor understanding of North Korean politics will inevitably lead one to call the products of that political system (policy choices) "surprising" or "perplexing."

This book's core argument is that the existing models of North Korean politics do a poor job of explaining the regime's political process. North Korean actions are continually labeled surprising precisely because of this inadequate view of its political operations. This study seeks to explain – and even predict – North Korea's policy choices based on a revised understanding of its basic functions.

In this specific incident, Kim Jong Il may have decided to shift course given this changed external environment, but what explains the stop-and-go nature of a strategic change in course? Why suffer the costs of loosened administrative control over the economy to foster economic efficiency if the state is simply going to reverse these gains the following year? How can the state pursue contradictory policies simultaneously and why do some senior leaders cautiously voice opposition to decided policy if all policy choices originate from the "nerve center" (Kim)? The various monolithic ideal types described in greater detail in the following chapter are inadequate to the task of describing and predicting North Korean political choices. Incorporating North Korea's institutional politics into a model of the regime's functions goes a long way to aiding our understanding of Pyongyang's policy choices and beyond.

Additionally, the summit statement reminds analysts that establishing the meaning and authenticity of statements remains challenging. Are North Korean statements merely tactical efforts to deceive the outside world or do they also serve as a conduit for internal communication? Pyongyang's focus on information security leads it to try to deceive hostile

Yomiuri August 10, 2000, p. 1, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). Don Kirk, "A North Korean Shift on Opposing U.S. Troops?" *International Herald Tribune*, August 10, 2000, p. 1.

³ Hwang Jang Yop, *Nanun Yoksaii Chilliril Poatta [I Saw the Truth of History]* (Seoul: Hanul, 1999).

⁴ Jerrold Post, "Kim Jong Il of North Korea: In the Shadow of His Father," in *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

states even more than most countries. However, concerns about internal threats to Kim's power lead the state to stovepipe information, or compartment access to data in such a way as to restrict cross-institutional collaboration and communication. Demand for cross-institutional communication prompts leaders to debate strategic policy choices in the North Korean press, where central leadership can keep a close eye on these communications. Systematically analyzing this data in context can help the outside observer see the interaction between various interests inside North Korea.

Views of the Regime

The popular view that only one man matters in North Korea quickly breaks down upon investigation. One may hypothesize that policy reversals are a function of a dictator ultimately unsure of his own decisions and second guessing himself. Of course, this does not square well with the popular or scholarly image of the dictator. Instead, Kim may be playing tactical games to merely sustain a regime lacking any existential purpose. This too has difficulty explaining a host of specific policy programs pursued and general goals like reunification and anti-imperialism that remain. Indeed, one may even label this cartoonish view of the North Korean state as a straw man; much more sophisticated views of the North Korean state exist that still present the state as some type of monolith.

One can read a number of excellent accounts of U.S.-North Korean negotiations. These explain in great detail the bureaucratic conflict within the U.S. government during these negotiations but rarely refer to any sub-state actor in North Korea.⁵ While these thoughtful authors recognize some internal dynamic must operate in North Korea as well, they readily admit that this process is unknown. Unknown does not imply unknowable and provides one motivation for this project.

Partisans in the debate over whether to engage the North dispute whether the state has or can uphold any of its international commitments. Both sides can select data to bolster their argument, but it often does not serve a fruitful analytical purpose. It does not help explain why North Korea upholds its international commitments sometimes and breaks them at other times. Further, it does not explain why the opaque state pursues a risky economic policy of marketization, for example, simply to later change course.

This study argues that divergent policy choices reflect, in part, different views and interests within the state. Kim must react to domestic as well as international stimuli. One must first recognize that internal politics matters and then specifically how North Korean internal politics functions to produce different policy outputs. Such as project has utility for both comparative theorists and policy analysts concerned with how the state functions. The project focuses on the how question, since, if it demonstrates a consistent pattern of North Korean politics, inherently refutes the argument that sub-Kim domestic politics do not matter.

⁵ Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). Joel Wit, Daniel Poneman, and Robert Gallucci, *Going Critical: the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004). Charles Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007). Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008).

Diverse Institutional Views

The empirical chapters detail the policy positions that different institutions within North Korea express in the official media. They expose these diverse policy preferences to an internal audience carefully, recognizing that foreign observers and the top leadership may read their articles. This exercise exposes a number of specific and general debates including budget fights over the relative merits of allocating funding to agriculture and consumer goods versus the military and heavy industry. It shows high-level cabinet members attending ceremonies committing rail and road connections across the DMZ and hosting South Korean trade delegations at the same time that party and military officials speak of insulating the state from foreign pressures and engaging in deadly interactions with the South Korean military.

Institutions regularly and openly identify revealed policy preferences as belonging to their institution and even question policy directions sanctioned by Kim. For example, in 1998 a senior military official said, “The Korean People's Army expected nothing from the agreement [Agreed Framework] and had no interest in dialogue and negotiation through diplomatic channels. Now, the United States, throwing away the mask of ‘appeasement’ and ‘engagement’ ... prove that the KPA's judgment and stand were completely correct.”⁶ It is only human to want to express to one’s colleagues when one’s policy preferences should be implemented or to claim victory by being “right.” More importantly, it is common to rational modes of policy creation to utilize the information resources available in different parts of the system. Communication between working-level and senior-level officials below Kim and his inner circle is necessary for rational rule.

This more divided political system has allowed greater discussions on several important issues. The cabinet, party, and military have expressed distinct views on the strategic direction of the North Korean economy. Increased marketization has experienced a back-and-forth trajectory over the timeframe under analysis, largely reflecting the success and failures of the state’s three institutions to allow or crack down on societal-driven economic changes. Though party and military officials favor greater socialist orthodoxy in the North’s economy, market economics plays a greater role under Kim Jong Il’s system than under Kim Il Sung’s regime. North Korea’s economy still maintains significant elements of a command economy and the state has not made any irreversible decisions to comprehensively reform the economy, but the command economy has shrunk in the last decade. The cabinet has been at the forefront of advocating a greater role for markets, decentralized enterprise management, and other mechanisms to increase the efficiency of the North Korean economy.

Kim Jong Il’s North Korea has likewise demonstrated its system functions according to a different model in the critical areas of anti-imperialism and reunification policy. The concrete manifestations of these two areas are Pyongyang’s foreign policy towards the United States and its policy towards South Korea. The party’s main source of input into policy decisions is ideological guidance. As such, it consistently presents the case against accommodating the American “imperialists” in diplomatic fora. It seizes on unfavorable news, presents historical

⁶ “Army's Anger over U.S. Nuclear Moves has ‘Reached its Limit’,” KCNA, December 12, 1998, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, December 14, 1998.

narratives, or makes pure ideological claims that undermine the Foreign Ministry's efforts to engage Washington.

The military takes a similar, but distinct, stand against negotiating with the Americans. Washington seeks to limit North Korea's coercive potential, particularly in the missile and nuclear areas. The Korean Peoples Army (KPA) objects to limitations that a foreign power seeks to place on its ability to defend the state. This insertion of the military institution into politics takes a limited but pragmatic strategic vision. The military does not object to negotiations because they violate *Juche* principles but because they hinder the institution's ability to provide for the state's military-based security.

The cabinet's Foreign Ministry is the only institution that consistently presents the benefits of engaging the Americans. As the lead organization in each of the different sets of talks during this period, the Foreign Ministry has presented the value of negotiating by highlighting the concessions the other side provided. It presents North Korea's positions fiercely and has not shied away from ultimatums. When relations soured, the cabinet often simply went silent as the party and military presented why such engagement was never productive or worthwhile. This cabinet institution's strategic interests conflict with the military and party's interests and platforms; it presents a strikingly different future for the North Korean state with American security guarantees and economic revitalization.

These three institutions likewise demonstrated three internally consistent agendas on reunification issues. Though all three groups support eventual reunification, they advocate different inter-Korean policies to achieve this end. The party presents a 1950s-style reunification path. The party's position is so nostalgic that some analysts question whether it still genuinely maintains this desire to reunify the state through force. South Korea is now a successful democracy with a military likely capable of defeating the North even without American assistance in a prolonged Korean conflict. When Kim Il Sung's forces crossed the 38th parallel in 1950, the North enjoyed military superiority over the South and Seoul's anti-democratic tendencies at the time did not give it a popular legitimacy advance over the North. Pyongyang also enjoyed support from a much wider group of leftists among the South Korean populace that opposed the South's rightist government. Seoul's superpower ally continued to demobilize its military forces after World War II, especially in Asia and even more so in Korea. Kim Il Sung enjoyed Soviet political support which brought reluctant Chinese support well in advance of Beijing's actually committing three million "volunteers" to the Korean War. Pyongyang had a much better chance of forcing reunification on the North's terms in 1950 than today.

The party maintains that, eventually, conditions will be ripe for a 1950s-style reunification drive again. The "Great Patriotic War" is immortalized in North Korean lore despite its recognized role in leveling the whole of North Korea and much of the South. The United States is not demobilizing, but it may – someday – withdraw from Asia or at least decide not to get involved in a long and bloody second Korean war, especially if it ran the risk of nuclear escalation. The Soviet Union is gone, but Pyongyang could conceivably enjoy Russian or Chinese political support in international organizations like the UN Security Council to preserve peninsular stability and limit the American presence on the Asian mainland. China's defense commitment to the North explicitly rules out assistance if Pyongyang initiates a conflict

and it is highly questionable whether Beijing will defend Pyongyang as its legacy treaty commitments indicate in case of a collapse scenario or even foreign invasion. South Korea still has a leftist social element but it has been much weakened since democratization and not likely to significantly and violently rise up against its democratic government in face of a North Korean advance.

Nevertheless, the party takes the long view and prefers to prepare for a day in the future when the North may reunify the Korean nation under one flag. When weighed against its alternative and incorporating the individual self-interest of elites, the party's position is more understandable. North Korea is not a state with favorable options. Reforming and opening up brings its own risks, especially to regime elites. If the state reforms in the way of Eastern Europe, revolutionary aims would be lost, decades of sacrifice and family efforts would be for naught, and the physical security of regime elites may be put in jeopardy. Even if the North is integrated into South Korean society under the most favorable of conditions for these elites, they would lose much of their privilege. In short, it is not irrational for this group of elites to prefer to extend the current system as long as possible rather than take the short-term risks of collapsing the regime and threatening both their social position and lives. In practice, this means the party rejects increased economic contacts with the South and stresses military strength.

The military's inter-Korean position is similar in practice to the party's. The military uses fewer explicit justifications for its actions, but it too takes exception to the cabinet's inter-Korean economic projects that allow greater cross-border rail and road traffic. It presents military security as an absolute goal; other issues should not interfere with the KPA's ability to provide for the state's security. It continually notes in the North Korean media that it stands ready to reunify the state by force. The motivation of its soldiers and tactical advances makes victory assured, they argue. Whether military leaders genuinely believe they can force the South into a protracted war and avoid American intervention is ultimately not observable. Koreans have a long history of fiercely defending their independence against all odds, and those who gambled and won in North Korea two generations ago put themselves and their families in positions of power for long periods of time in a system that otherwise makes climbing the social ladder very difficult. More importantly, military leaders must prepare to carry out orders to go to war, so it is natural that these leaders try to position resources to most effectively carry out those potential orders. The fortress state means prioritized resource allocation to the military, a sealed northern and southern border, and developing all weapons systems available, including nuclear weapons and their means of delivery.

The cabinet's inter-Korean policy is the most distinct. It does not reject reunification but does not mention it much either. Inter-Korean policy for the cabinet is wrapped up in a different view of the future of the state. The cabinet has a more difficult time articulating a strategic vision for a unified peninsula under the North's control as a byproduct of its advocacy. Instead, its goals are aimed at more immediate economic goals and a long-term vision of a more sustainable economy. Foreign investment, special economic zones, and humanitarian aid provide economic and social benefits. The special economic zones especially provide foreign investment with fewer immediate risks since they are fairly well-insulated from the wider society. The cabinet's efforts to attract more foreign investment, development assistance, and humanitarian aid, especially from South Korean government sources, require improved North-

South ties. The cabinet manages this relationship with an emphasis on the economic benefits it provides, but its policy does not logically end with reunification. As such, the cabinet opens itself to criticism from party and military quarters that such policies abandon a core, emotionally- and rationally-held goal of Koreans.

These debates reflect how North Korea's institutions embody the competing goals the regime must manage. There is a role for ideology but also pragmatism. The party is an important institution, but only one of three peer institutions that compete for influence. In short, the nature and functions of North Korean politics is different than in the past. North Korea has undergone an evolution, not a revolution. It changed from its distinct past, and this starting point has a profound impact on its present. North Korea did not reshape its politics from scratch but how the regime fundamentally functions remains a key question for any student of North Korea that this study addresses.

These policy differences are puzzling if one subscribes to a monolithic view of the North Korean government. Why does Kim permit this dissent? Is the dissent genuine? If not, what is its purpose? Why would the regime attempt to demonstrate its absolute control to internal and external audiences present subtle evidence of disunity? More fundamentally, how can one make sense of this seemingly strange political system that both surprises and defies conventional expectations? It is my contention that North Korea's bureaucracies work at cross-currents; recognizing that the river flows in different directions simultaneously is an important first step in crafting an effective navigation strategy.

Towards a New Model

Understanding how the state functions, crafts policy, and conducts politics is the critical first node in explaining and even predicting policy choices. Continually surprising and perplexing outcomes suggest that existing models of North Korean politics may be outdated or wrong. Despite this demand for understanding, few have attempted in recent years to comprehensively model the North Korea political system. This project looks to fill this void.

There is demand for scholarship on the North Korean state both among comparativists and foreign policy practitioners, but the supply of methodologically rigorous scholarship is low. A review of the two major comparative politics journals and the three general political science journals yields only one article on the state since its founding.⁷ Likewise, some area specialists recognize that the state is poorly understood in both policy and academic circles. This recognized problem has not been resolved. The little area studies literature broadly related to this topic does not speak to the comparative literature and usually has little to no explicit theoretical discussion. Area specialists have largely avoided studying the state's domestic politics altogether or applied the same limited data points on the North's internal functions. This scholarly chasm has further hampered our collective understanding. This project attempts to

⁷ Byung Chul Koh, "Ideology and Political Control in North Korea," *Journal of Politics* 32:3 (1970), pp. 655-74.

bridge this gap by building on the strong comparative politics theoretical tradition, the rich area studies empirical work and my own contribution to each of these areas.

One reason for this dearth of scholarship is the required refrain that North Korea is a data-poor country. While this is true, it is often overstated and perhaps discourages new researchers before they even begin. The lack of empirical research on North Korea is a great opportunity to make significant statements and expose substantial “new” data that has been largely overlooked. There are more untapped scholarly resources available on this state than most others as the empirical chapters demonstrate. Furthermore, North Korea’s controlled media is a useful window into the state’s function precisely because it is controlled. Dismissing this information as thoughtless propaganda loses an opportunity to look inside this controlled regime’s operations. The state can be studied systematically and new data and patterns discerned.

North Korea suffered a confluence of crises in the 1990s. The state’s founder and national hero died in 1994, and his son took power. China and Russia established diplomatic relations with South Korea, and the United States came precariously close to war with North Korea during the first nuclear crisis in 1993/94. Pyongyang lost its Soviet benefactor in 1991, notably losing energy and food aid. The state suffered extreme economic hardship and decades of poor agricultural policy choices combined with North Korea’s periodic intense flooding to plunge the state into famine in the late 1990s.⁸ Multiple analysts argued the regime’s days were numbered, suggesting the state would not survive the decade.⁹ While the state did not collapse, these forces did alter it. North Korea’s political evolution rapidly accelerated, dislodging some elements and retaining others. The assumption that that North Korea’s government functions in much the same way as it did under Kim Il Sung is highly questionable.

The centralized narratives generally hold that both Kims relied on a small set of inner circle advisers to craft national policy. Some of these individuals command large bureaucracies but most do not. They are powerful due to their relationship with Kim, not the bureaucracies they command. Power flows from the top. Kim uses carrots (e.g., gifts) and sticks (e.g., purges and threats) to control this group. Kim may direct policy through a favored institution such as the military or the party, but policy innovation comes from the center. The major bureaucracies are composed of functionaries. In Stalin’s terms, these are “transmission belts” to implement small-group decisions. Functionaries are to blame for failing to properly implement necessarily sage policy when policy fails. Both power and authority are centralized.

⁸ Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers*.

⁹ Byung-joon Ahn. “The Man Who Would Be Kim,” *Foreign Affairs* 73:6 (November/December 1994): 94 – 108. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Jongryn Mo. *North Korean Economic Reform and Political Stability* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1996). Nicholas Eberstadt. *The End of North Korea* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1999).

This centralized narrative comes in various forms with varying degrees of state dynamism built into the explanation. The state is Stalinist,¹⁰ post-Stalinist,¹¹ personalist, neosocialist corporatist,¹² or an eroding totalitarian¹³ or eroding socialist¹⁴ state. Kim rules as an absolute monarch through the military,¹⁵ party,¹⁶ or an inner circle of advisers and kin.¹⁷ Some of these models suggest that there is some movement away from Kim Il Sung's more thorough power and authority, but Kim Jong Il does not radically depart from his father's mode of rule. While I expand upon the meaning and arguments of these characterizations in the following chapter, I ultimately find them lacking. I argue that these monolithic ideal types fail to capture the pluralism that helps distinguish the younger Kim's rule from his father's. My central thesis is that while Kim Il Sung's rule can be described as totalitarian, Kim Jong Il rules through a more decentralized post-totalitarian, institutionally plural state that I call "post-totalitarian institutionalism."

Pluralism is often associated with democracy, so I should be clear to note that this is not an argument that North Korea is democratizing. Quite the contrary, the argument notes that the state has stabilized as a type of autocratic government. However, it is an argument that not all autocratic regimes are alike and teasing out North Korea's specific variety has utility.

In this type of state, interests are more diffuse and institutional preferences are debated cautiously but publicly.¹⁸ Debates are not personal; they are institutional. Important policy differences are not defined by individuals closely tied to Kim but large bureaucracies with consistent interests and the capacity to produce detailed knowledge.¹⁹ National policy outcomes are determined more by the interaction of three "second echelon" institutions: the cabinet,

¹⁰Cheng Chen and Ji-yong Lee, "Making Sense of North Korea: 'National Stalinism' in Comparative-Historical Perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40 (2007), pp. 459-475.

¹¹Andrei Lankov, "North Korea: Destalinization From Below and the Advent of New Social Forces," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10:2 (Spring 2006), pp. 4-14.

¹²Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: Norton, 1997).

¹³Andrew Scobell, "Making Sense of North Korea: Pyongyang and Comparative Communism," *Asian Security* 1:3 (2005), pp. 245 – 266.

¹⁴Han-beom Cho, "The Characteristics of the North Korean Political System: A Comparative Socialist Perspective," *Vantage Point* (April 2003), pp. 44 – 54.

¹⁵Soyoung Kwon. "State Building in North Korea: From a 'Self-Reliant' to a 'Military-First' State," *Asian Affairs* 34:3 (2003), pp. 286 – 296. Ralph Hassig, "The Well-Informed Cadre," in *North Korean Policy Elites*, ed. Kongdan Oh Hassig (Alexandria: VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2004). Robert Scalapino, "In Search of Peace and Stability in the Region Surrounding the Korean Peninsula – Challenges and Opportunities," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 28 (2006), pp. 367 – 378.

¹⁶In-su Gwak, "Guiding Role of North Korean Workers Party," *Vantage Point* (May 2004), pp. 43 – 53.

¹⁷Joseph Bermudez, "Information and the DPRK's Military and Power-Holding Elite," in *North Korean Policy Elites*, ed. Kongdan Oh Hassig (Alexandria: VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2004). Yi Yang Su, "Analysis of DPRK Power Group," *Chungang Ilbo* (Three part series: January 4, 2007; January 5, 2007; January 6, 2007). Bong-uk Chong, "Changes in North Korea's Hierarchy," *Vantage Point* (February 2007), pp. 16 – 21.

¹⁸Robert Carlin and Joel Wit, *Adelphi Paper 382: North Korean Reform* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006).

¹⁹Ken Gause. "The North Korean Leadership: System Dynamics and Fault Lines," in *North Korean Policy Elites*, ed. Kongdan Oh Hassig (Alexandria: VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2004).

military, and party.²⁰ Policy innovation comes from below. Kim and his inner circle serve as the final decision-maker of options presented by these institutions. Authority is centralized, but power is diffuse.

If this hypothesis is correct, then this mode of rule produces very different expectations than the previously applied modes of rule. North Korea is not a simple organizational unit with one man making core decisions. The state processes foreign actions through a rigid and predictable political apparatus and returns reactive policy choices based on the external and internal considerations. Treating North Korea as a black box overlooks the critical internal political calculations that often modify policy choices. Predicting North Korea's responses to foreign actions is not always intuitive, but this theory should improve our predictions about those policy choices.

The Stakes

North Korea is a country of great interest to foreign policy practitioners and scholars alike. It is the world's poorest state with a nuclear weapon and has demonstrated its willingness and capability to transfer its nuclear know-how and equipment to the Middle East. It has the largest military conscription rate in the world, develops and exports ballistic missiles, and continually threatens its neighbors. The country has seen humanitarian catastrophes and a fundamental denial of human rights. It is the only communist state to weather a hereditary succession and one of the few remaining one-party communist states to survive the end of the Cold War. In the past, the state has been linked to counterfeiting foreign currency, drug running, and terrorist incidents.

North Korea shares a land or sea border with the second, third, and thirteenth largest economies in the world. It is the 95th largest economy in the world – right behind Cameroon. In 2007 only three national economies in the world suffered a worse growth rate than North Korea.²¹ It commands roughly half of China's development assistance and requires food and energy aid from its neighbors, its main stated adversary – the United States, and the international community to fill shortages. It has experimented with limited form of market reforms simply to backtrack later on these moves. North Korea rightfully commands interest, yet it is poorly understood.

The common element to these issues is the North Korean regime. Understanding the North's internal processes helps gauge its reaction to policy choices made in Washington, Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo, and other interested capitals. This study is, at its outset, agnostic on the

²⁰ Jinwook Choi, "Changing Relations between Party, Military, and Government in North Korea and Their Impact on Policy Direction," (Stanford, CA: Shorenstein APARC Working Paper, 1999). Alexandre Mansourov, "Disaster Management and Institutional Change in the DPRK: Trends in the Songun Era," *KEI Academic Paper Series 2:9* (2007), pp. 1-19.

²¹ CIA World Factbook, < <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>>, accessed April 30, 2008.

normative question of selecting between policy options towards North Korea, ranging from accommodation to pressure strategies. However, it does seek to inform analysts interested in predicting North Korean reactions to these policies based on an informed understanding of the state's decision-making structure.

Furthermore, understanding how North Korea's political system functions gives critical insight into a wider group of authoritarian regimes. North Korea is arguably the most centralized authoritarian state in existence today. The following chapter exposes how it has been described as fitting the mold of the totalitarian, personalist, and corporatist models. While theories and typologies of authoritarian states are comparative in nature, understanding this critical case's domestic politics has useful applications for the wider study of authoritarian regimes. If the state that comes closest to the proposed ideal types departs significantly from the theories' expectations, this may suggest important revisions to these typologies.

While many of the former Soviet satellite states in Europe transitioned towards democracy, many regimes in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia arguably share some common characteristics of a post-totalitarian state. An updated and revised view of North Korean politics has direct relevance on explaining a wider group of states that do not seem to be moving towards democracy. In this way, this project seeks to be relevant to another group of readers interested in how this general group of states' political systems craft policy, sustain themselves in face of challenges, evolve, and react to foreign actions of regional and global actors.

Finally, the universe of communist states that weathered the Soviet collapse is few in number. North Korea accounts for a substantial portion of these states that failed to transition to democracy and is the least reformed of the remaining communist governments. The study traces the process by which North Korea evolved politically and prevented its own collapse in face of economic crisis, famine, international pressure, and its first and only leadership transition. Explanation requires theory, and well-crafted theory may be exportable to other countries. Authoritarian resilience is the other side of the coin of the well-researched question of democratic transitions and has bearing on this research program. The evolution and resiliency of North Korea's government informs both the question of how post-totalitarian regimes operate and the dynamic process of post-communist (non-)transitions.

Road Map

Chapter two reviews the competing theories of North Korean politics, including the totalitarian, post-totalitarian, personalist, and corporatist models. I lay out my theoretical model, explaining why the state evolved from its totalitarian origins and how the system consequently functions today. I conclude the theoretical section with a research design. I describe my data sources and means of evaluating this theoretical model.

Chapter three documents the historical evolution of North Korean politics under Kim Il Sung, while chapter four discusses the modified institutional structure of Kim Jong Il's rule. The younger Kim did not accept wholesale his father's mode of rule, but he also did not recreate the state from scratch. Chapter three describes the founding national-level institutions, ideology, and mode of rule. It shows how these gradually evolved under Kim Il Sung's watchful eye, including formal constitutional revisions and a general decline of the *Juche* ideology. The second part of the chapter acknowledges several shocks to the system in the mid-1990s that accelerated the state's transformation. The collapse of its Soviet benefactor, nuclear crises, death of the state's founder and national hero, and famine jeopardized the existence of the state. The younger Kim had to adapt to deal with the existing realities. The state's "emergency management" and response to social pressures from the famine altered North Korea's politics. Chapter four focuses on the resulting political order, providing relevant background on all constitutional institutions in North Korea not included in the general historical narrative.

Chapters five through seven constitute the empirical tests of this model. These chapters contextualize North Korean policy debates observed in the press and leaked by foreign interlocutors in a contemporary history. The model is dynamic. This section explains how the state processes specific examples of foreign actions and produces policy responses. It goes inside the red box to construct this narrative rather than making blind assumptions about internal dynamics. It documents what the key North Korean institutional leaders said in commentaries, articles, and major speeches and show how these positions are consistent across the leader of the institution. It evaluates how these leaders communicate preferences to other institutional leaders and in some cases even resist high-level policy choices. Strategic positions by institution are remarkably consistent, responding in the same general frame to specific challenges. However, national policy varies. This chapter evaluates how these debates frame the discussion internally and explain otherwise perplexing national policy choices.

The final chapter concludes with three important tasks. First, it discusses whether this model better fits the data than the competing models reviewed in chapter two. This naturally raises the question why this characterization matters. I discuss the downstream consequences of the model, which predicts some otherwise counterintuitive conclusions. Second, I evaluate the effect of this model on our general understanding of authoritarian regimes. Does this revised understanding of North Korea's politics leave lessons for other states in the post-totalitarian world? Finally, the chapter analyzes the general lessons for foreign policy practitioners. Policy choices will remain normative, political decisions but understanding North Korea's political system can aid a balanced view of concrete and predictable trade-offs involved in these choices.

Chapter 2: Post-totalitarian Institutionalism

This chapter provides a conceptual basis in which to evaluate North Korean domestic politics and puts forth my theoretical contention of the system's functions. I argue that North Korea under Kim Il Sung approximated the totalitarian ideal type, but North Korea today is better understood as a centralized polity in which second-echelon institutions play an important role. Kim Jong Il's government is highly centralized, but it is less centralized than his father's. North Korean politics comprises the interaction of the military, party, and cabinet with "oversight" by the security apparatus (see chapter 4 for a review of these institutional actors). These institutions enjoy limited autonomy in an effort to most productively leverage their expertise while retaining generalist political control over them. Kim and his inner circle of advisers have final authority, but institutional inputs set the decision-making stage and shape most policies' implementation.

These semi-autonomous groups have opportunity and cause to interact in the policy formation and execution process, creating room to discuss pluralist politics in North Korea. Kim Jong Il's focus on political survival and emergency management over ideology as a guiding force makes today's North Korean government more rational than in the past but it does not suggest that ideology is irrelevant. Bureaucratic winners and losers are defined on an issue basis. In short, institutional politics – in conjunction with Kim Jong Il's critical role – help explain political outcomes. In order to build on past advances, I first turn to evaluating existing theories of non-democratic rule that have been applied to this state.

Existing Models of North Korean Politics

This section synthesizes the main typologies used to describe North Korean politics and shows where they have failed to account for contemporary elements of the North Korean system. Much of the area studies literature describes North Korea as some type of a monolithic state. Kim has "almost total power,"¹ the system is marked by a "hybrid of modern Stalinism and traditional Korean authoritarianism" which "lack[s] of interest group participation."² It is "post-Stalinist,"³ "an eroding totalitarian regime [...where] an absolute dictator still rules,"⁴ and the "application of a 'bureaucratic model' to North Korea is premature."⁵ Other area specialists have recognized the conflicting roles for the cabinet, military, and party in limited

¹ Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 4.

² Samuel S. Kim, "Introduction: A Systems Analysis," in Samuel Kim (ed.), *The North Korean System in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 12, 22.

³ Andrei Lankov, "The Natural Death of North Korean Stalinism," *Asia Policy* 1 (January 2006), pp. 95 -121.

⁴ Andrew Scobell, *Kim Jong Il and North Korea: The Leader and the System* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), p. vi.

⁵ Hak Joon Kim, *North and South Korea: Internal Politics and External Relations Since 1988* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 150.

circumstances⁶ and noted the increasingly visible roles of the military and state “though under the guidance and directions of the party,”⁷ but no study has attempted to apply this to North Korean politics generally or build a model of institutional interaction.

The area studies literature is strong on empirics and relatively weak on theory. The comparative literature in this case is the reverse. Both miss an opportunity. This study attempts to help bridge this gap. I argue that certain elements of the ideal types apply to North Korea. Explicitly incorporating the comparative literature builds on previous theoretical advances and allows a more sophisticated model as a fruit of knowledge accumulation. No case fits these ideal types perfectly, but the North Korean case is sufficiently different that it merits a different typology.

Partisans in the comparative debates have accused one another of erecting straw man arguments around the usage of terms like totalitarianism, monism, pluralism, interest groups, and corporatism. This has delayed theoretical progress in previous debates of a similar nature and stands as a stark warning to proceed cautiously. However, if one is to understand North Korea as another state that fits into a comparative framework, it must be defined in comparative terms. The danger of conceptual stretching and emotional connections to certain terms comes into conflict with the desire to integrate the presumed uniqueness of this state into a comparative framework. Every state is unique at some level of abstraction, and North Korea’s now unfashionable label as a “rogue state” demonstrated a continued view that this state is particularly different. Still, this does not suggest that it cannot or should not be studied comparatively. One explicit theoretical purpose of this study is to bring this presumed outlier into the comparative tradition to explain it and help develop a better understanding of some category of non-democratic states more generally.

Given the importance of studying this state comparatively, the remainder of this section shows the inadequacy of current comparative ideal types in explaining North Korea’s policy inputs. Policy choices (outputs) that continually surprise and puzzle observers further motivates this theoretical reevaluation. To be productive, a comparative study should be able to assess the validity of applying these previous models to this case, provide a better alternative to current theories, and conclude by noting the possibility of other states falling within this theoretical outline. This study broadly addresses each of those tasks.

Totalitarian states isolate individuals and replace previous private social networks with state organization. Totalitarian leaders are revolutionaries, intensely committed to destroying the old order and building a utopian political order based on an all-encompassing ideology.

⁶ Choi 1999; Robert Carlin and Joel Wit, *Adelphi Paper 382: North Korean Reform* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006).

⁷ Haksoo Paik, “North Korea’s Choices for Survival and Prosperity since 1990s: Interplay between Politics and Economics,” *Sejong Policy Studies* 3:2 (2007), pp. 249-92.

Monopolizing information sources and propagandizing provides purpose to the atomized masses for the radical changes. The state does not tolerate pluralism or opposition and regularly purges officials to pursue its revolutionary aims. The party and secret police utilize terror, or arbitrary coercion to instill fear and anxiety in the population.⁸ Anti-regime organizing is not a matter of calculated risk as under authoritarian regimes; people are deterred from extra-state organization that has the potential to be viewed as anti-regime.⁹

Totalitarianism regimes are short lived. Since the state's goals are utopian, they are never reached in practice. The revolutionary euphoria that helped singular leaders or parties come to power subsides; the elite that benefit from this dictatorial rule face a cognitive dilemma. They know the system does not promote its stated ideals, yet they have an incentive to maintain their privileged place in society and avoid punishment if the regime were to change.¹⁰ Consequently, the state loses much of its utopian motivation, bureaucratizes and makes routine the normal state functions.

Ideology may remain as a propaganda tool for the masses and shrinking group of true believers, but it is particularly hollow for many that employ it. Ideology becomes primarily a tool and a constraint on state actions, but it ceases to be a motivating force for the increasingly disenchanted and educated elite. Those in power are no longer a band of revolutionaries working against the system; they are the system, and they try to protect its interests. From this new found conservative position, limited plurality emerges from the natural tendency to bureaucratize.

This pattern can be found in multiple historical examples. Almost a century ago, Max Weber recognized this general movement from revolution to bureaucratization.¹¹ The pattern is also not alien to Korean culture or its core benefactors. The young neo-Confucian scholars that perpetrated the Literari Purges in the early Chosun Dynasty on strong ideological grounds ultimately lost their revolutionary euphoria and bureaucratized their rule and protected their privileged place in society.¹² In the Soviet Union, this rise of limited pluralism followed the death of Stalin.¹³ Likewise, North Korea has evolved from approximating the totalitarian ideal type under Kim Il Sung to a more plural polity under Kim Jong Il. However, this is not simply the story of a state growing more rational or a pragmatic state replacing an ideological one. The

⁸ Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution: The Total State in a World at War* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1942). Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950). Franz Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957).

⁹ Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ Oh and Hassig, pp. 39 – 40.

¹¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968 [1914]), pp. 1121 – 1156.

¹² Carter Eckert et al, *Korea Old and New: A History* (Seoul and Cambridge: Ilchokak Publishers and Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 132-54.

¹³ H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths, *Interests Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971). Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

developments in North Korea require greater refinement to capture the state's functions in a way that helps the observer understand, explain, and even predict its policy choices.

Post-totalitarianism is best understood as an umbrella term that recognizes the unique attributes of states that emerge from the breakdown of revolutionary totalitarianism. The evolved states emerges gradually and retains main attributes of the prior totalitarian regime rather than a radically departing from the totalitarian model with a wholesale acceptance of a new form of rule. The emphasis on evolution rather than revolution makes understanding the state's political history even more important for explaining the way the state currently operates.

Of course, recognizing that states evolve from a similar starting point in no way suggests that they evolve in the same way or are on the same trajectory. They can move in very different directions. In an early attempt to categorize regimes emerging from Soviet domination in the 1990s, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan presented their views on the emergence of a certain class of these post-totalitarian states. They argued in part that the decay of ideology in the Soviet bloc created space for democratic opposition – particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Technocratic employment became a real alternative to party careers as citizens withdrew into private life and the state increasingly tolerated private activity. When ideologues dominate politics, administrative competence declines. Absent policy inputs from outside the state, politics stagnates if specialists from below do not push new concrete ideas up to the entrenched generalists. In a participatory bureaucracy, ideas flow up and down. Experts provide original ideas, which are moderated by bargaining. Without a permanent purge, specialists can develop expertise and send new ideas up to the leadership. Likewise, an expert bureaucracy can modify – wittingly or not – orders of superiors according to developed professional standards.¹⁴

The loss of ideological purpose, combined with these developments, creates room for rational policy. Absent a revolutionary ideological lens through which to prescribe policy choices, the state looks to rational data. Technocrats and a diversity of ideologies – new and old alike – help define the universe of policy choices. This evolution of the polity comes in stages. In the early phase, the leadership is divided, coercion is used less, and contact with the outside world is less restricted. Terror is no longer arbitrary; rather the state learns to deal with dissent outside of the state structure for the first time. The fusion of state and society slowly begins to separate, disheartening some while providing opportunity to others. Crackdowns on dissent freeze the post-totalitarian system into a purposeless, unmoving state with an increasingly relevant civil society opposition that makes it susceptible to collapse.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

¹⁵ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Jeffrey Goldfarb, "Post-totalitarian Politics: Ideology Ends Again," *Social Research* 57, no. 3 (1990): 533-54. Mark Thompson, "To Shoot or Not to Shoot: Posttotalitarianism in China and Eastern Europe," *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 63 – 83.

This band of states evolved in a similar direction, because they had similar starting points after World War II, common pressures, and looked to one another as political development models. There would still be diversity among even those states that came to join European institutions like the EU and NATO, but one could draw effective generalizations about the transition process and their political outcomes. However, states further east like Belarus and the Central Asian republics looked substantially different. China, Cuba, and several states in the Middle East and other parts of Asia likewise evolved from a totalitarian or semi-totalitarian existence but not on the same generalized path as the European post-totalitarian states. North Korea too evolved from this common starting point. It was subject to important social forces described later in this chapter and evolved into something different.

Put differently, if one accepts the argument that Kim Il Sung approached the totalitarian ideal type and his son's state looks substantially different, then North Korea meets the most general definition of the post-totalitarian model. This does not suggest that it follows the specific trajectory that Linz and Stepan outline for the states of Central and Eastern Europe. North Korea certainly looks very different than the European post-totalitarian states which lacked a leader as strong as Kim and where the nature of state-society relations is fundamentally different.¹⁶ Indeed, there is reason to believe they are on distinctly different trajectories. Consequently, I develop a new post-totalitarian model that incorporates elements from each of the characterizations sketched in this section as well as new theoretical components relevant to the North Korea state. Before doing so, however, it is useful to review the remaining ideal type characterizations that inform the new model.

Personalistic rulers use coercion and fear like totalitarian regimes but govern not by tradition or ideology but by personal, arbitrary rules. Tradition and ideology constrain totalitarian leaders, while personalistic rulers do not have this constraint. They employ power for private ends, using national resources to extract private wealth and private wealth to maintain power. This is increasingly difficult when mass organizations are prevalent as in many industrial states. Personalistic states are simple and unstable, since cutting off the head of the monster kills the beast.¹⁷

North Korea resembles this model in several ways, and this model comes closest to the popular description of North Korea as a state governed by "one man rule." But this model does not explain the remaining ideological constraints and power-wielding elite that continue to trumpet totalitarian rule. Personalism explains policy reversals and contradictions only as a function of the leader's changing motives or psychology. It has a difficult time explaining

¹⁶ Ceausescu's Romania is a notable exception. See Greg Scarlatou, "The Role of the Military in the Fall of the Ceausescu Regime and the Possible Relevance for a Post-Kim Jong-il Transition in North Korea," KEI Paper, February 2009.

¹⁷ Houchang Chehabi and Juan Linz, *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

regular policy contradictions and cross-purposes in North Korea described in the following chapters. The model also predicts an unstable state, yet North Korea has weathered the collapse of its Soviet benefactor, severe economic decline, nuclear crises, a hereditary power transition, and a famine.

State efforts to propagandize and promote ideology remain puzzling under this characterization of personalist rule. Efforts to modify the ideal type to include an all-encompassing ideology or a mass party remove much of the model's explanatory power and produces expectations more in line with other ideal types. Further, Kim and his colleagues have enriched themselves at the expense of their populace, but private gains do not explain broad national goals like reunification, macro-economic improvements, and broad anti-imperialism. Elite privilege is common to non-democracies and a single man tops even totalitarian states, but the personalistic ideal type leaves puzzles that other analytical tools help bridge. I incorporate the relevant attributes of this ideal type into my model of North Korean politics but it is insufficient to simply place the North Korean state under this ideal type characterization.

Corporatism is an elastic concept.¹⁸ North Korea's specific variety, "neosocialist corporatism" in the historian Bruce Cumings' characterization, departs somewhat from what most political scientists mean by the term. Cumings sees the North Korean body politic as a non-competitive, united entity in which disharmony is harmful. Kim and his familial-based inner circle regularize policy relations between different interests in this top-down, hierarchal model. Mixing metaphors, the state is a family with the father directing affairs out of his paternal wisdom – an element shared by the personalist model. The personality cult emphasizes that through wisdom, Kim promotes virtue, love, and benevolence, and expects loyalty in return. Policy radiates from the nerve center (Kim). Innovation does not come from below.¹⁹

Cumings sees little change between the two Kims' reins and finds the organic metaphor applies to both regimes.²⁰ He tests his theoretical expectations by reference to the same core evidence found in this study: the North Korean media and public statements as well as perspectives from some political insiders. North Korean propaganda states that policy (and all wisdom) radiates from Kim. North Korea's press continually repeats that both Kims are benevolent father figures "sagaciously" guiding their flock. Cumings takes this oft-repeated propaganda line as evidence of how the state actually functions. Policy begins with Kim and those below Kim implement policy.

I argue he overstates this case and miscategorizes Kim's normative demands for absolute loyalty as an empirical reality. It leaves open the question why one should believe the official

¹⁸ Oscar Molina and Martin Rhodes, "Corporatism: The Past, Present, and Future of a Concept," *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (2002), pp. 305-331.

¹⁹ Bruce Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies* 4 (1982-83), pp. 269-94. Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

²⁰ Bruce Cumings, Interview, March 11, 2008.

characterization of the state. This model has some very useful elements that help develop a theory of how Kim and his core inner circle group of about two dozen advisers make final decisions. However, the model does not give enough attention to formative elements of policy. Neosocialist corporatism is more useful in the study of high politics such as nuclear diplomacy where policy inputs and execution can be more easily centralized than in the case of broader social and economic questions, but systemic studies must take into account the types of information Kim and the inner circle receive to form and execute decisions. Further, the model does not discuss the downstream consequences of the particular version of corporatism, leaving a further opening for theoretical improvements.

More directly, the corporatist characterization alone has a difficult time explaining North Korean actions. This model cannot explain open policy disagreement in the media and evidence of institutional elements working at cross-purposes. It does not explain bureaucratic resistance to central decisions or in-fighting. The more conflict rather than regularized bureaucratic interaction shapes policy decisions and implementation, the more one must conclude that pluralism is at work. In short, the evidence presented in this study suggest my model should be used instead of the corporatism model, at least during this specified timeframe, as it more completely captures the state's policy process of both high and low politics and moves beyond an analysis of Kim and his relations with his core advisers.

The most productive difference between neosocialist corporatism and my formulation of North Korean politics is the role of institutional bargaining as a form of policy moderation. The institutional pluralist state makes the most extreme policy choices more difficult. Institutional opponents argue against their competitors' extreme policy choices, encouraging bargained policy compromises that sit closer to the center of the political spectrum. These choices are moderate not by a global standard but by a domestic standard. They more fully capture the interests advocated by differing segments of the state's policy experts. All North Korean institutions share a strong anti-imperialist sentiment that most Americans would consider extreme, but the cabinet's relatively moderate advocacy of negotiations tame the party's advocacy for a second Korean War in response to the perceived American threat, for example. While ultimate authority remains in the hands of one man, power is more diffuse. Pluralist models dispute that all power is defined at the top and radiates downward.

Institutional pluralism grew out of challenges to the totalitarian framework, emphasizing how groups of individuals cluster together to pursue specific or general policy goals. These groups are not sanctioned or explicitly created by the state and have multiple, conflicting, and overlapping ideas and preferences. These groups engage policy only on issues in which they have an interest which may or may not encompass the entire corpus of policy decisions. Institutional pluralism does not engage the totalitarian model so much as it presents an argument about how a specific totalitarian state, the Soviet Union, evolved. The model disputed the

continued applicability of two core components of the totalitarian ideal type: that the state “atomizes” the individual from an otherwise natural social reality and that the state is monolithic.

Gordon Skilling and Jerry Hough were at the forefront of this post-Stalinist model of Soviet politics, disputing the argument that the post-Stalinist Soviet Union “atomized,” or psychologically isolated, the individual completely. Instead, groups develop within elite circles with counterparts among the masses that try to influence certain segments of policy. Any polity that takes on greater roles and powers produces greater incentives for interested social groups to try to influence that state’s policy decisions. The Soviet state was an extreme example of this type of “big government,” encouraging individuals with shared attitudes and interests to cluster together to influence policy in any way they could. Access to the halls of power in the Kremlin or local governments in the Soviet Union looked different than lobbyists working in a democratic state, but the basic incentive structure remained similar. As post-Stalinist Soviet repression eased, interested individuals had greater opportunity to organize to exert influence on the state.

More importantly, advocates of the institutional pluralist model did not doubt that the top leadership could intervene arbitrarily in lower-level policymaking. Rather these authors sought to progress beyond this level of understanding. In most cases, limits on senior leadership’s time and capacities required delegation. Since the top leadership had been much more extensively studied, these scholars decided to devote most of their attention to describing the second-order groups that transgressed state and society. Groups with common preferences coalesced around governmental decisions at the local, regional, and national/imperial levels. Groups bridged the elite/masses divide and influenced decisions outside the top leadership’s purview. The system was less monolithic and less centralized than the totalitarian ideal type suggested.

Appropriately, the totalitarian model could point to Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy as elucidating the core tenets of the applied totalitarian model, while the institutional pluralism model was a relatively diffuse set of theories that evolved with the Soviet state. Institutional pluralism does not have a conveniently laid out core canon that synthesizes and directs the larger model. At best, Gordon Skilling and Franklin Griffin’s edited volume, Interest Groups in Soviet Politics, takes this distinction, although the edited volume contained multiple different views on the functioning of the Soviet state. Even the co-editors disagreed over the nature of the state’s diffused power and wrote separate concluding chapters.

Yet it is still valuable to attempt to distill the main components with lasting relevance to this project. The two most prominent concepts in this research area – “interest groups” and “pluralism” – are plagued with multiple meanings that have prompted a great deal of confusion and criticism. Clarifying them is a critical first step. Debate around these two terms focus on two core questions: What is the nature of these “groups”? And how do they affect policy decisions? In other words, who are the actors and how do they act.

Skilling borrowed from David Truman and Arthur Bentley's democratic definition of "interest groups" to elucidate his theoretical definition of a group. Interest groups are "any group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by shared attitudes."²¹ But proponents recognized that their version of interest groups looks little like the democratic variety and have functionally defined it very differently. Interest groups cannot block a dictator's initiative by reference to public opinion, the courts, or supporting alternative candidates in popular elections as Bentley and Truman describe. Interest groups in a democratic context are societal-based actors pressuring – or presenting interests to – government officials (the state). In the communist context, state and society are much more tightly fused and an external society is not acting upon a separate state. Democratic interest groups utilize and try to shape public opinion, parties, and elections to influence lawmakers, while communist leaders seek legitimacy (authority) and power from different sources and cannot seek influence in this same democratic manner. Truman and Bentley show how formal lines of legal control are only part of the story, but their story is fundamentally a democratic one.

Instead, Skilling and Hough try to build on this democratic concept and describe interest groups more generally as "informal clusterings that articulate distinctive interests."²² The theory applies to more than state institutions that are permanent, structurally separate from the leadership, and provide services the regime values²³ with a stable and consistent pattern of interaction.²⁴ Skilling claims evaluating these bureaucratic groups alone is an incomplete reading of the relevant political forces, concluding that professional and occupational categories outside the state have a discernible influence on policy direction. He includes groups such as "professionals" and other vaguely defined "clusterings."

Critically, the empirical chapters in Skilling and Griffith's edited volume largely focus on the more easily identifiable state institutions such as the party, military, and judiciary. In North Korea, indigenous societal-based actors are as close to non-existent as one could imagine, but three main institutions interact at the top of the system: the cabinet, military, and party. I find these types of groups that somehow transgress the elite/masses divide in an unobservable manner inappropriate to describe the North Korean political system but the concept of interested, institutional groups as second-echelon actors in conflict with one another has real bearing on my model. The value is more apparent in the more difficult area of theorizing how such groups interact with each other and a state's supreme authority (e.g., Kim Jong Il).

²¹ H. Gordon Skilling, "Interest Groups and Communist Politics Revisited," *World Politics*, 36:1 (1983), p. 3.

²² Skilling, p. 4

²³ Skilling, p. 9.

²⁴ David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971). p. 23-33.

Under the institutional pluralist model, multiple groups interact to help shape policy direction. Institutional pluralist advocates never argue that the state is a passive broker of these groups' interests nor do groups necessarily have a systematic influence on policy decisions: "Interest groups are but one of the many elements involved in policy making; they are not necessarily decisive, and may sometimes be marginal in their impact...hampered and sometimes blocked by other factors, in particular the power of political leaders and authoritative organs of government and the party."²⁵ Rather, the point is that power is more diffuse than totalitarianism suggests and there is another element at play in regular policymaking decisions – especially those decisions that do not reach the highest echelons of the state. Skilling shows how interest groups are compatible with authoritarianism.

These groups with diverse interests attempt to exert influence in certain areas. All clusterings do not have an interest in all issues, nor does a single individual belong to only one group. These shifting and overlapping group identities make the theory more plausible but complicates testing systematically. Much of the research program relied upon case studies of parochial issues in Soviet politics where the researcher had limited access to selected interviewees or read selected portions of the considerable official press to analyze how they may interact. Skilling argued that this research revealed only the "tip of the iceberg" of state-suppressed preferences – a plausible but ultimately unverifiable claim. With proper organization and opportunity, he argued, such dissident preferences could explode on the scene like the Solidarity movement in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia.²⁶

Critics charged this was not a theory at all. The totalitarian ideal type still stood strong, although even the Soviet case did not meet the ideal type fully. Critics of institutional pluralism noted the power diffusion idea was obvious and not particularly useful: "Power is diffuse even in concentration camps... The major question... is how power is diffused."²⁷ Alexander Groth showed how traces of pluralism could be seen even in Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany,²⁸ while William Odom repeatedly noted that "it is indeed a misconception to believe that all power in the U.S.S.R. was ever wholly in the dictator's hands. Sophisticated users of the totalitarian model never really treated the matter so unambiguously. The key question has always been how power is dispersed, not whether it is dispersed."²⁹ These later advocates of the totalitarianism model argued that the institutional pluralism thesis erected a straw man of the totalitarian model to knock it down, distracted attention from the core of the system, and focused on the trivial at the expense of explaining how the state functioned fundamentally. They claimed

²⁵ Skilling, p. 17.

²⁶ Skilling, p. 23

²⁷ William E. Odom, "A Dissenting View on the Group Approach to Soviet Politics," *World Politics* 28:4 (1976), p. 567.

²⁸ Alexander J. Groth, "USSR: Pluralist Monolith?," *British Journal of Political Science* 9:4 (1979), p. 445-64.

²⁹ Odom, p. 543.

institutional pluralism was not a new model at all and represented, at best, a misguided attempt to correct totalitarianism.

The debate therefore became one of degree. How diffuse is power in the system, what is the nature of different power holders, and how do these power holders influence policy? These are very similar tasks that the institutional pluralism thesis started out with, revealing that partisans in this debate actually held substantial common ground.

While I borrow from the theoretical debates over institutional pluralism in forming my views of North Korean politics, the hodgepodge nature of this theory makes disputing or supporting its wholesale applicability to North Korea less fruitful. Instead, I take a more positive approach with regard to this research program and show where I incorporate its thought into my own theory in the following section.

The Emergence of Post-totalitarian Institutionalism

Totalitarian regimes are extreme. They must maintain a mantle of revolution to motivate the high collective energy required to keep the state on a constant state of readiness against foreign imperialists and internal enemies. Such intensity is difficult to maintain. It is justified by arguing that times are special. The uniqueness of a threat or opportunity encourages individuals to accept extreme hardship with the promise of a better future. Over time, the call to work especially hard loses its special significance. Special times become normal, and promises of utopia are not realized. Intensity naturally fades, and the state must take great pains to motivate an increasingly skeptical and exhausted populace. Time is totalitarianism's natural enemy, especially as economic returns flatten or turn negative.

Nevertheless, this type of state has several tools at its disposal to encourage the masses and elites to follow the party line and discourage unwanted behavior. North Korea under Kim Il Sung approximated the totalitarian ideal type on all five of these core areas. (1) A single, all-encompassing ideology predominated, (2) the Korean Worker's Party controlled the government and military bureaucracies, (3) the state used arbitrary terror to atomize individuals and maintain obedience, and the state (4) monopolized the media and (5) planned a command economy.

On every one of these counts, North Korea moved away from its totalitarian past, yet the question remains: why? Contrary to popular belief, the totalitarian state promises its citizens and elites something in return for their buying into the system. Totalitarian states are not built on the relatively weak platform of simple repression. Pyongyang promises its citizens a powerful (in ideology and international security) and prosperous country, and it was rapidly losing its ability to produce on each of these pledges due to forces that the regime could not manage.

The North Korean state, despite its continued emphasis on self-reliance, had been notably and increasingly reliant on external benefactors throughout the later decades of the Cold War to

maintain this intensive mobilization. A state must draw on additional resources to shape and constrain a citizenry and group of elites that grows increasingly skeptical of revolutionary ideals and requires different sources of motivation. These groups must be reminded and convinced of the continued threat to their way of life by outside forces and that this way of life is worth protecting. Otherwise, the state must utilize scarce resources to materially entice support or effectively compel groups to act in the desired way.

At the very least, the state must provide the basic material needs of the population (food, water, shelter) to maintain legitimacy. In North Korea's case, shelter would include energy for heating that prevent citizens from freezing in the country's extreme winters. Without these essentials, the masses and elites alike can conclude that the revolution is simply unsustainable given the bounds of human frailty. It is exceptionally difficult to convince a starving citizen that he or she is not hungry. Consequently, in this case the state must remind the population of the horrors of the Korean War and note that the current difficulties are better than the alternative – the risk of a war-torn peninsula and immoral, exploitative polity.

Domestic and international forces that threaten the regime's ability to provide these requisite needs undermine its ability to sustain itself. Some forces are rather straightforward while others may be initially counterintuitive. For example, greater international insecurity bolsters the state's role as protector. Viewed in a linear frame, greater international insecurity represents failure in the regime's stated mission to protect its citizens and system. However, this amorphous sense of insecurity that may arise from new actions or outright fabrications compels the population and bureaucracy to support easily identifiable means to address this insecurity, most notably by prioritizing military needs. This reinforces the spiral effect of the security dilemma, producing more insecurity that must be countered. Efforts that may actually undermine the state's security like missile and nuclear developments can be presented to a mass or elite audience as actually increasing security due to the amorphous nature of the concept. Both success and failure in providing security can be framed to pursue the same policy end.

Bread and butter issues are quite different. Threats that can be concretely experienced like hunger force a more results-oriented approach. Citizens know if they have enough food to eat. Basic economic questions cannot be theoretically interpreted without reference to actual reality with the same ease as some questions of high politics. On some issue areas, the state does not need to move away from its old ideologically-guided thinking while other areas more clearly demand results. If issues were not linked or did not interact, the state would not face a dilemma. It could pursue a results-oriented economic policy to provide for the basic needs of its population and maintain a highly militarized polity, providing for the defense of the country. Indeed, the structural realities of the DPRK's first 25 years allowed Kim Il Sung to accomplish enough of both of these goals – economic and ideological advancement – to maintain a popular regime. Kim Jong Il faces a more difficult situation, however, and faces tough trade-offs between ideological correctness/revolutionary politics and meeting his population's basic human needs.

While both Kims had to address the gradual erosion of the state's power to maintain their rule, challenges under the younger Kim became acute. Neither Kim wanted to loosen control, but the younger Kim had to respond to three shocks in the 1990s outside his immediate control. Kim Jong Il did not seek out an increasingly ideologically-disenchanted populace, the death of the country's founder and national hero (his father), the collapse of its main benefactor, or the famine. North Korea had to cope or collapse. Certain political and economic changes risked bringing down the whole system, while doing nothing over time risked the same. With everything to lose, Kim proceeded cautiously to partially rationalize the state's governance structure to exert greater efficiency while not giving up his most important claim to legitimacy – his hereditary claim to his father's revolutionary history. Kim's efforts to stave off collapse produced a political order that looks and acts in substantially different ways than the totalitarian model predicts.

In short, my argument is that Kim maintained much of the old system and changed only what he thought he must in order to address the changing internal and external situation and avert collapse. I do not argue that Kim had a preconceived idea of what a new North Korea might look like, and I do not consider him a committed reformer. Instead, he has implemented and continues to implement changes to the political and economic structure over time.

Certain regularities have emerged and a general direction of the state's politics and economics can be identified. Kim belatedly came to shift emphasis away from revolutionary politics to partially address the dire social situation and institute new checks and balances on the system to complement his own ruling style. While his father was a charismatic revolutionary, the younger Kim was a more detail-oriented micromanager who could more effectively divide and conquer the state rather than dominate a unified system as his father did. He lacked his father's gravitas and compelling personal narrative and tried to make up for it with even more Machiavellian cunning. However, Kim Jong Il's move to a more divided political system would be very difficult to reverse, creating a certain stability to the new arrangement. The cabinet, military, and party emerged as peer organizations, checking one another; Kim faced real resistance in the military and cabinet if he tried to resubmit their authority to the party, creating a stable expectation of continued institutional jostling and pluralism.

This development eroded the preeminent position of the party. The decline of ideology as fundamentally guiding policy and the decline of the communist party are analytically distinct ideas, but they go hand-in-hand in practice. As the state recognizes a need for more rational decision-making, the type of information required changes. Party ideologues continue to provide some input, but they fundamentally lack the necessary skills to make technical or expert statements. Instead of retraining these aging ideologues in specific disciplines like economics or foreign affairs or massively migrating existing technical expertise into the party apparatus, technocrats housed in the government ministries find themselves with much greater influence on policymaking.

Expert knowledge is necessarily diffuse. Experts are valued for their limited but deep expertise. Only in the aggregate can experts touch on all or most issues that afflict society. Experts' work does not offer a one sized fits all answer to questions in the way ideological correctness promises. Nevertheless, the government's work, no longer constrained to the same degree by ideological minders, continues to run into opposition by those previously in a place to squelch ideologically incorrect lines of research. However, the cabinet is no longer an institution subordinate to the party but a peer competitor.

A similar process occurs in the military. The military, also previously under the party's domination, has a continued importance as the defender against imperialist aggressors. Since the removal of the Soviet benefactor set in motion a set of crises that intensified economic and security concerns, the state has renewed interest in military-directed security strategies. The ideological correctness of military doctrine too became less important. The military genuinely needed to provide for the state's own security without the possibility of superpower backing. However, change here proved least significant. As noted previously, security is a relatively amorphous concept without objective benchmarks of success. The military could continue to argue that more defense spending buys more security, although competing interests as they grew more powerful could argue that effective diplomacy and economic contacts provided another route to national security.

With these three institutional actors participating in policy deliberations, central leadership increasingly arbitrated between competing proposals that put in sharp relief the costs and benefits of strategic choices. For example, economic and social control goals came into conflict in North Korea. As a small state that cannot grow its own food needs due to its particular geography, weather, and past agricultural policy decisions, self-isolation and autarky are particularly taxing on the state's economy. However, the state's ideology and security are fundamentally rooted in keeping out foreign ideas and influences. Competing interests and those who articulated those interests clashed. The predominance of ideological correctness became a luxury that foreign benefactors (or the lack thereof) no longer demanded, providing greater impetus for economic opening.

Maintaining political stability becomes a precarious balancing act. The state must accept the need for radical changes in certain areas in order to provide basic services while not forfeiting the entire game by undermining security. This is particularly true in the economic arena as the command economy's returns level off and eventually turn negative. In North Korea's case, the plan's economic returns leveled off in the 1970s and turned negative in the 1990s. After the Soviet collapse, North Korea's economic maladies became acute and chronic. Avoiding the impending risks of continued economic decline required loosening control to allow more efficient economic operations and allow international trade. However, this requires accepting the security risks of new ideas flowing into the country and takes some assets and liabilities off of the state's power balance sheet. The state's roles shrink, and it becomes an open

question whether that causes its power to increase or decrease. The state attempts to replace one risk with another.

The state must recreate itself not in the likeness of a Stalinist protector that encouraged many new regimes in the early part of the Cold War to follow Stalin's totalitarian model but in a way that maintained as much of what was familiar of the old system and required of the new. Change by its very nature is destabilizing. One can imagine how concern about change would be particularly acute in a state predicated on strong control and micromanaging people's lives. In the post-totalitarian phase, maintaining political stability is not a simple, straightforward endeavor. Paradoxically, the state may have to loosen control in order to maintain it.

This transition is not a process of optimizing the state's ability to function for its citizens. Kim remained on top and elite families generally stayed the same. These people have private and public interests. While motives are impossible to observe, it is an oversimplification to claim these elites only serve their private interests. Kim uses gifts and prestigious awards to motivate and purges and punishments to compel, yet divergent normative ideas about how the regime should operate are routinely expressed in the state media. Money and status are not the only objectives that motivate human action. Leaders of institutions highlight the importance of their institution's mission and advocate both its institutional interests and policy choices consistent with that worldview. Personal interest cannot explain this regularity. This combination of private and public interest is not unique to the North Korean government but it is also not the exclusive domain of democratic governance.

In face of a real domestic opposition vying for power and failure to provide for the basic needs of its population, an opposition could eventually pressure the regime to change radically. Poland and Czechoslovakia provide examples of the power of indigenous opposition groups within a communist state. However, North Korea lacks a real opposition within the country. The population does not have a clear alternative to the status quo and no semi-organized means to pursue it due to continual purges and extensive repression. Of course, this does not suggest that an opposition could not develop, especially given continued material hardship, ideological decline, and state ineptitude, but it does not describe the current reality. Without the pressing demands of a domestic opposition, the state has greater opportunity to gradually modify its roles. With the state facing increased impotence in these core areas, it can alter its mode of operations to recapture its ability to provide basic services to the population and maintain a mantle of legitimacy as protector against imperialist forces and/or as champion of a reunified Korea.

These developments are important, because they demonstrate why North Korea developed the way it did instead of moving in the direction of the post-communist states of Eastern Europe, post-Maoist China, or elsewhere. With retaining certain elements of the old order and incorporating significant new elements, North Korea looks and acts much differently

today than under Kim Il Sung. A theoretical snapshot of this emerged form of governance is the remaining subject of this chapter.

Post-totalitarian Institutionalism

The single, most important person in North Korean politics is unquestionably Kim Jong Il. This is the most critical hold over from the old system. Kim continues to maintain absolute authority, although not absolute power. He can intervene in any part of the policy decision-making chain he wishes and pursue different strategies to ensure effective policy execution. He is an active micro-manager with particular leadership traits. His role should not be minimized, but it is important to remember that he is just one man. Kim is not synonymous with North Korean politics. To more fully understand North Korean politics and explain variant policy outcomes, one must evaluate the second-order institutions that Kim seeks to command.

The same two fundamental tasks that faced earlier studies of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union face this study. What are the relevant political institutions below Kim? And how do they affect policy (the criterion for “relevance”)? Besides Kim, the party is the clearest example of a hold-over from the old regime. It continues to purport an ideologically-based policy guide, although it no longer reins supreme over the government and military. The military continues its same basic function of defending the state but has an additional political role now that it is freed from its subordination to the party. It highlights specific security threats and suggests means to counter them but largely does not articulate a class-based perspective or specifically ideological anti-imperialist orientation. The newest element is the increased role for the cabinet. With its emphasis on tangible results, particularly in the economic arena, it houses technocrats pursuing the most rational agenda.

This does not discount the possibility (indeed, probability) of sub-institutional divisions. Nor does it suggest that individuals or groups within an institution may find common ground with others in a second institution. On the contrary, I suggest such divisions should exist down to the individual level. However, the most salient division exists at the top. Each bureaucracy is a coherent group with visible differences on the most important questions of the direction of the state. It is at this second-echelon – more so than the third or fourth – that variance in important, national policy decisions can be explained and understood.

These three institutions, the party, military, and government, represent distinct interests. In the course of strategic policy decisions, these interests come in conflict, forcing a new type of institutional interaction. The party in particular now must compete on an increasingly level playing field in policy formation debates. Ideological guidance is not irrelevant, but it has become just one of several arguments for or against a particular agenda. Different institutions with a distinct clustering of personnel, resources and competencies, and shared backgrounds and (potentially) worldviews define various policy options from below rather than being prescribed

from on high. Authority remains at the top, and Kim and his inner circle are more than mere mediators of competing options.

North Korea's institutions define the range of policy alternatives. Kim with or without advice from inner circle advisers select from these presented options. Power is more diffuse but authority remains centralized. Institutions are the critical, ignored policy inputs that this study largely focuses on. However, Kim is in no way peripheral to the policy process. He has the final say, but his state increasingly uses rational information inputs as another critical input in a way that the more purely ideologically-guided policy choices of his father did not. This new mode of rule necessarily requires more diffuse power.

Experts by their very nature have a more limited professional view. While they may consciously attempt to contextualize their own particular area of expertise by being generally informed about other areas, senior leadership values their opinion for the specific expertise it provides. Experts are expected to develop and sustain a deep understanding of a specific policy area. As a collective body, competent experts should retain a much more detailed understanding of a range of issues than senior leadership. Insofar as this expertise is valued and sustained by senior leaders making decisions, a larger number of nameless people are involved in some way in influencing those policy decisions. Not all knowledge translates into power. It requires a connection of knowledge that authoritative officials value. North Korea's modified institutional structure puts in place the ability of the bureaucracy to provide expert opinion that would aid a rational mode of governance.

I contend that in North Korea, policy innovation comes from below. Experts craft new ideas and form proposals to challenges they confront. They do not merely execute policy. Instead, they also seek to inform policy based on rational and ideological arguments. On the most important questions of the direction of the state, the largest group of bureaucrats has some interest in the outcome. Of course, the highest ranking bureaucrats will articulate these views most commonly. Given this outlook is shaped and synthesized from below, it is natural for these high-ranking leaders to espouse distinct policy preferences from their colleagues leading other institutions. Since Kim holds final authority, these institutions come in conflict and must articulate specific goals to the Dear Leader and one another as internal and external events give them opportunity to bolster their position.

The three major institutions dispute views of strategic policy choices prior to high-level decisions. Kim is playing a delicate balancing act with this arrangement, trying to maintain his weakened emotional/ideological case for legitimate rule (revolutionary politics) and a case based on more effective governance any other domestically foreseeable alternative. He continually reminds elite and mass audiences alike through references to his father and Kim Jong Il's own paternal wisdom that he is the legitimate heir to the revolution. At the same time, he utilizes policy experts to improve government performance and reduce discontent even when such

prescriptions contradict revolutionary orthodoxy. Kim has not sought out this arrangement any more than he sought out the Soviet collapse, his father's death, or the famine. It was the product of a historically-dependent process described in the following chapter outside of his complete control. Consequently, Kim and his core set of advisers hear both rational and ideological arguments from institutions with vested interests in his decision.

The younger Kim's system fosters more rational policy options through pluralism. Experts apply specific knowledge to policy questions as ideological generalists contribute their own piece to the conversation. Ideology no longer dominates as the deciding factor in policy decisions, but it has not vanished from the scene either due to its continued role in Kim's personal narrative of legitimacy. The central leadership must allow public debate if it is to occur in the official media, and one can see competing empirical and normative arguments being advanced through different institutional organs in the official newspapers. Bringing more expert voices into the policy arena helps rationalize the North Korean political system in the hope of improving the state's material condition and security.

Through the course of these debates, Kim and his core advisers are exposed to competing expert and ideological opinions on policy direction. Senior leadership arbitrates between competing proposals but is influenced by the type of information their institutions produce. How Kim and his inner circle process these different views is difficult to observe, but certain insights can be gleaned. Though several of these inner circle advisers wear two hats as both an adviser and the head of a major bureaucracy with a separate information stream, the inner circle is reputed to be highly insular. Individuals may risk their (and their families') lives if they get out of step with the rest of the group, providing a tremendous disincentive for this group to innovate.

The extent to which this group provides few new ideas for consideration makes it much less important than often assumed in explaining policy change. Replacing risk-averse group thinker one with risk-averse group thinker two should negligibly affect policy. This is the type of analysis that makes some researchers conclude Kim is the only person that truly matters in the North Korean political system. Knowledge valued by the central authority and access to that authority are critical elements of power in any system. Understanding the process of knowledge creation, mediation, and dissemination are therefore critical. The inner circle is mainly a disseminating body—one final filter sometimes used that has powerful disincentive to redirect the discussion away from the group's conclusions.

This is not to suggest that the inner circle is irrelevant. The existence of a unified inner circle has especially important implications for any succession scenario. Since Kim is mortal and has not publicly prepared for his succession as his father did extensively, this group may be able to continue Kim's rule in the short-term in the event of Kim's sudden incapacitation or death. While it is unclear whether the group could control the state in the medium-term given the Kim family's unique claim to personal authority, it may be able to draw on the state's

repressive apparatus to maintain stability long enough to reassert the anti-imperialist, reunification, and/or economic appeals to legitimate authority to maintain the system in some form over time.

While the central leadership holds the final say on policy decisions, even these high-level central decisions face bureaucratic resistance in implementation. Bureaucratic losers do not get on board with national policy and continue to voice opposition publicly to the chosen policy direction. Further, these bureaucracies implement the bulk of policy choices that never reach the inner circle level. Bureaucratic preferences impact policy at this lower decision-making level and in implementing high-level choices. These three institutions critically define the agenda and shape for options for even the most fundamental strategic questions. They debate and bargain in the policy formulation stage and present their case to Kim. Preferences do not end because an authority has already decided on a policy question, so this model expects that these institutions continue to try to affect such policy preferences in the implementation stage whenever the opportunity arises. As such, these institutions influence policy decisions by agenda setting, selectively presenting their case, and making lower-level decisions directly. Of equal importance, they affect implementation by actively and substantially resisting and modifying even the highest-order decisions promulgated by Kim himself.

This model is a fairly straightforward view of bureaucratic politics with a particularly strong individual on top, but it radically departs from the conventional wisdom on how North Korea functions. Under this model, the three bureaucracies debate policy in the formation and execution stages. Authority remains centralized, but power is more diffuse than the relatively monolithic typologies predict. It shines light on a part of the system that exists in analytical darkness. If my hypothesis is correct, the regime functions in a very different way than previously thought with different downstream consequences for regime stability and reaction to foreign events.

Rationalization – even when partial – has real costs. The costs include information outflow and loosened control over the bureaucracy, allowing some more, limited political expression within the regime. Likely concerned about internal threats, most notably including coups, both Kim regimes implemented a vertical information flow. A party official, for example, can push information and analysis up the party chain of command, but he or she cannot communicate regularly with lateral contacts in the government or military. Institutional stove-piping effectively prevents most cross-institutional communication.

Still, the demand for cross-institutional communication to reveal preferences, influence policy, or coordinate effective responses remains. More senior officials can communicate to a wider audience outside of their own institution in the form of speeches, commentaries, and articles. Although they must be cautious to not overstep their bounds, the official media has been increasingly used under Kim Jong Il to reveal policy preferences and foster limited forms of

debate. It is perhaps more revealing than ironic to note that this state so concerned about information security prefers to allow foreign observers to see some of its internal deliberations than to allow regular cross-institutional communication. Such secret communications may allow threats to Kim's final authority to emerge. Consequently, systematic content analysis of North Korea's elite press is the best way to elicit institutional preferences and interaction.

Research Design

I employ a simple historical analysis to test my theory. This history focuses on evidence of institutional policy positions, institutional debate, and bureaucratic resistance to decided policy. My historical analysis has two tasks. First, I identify the strategic policy issue areas to focus my study. If power is diffuse on the most important issues, then the central leadership likely does not try to micromanage issues it deems relatively trivial. This approach has the advantage of not focusing too narrowly on a single issue area where the technical nature of the issue may predispose it towards technocratic input. However, it also does not overextend the analysis beyond a digestible set of primary data on important issues.

Once the issue areas are established, I conduct a systematic content analysis of North Korea's elite press and speeches to document stated institutional policy preferences in context. This allows me to demonstrate how institutional leaders respond to each other and their environment. It allows one to see if institutional leaders can reveal preferences and whether differences are institutional or simply vary by the leader of the institution at the time. The remainder of this chapter reviews the specifics of my approach, including coding details, the relevant methodology literature, and data sources.

In the process of synthesizing internal policy debates, any researcher must select documents from a larger body. The most significant test of my theory will be on the most significant issues facing the state. However, reasonable people disagree on which issues are most important. For the purpose of this study, it is imperative to tease out which issues the central leadership deems most important. As early as 1966, Kim Il Sung laid out the key priorities for the DPRK: anti-imperialism, reunification, and domestic ideological and economic concerns.³⁰ With minor modification, these core goals remain at the top of the state's agenda today. Indeed, even an ad hoc reading of this body of media would leave the researcher scraping to find other significant issues that do not fall under these banners.³¹

³⁰ Scalapino and Lee, p. 604.

³¹ Domestic policy goals such as maintaining social control is broadly wrapped into the debate on economic opening with few other domestic issues demanding cross-institutional conversations at this level. The only other countries of sustained foreign policy importance to Pyongyang that could merit a prolonged conversation for systematic analysis are relations with Japan and China. With rare exceptions noted in the empirical chapters, relations with Japan are often debated in the "imperialist" context of relations with the U.S. Sino-DPRK relations are not discussed at any depth in the media.

The annual New Year's Joint Editorial (NYJE) also demonstrates these three issues are paramount in Kim Jong Il's DPRK. The NYJE is the North's most significant policy and propaganda tool for the year. Pyongyang lays out the state's core policy goals, ideological imperatives, and reaffirms the leadership every year in the NYJE. Kim Il Sung delivered a speech on New Year's Day every year until his death. Kim Jong Il has only spoken publicly on one known occasion (and then only to shout a single sentence), so he replaced the New Year's Day speech with the NYJE the first year after his father's death. While important joint editorials between two of the major newspapers are found occasionally during the year, the NYJE is the only document carried by all three major, official media outlets in the DPRK. Domestic and foreign audiences anticipate the NYJE and read it closely. In short, the NYJE is the best, most systematic indicator of the regime's strategic priorities.³²

I demonstrate the NYJE focuses on these issues every year by coding each paragraph in the NYJE's policy section by the dominant goal it elucidates. While the NYJE has some inter-mixing of the leadership, policy, and ideological sections, it does not repeatedly jump between these areas. When more than one goal is mentioned in a paragraph, I decide which goal is dominant. This does not pose a significant challenge, since the North's stark terms makes their core point exceedingly clear.³³ I repeat this process for each full year Kim Jong Il has been in power to date: 1995 – 2009. I use the full-text NYJE translations publicly available from FBIS/OSC.³⁴

These three goals demanded 95-100% of this section each year (1995 – 2009). Together, the economy and reunification dictate a median of 92% of the issue focus. When incorporating U.S. policies, the three issues make up 100% of the issue focus for most years (Figure 2.1). The regime likely considers these issues strategic.

My second, longer task is to test whether the state is unified and monolithic as the centralized models describe or is more diffuse as I hypothesize. This section provides the central evidence to support or refute my theoretical expectations. Do the cabinet, military, and party each advocate their own policy agendas within these three issue areas and specified time period

³² Inference is not the only tool to highlight the importance of the NYJE. The North Korean regime explicitly says it is the core policy document for the year. North Korea's semi-official webpage, The People's Korea, describes the NYJE: "As the DPRK's key policy statement for the year replacing late President Kim Il Sung's New Year's Address, the Joint Editorial is published annually on New Year's Day since 1995 [sic] by the country's three major newspapers – *Nodong Sinmun* (organ of Worker' Party of Korea), *Joson Inmingun* (organ of the Korean People's Army) and *Chongnyon Jonwi* (organ of the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League). Following the line of the late President Kim Il Sung's annual New Year's Address, the joint editorial sets forth the new task of the year, looking back upon the previous year [sic]." People's Daily, "QandA on DPRK's Joint Editorial," 2000, http://www1.korea-np.co.jp/pk/127th_issue/2000011901.htm.

³³ My judgments on the subject of the paragraphs are available for replication. Since this is a single-investigator project, my coding has not yet been subject to inter-coder reliability efforts.

³⁴ The Foreign Broadcast Information Service, renamed the Open Source Center in 2005, translates foreign media into English. Articles date back to 1953 and are publicly available in research libraries.

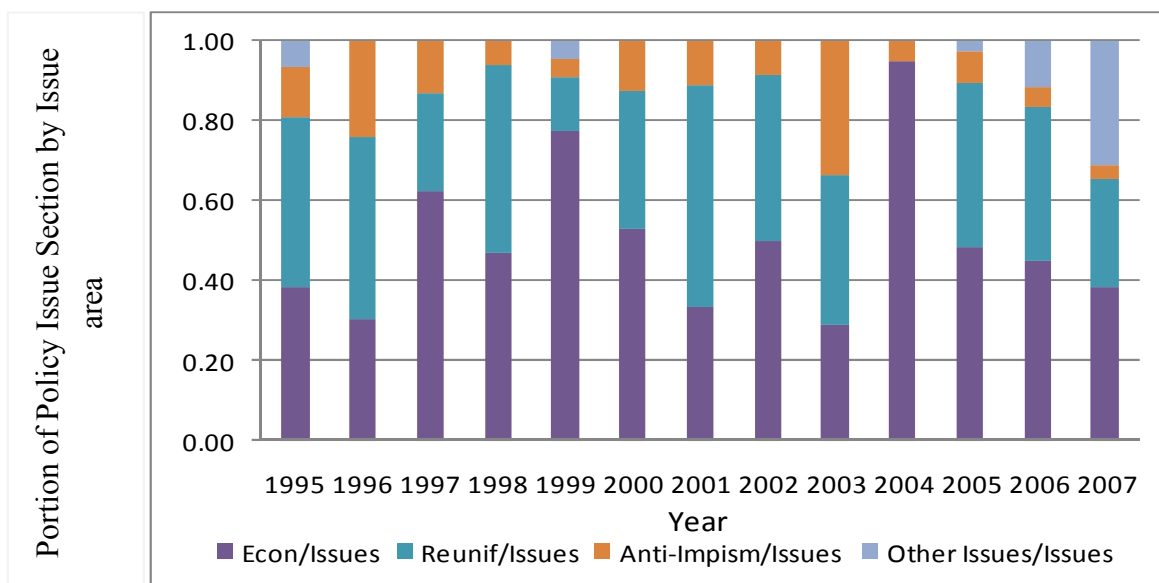


Figure 2.1: Policy Issues in NYJE (1995 - 2007)

(1998 – 2008)? Do these institutions publicly clash with one another in advocating their own policy agendas? Do policy agendas vary when new leaders assume the top post of a given institution and therefore better ascribed to the individual than the institution? Do implemented policy choices tend to come from the universe of options publicly presented by North Korea’s bureaucracies?

I reviewed a set of speeches and articles presented inside the country by the 48 most senior members of each bureaucracy and their successors as defined in the North Korea Handbook.³⁵ Despite cross-over in formal affiliations, these lists help determine primary affiliation. For example, Cabinet Premiers have all been party members, but these lists identify their primary affiliation with the cabinet. These officials produced approximately 4460 speeches or articles from Kim Il Sung’s death until the end of 2008 on these three issue areas. This is slightly less than half of all publications sourced to Pyongyang. The most senior leaders spoke and published much more often than subordinates, leaving less ambiguity about the institutional affiliation.

North Korea’s official, elite media is a critical conduit for the regime to communicate general policy and ideology internally. Two of the three most important newspapers in the

³⁵ Yonhap, *North Korea Handbook* (Seoul: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). Updated list of successors compiled from multiple sources.

country are consistently available to foreigners: the dailies of the party and government. The Korean People's Army daily *Choson Inmingun* is not available outside of North Korea.³⁶

I primarily rely on FBIS/OSC translations. This material is translated by professional, full-time Korean linguists with a secondary line of review. This provides for a more accurate translation than a single researcher could likely provide and allows more researchers (e.g., non-Korean linguists) to replicate this study. As will be demonstrated in the empirical section, even native Korean speakers have made critical translation errors with profound effects on US-DPRK relations, especially given regional variations and the North's occasional use of intentionally vague constructions. Relying on professionally-trained linguists with a second reviewer has real advantages over attempting to translate this material myself. Under no circumstances do I rely on the North's own English language translations as this is an incomplete body of articles and the North occasionally omits and changes portions of the translated text.

Furthermore, one can be assured that this study is not missing material by utilizing these translated sources. North Korea's relatively small volume of print media articles and commentaries makes a comprehensive review of this media feasible and verifiable. *Nodong Sinmun*, the party's newspaper is a six-page daily, *Minju Choson*, the government's newspaper, is a four-page daily. Given North Korea's high priority and the relative importance of its official press to OSC's clients, the entire body of relevant articles is available. Skeptics of the translated documents can spot check the publicly available OSC articles against the original vernacular or compare to the duplicate, albeit incomplete, BBC Worldwide Monitoring translations. The OSC translations provide a convenient link to the vernacular text. I also include relevant leaked media reports from third party interlocutors that described specifically bureaucratic positions. I utilize all available databases to include this material.

My research design hinges on the contention that each institution presents its own policy preferences in the elite press. Elites have information needs beyond what the mass media supplies. The elite media serves an important communication function. In a state where regular cross-institutional communication is restricted, the media helps fill this void. Sacrificing this critical conduit of cross-institutional communication for a disinformation campaign would be puzzling. While the central leadership may be able to sow disinformation, this also undermines its own ability to rule. Elites within the bureaucracies would be less clear about state policy and centralized wishes less effectively translated into action.

Furthermore, the state goes to great pains to continually reinforce the notion that Kim is the nerve center directing all wise choices. Presenting the state as disunited undermines this critical propaganda purpose that both the regime and comparative politics theory recognizes is

³⁶ The Open Source Center (OSC, formerly FBIS) estimates *Nodong Sinmun*'s circulation is one million and *Minju Choson*'s circulation is 600,000 out of the country's approximately 23 million people.

important for regime survival.³⁷ If the military or any other institution serves as the excuse for Kim to select a policy, then his power is necessarily constrained. He not only is challenged but is challengeable. This is not a cost-free idea for a dictator. Despite the regime's security consciousness, it is less likely that this disinformation campaign seeks to mislead academic or policy analyses like this one.

Additionally, the deception counter-thesis cannot explain why policy divisions are institutional rather than personal. An individual is easier to blame than a whole institution for policy failure. Cadres, for example, know their own unit's performance better than they know the performance of one high ranking general. Blaming the entire military is a harder sell to this elite audience than blaming a single individual that a smaller group of elites would know personally.

I contextualize these policy positions in a contemporary history. This has several generic methodological advantages for a project like this one. Charles Tilly put the methodological argument most starkly: "In the case of state transformation, there is no way to create comprehensive, plausible, and verifiable explanation without taking history seriously into account."³⁸ This study at first blush is more limited in time (1998 – 2008) and space (North Korea), but it is not a particularistic, atheoretical case study. Instead, it seeks to both explain this case on its own terms and use that knowledge to build and refine comparative politics theory.

This dual purpose lends itself to this approach. This study of state transformation questions our fundamental assumptions about how the state operates. It seeks to define the relevant variables that have not been identified previously and that exist in complicated two-way feedback loops where time intervals are not standard. The project attempts to uncover the processes and mechanisms that produce variable trajectories and outcomes. This is highly context dependent. All social science attempts to simplify reality, but the initially more limited scope of this project requires retaining the specific context as important data. The historical approach allows the incorporation of initial conditions, path dependency, sequences, and interaction effects. In this way, it can expose the political process that evolved and currently exists in history.³⁹

More specifically, the historical approach most effectively deals with this research problem. This approach allows me to identify the evolution of North Korea's policy debates over time, given internal and external circumstances. For example, do periods of intensified hostility with the United States favor the military and their agenda? Does South Korean economic aid foster increased international opening and softening of the North's foreign policy

³⁷ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

³⁸ Charles Tilly, "Why and How History Matters," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, Robert Goodwin and Charles Tilly (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 421.

³⁹ Tilly 2006.

choices? More basically, does Kim select policy from the universe of choices debated in the official press? Do institutions hold relatively stable policy advocacy across leaders of the institution or are they a product of new leaders? In short, my detailed historical discussion of this period focuses on whether my theoretical expectations and the downstream consequences of my model hold true.

Integrating the three issue areas into a single chronological history allows one to view the bureaucratic debate within and between these issue areas. Also, the temporal character is important. Are new policy initiatives discussed between agencies prior to implementation? If a new policy idea appears in the elite press as an institutional position before Kim lays claim to it or it is implemented as policy, then that policy likely originated from below. While it is possible that the idea originated within Kim's inner circle, it is unlikely that the top political leadership would allow lower-level bureaucrats to claim credit for their idea. Questioning policy diverges from the more centralized models' expectations. If the bureaucracies have a say in refining policy ideas through inter-agency debate, then institutions weigh in on policy choices and expert opinion factors into policy decisions.

Furthermore, my hypothesis predicts an element completely alien to the monolithic descriptions of North Korean politics: bureaucratic resistance. I expect the disadvantaged institutions to maintain consistent policy positions on strategic policy even after Kim's central decision. These positions may be somewhat muted or presented more cautiously after Kim's decision, but continued opposition to decided policy is strong evidence of a more plural polity. The center does not direct all positions.

My research hypothesis is falsifiable. It is possible that institutions do not maintain a consistent general outlook on these issues over time. They may simply reflect the wishes of the central leadership, towing Kim's official national line and not varying on revealed policy preferences. The central leadership may encourage these contrary views to throw off foreign observers and select policy consistently advocated by only one institution. Also, senior leadership may ignore these differences and select policies outside the universe of policy options debated in the elite press. Alternatively, powerful men – and here the gendered term is explicitly warranted – may rotate between the most senior positions of each bureaucracy, bringing with them a new outlook to propound. Finally, men or institutions may be set up as scapegoats, linking certain people or institutions to policies that are bound to fail. In short, the research design can at the outset find supporting systematic evidence for any of the theories documented in the literature review – or it can support my own.

The monolithic ideal types may find support in the following chapters instead of my theory. If the central leadership defines policy and the bureaucracy implements it, then one would not expect to find policies debated in the official press. The central leadership would have no incentive to allow systematic disagreement with their dictated policy. Furthermore, if power

is personal and not institutional, then a leader's policy choices should not be tied to the institution he leads. A new Cabinet Premier, for example, would have no reason to articulate the same policy line as his predecessor. By contrast, consistency across leaders of the institution suggests the expert professional bureaucracy pushes new ideas up to the political leadership to arbitrate, and individual leaders are less important in policy formation than competing models argue. In this case, the institution has expertise and momentum of its own regardless of the top leader.

My theory argues that Kim's power is limited in the sense that he rules through a rational bureaucracy. His policy choices carry the day, but experts within each bureaucracy present him with a universe of policy options. While "none of the above" remains one of his multiple choices, I test with the analysis in the following chapters whether he usually selects from those options debated in the press. If he does, then this is evidence that power is more diffuse than the monolithic theories present. Defining options for policy selection is a critical power. Bureaucratic resistance is also strong evidence that Kim's power is more limited than the monolithic ideal types indicate.

The falsifiable empirical test will allow me to systematically address this question. My research design does not allow proving the theory beyond a reasonable doubt. Rather it tests which theory holds the preponderance of evidence. If my empirical tests correspond with my expectations, then they are highly suggestive that the monolithic conventional wisdom is incorrect. More importantly, it demonstrates that my model is more likely to be correct than competitors.

In order for this theoretical model to be deemed applicable to North Korea, several empirical regularities must be observed. Bureaucracies must:

- be coherent groups;
- have an ability to aggregate and articulate preferences;
- conflict with one another on policy questions; and
- have some bearing on actual policy decisions.

Bureaucratic resistance to selected policy choices, while more difficult to observe, would provide further evidence that bureaucracies articulate and pursue specific interests in a diffused manner at odds with the totalitarian model.

In chapter four, I argue that the party, military, and cabinet are each coherent groups with distinct policy outlooks. They have different histories and composition. Conversely, I argue that the security apparatus is not a coherent group and therefore cannot be considered a fourth interest group. I also show briefly how the other national institutions recognized in the constitution – the

rubber-stamp parliament (Supreme People's Assembly) and judiciary – cannot be characterized as coherent, semi-autonomous groups that influence policy decisions.

Chapters five through seven take up specific policy debates within the system. I test whether each of these three institutions have a coherent message over time and whether their policy goals come in conflict with one another. I also test whether one or more of these policy options generally becomes state policy. If each institution does not present a single policy response to arising issues, wavers from institutional interests, does not conflict with other institutions, and/or has its policy options routinely ignored, my theory should not be deemed empirically valid.

Before turning to these critical tests, however, it is necessary to sketch the regime from which North Korea has evolved. The following chapter sketches the regime's six-decade political history from the founding of the state in 1948 to the present.

Chapter 3: Historical Context

Introduction

Kim Il Sung maintained the longest ideologically-driven political system of the communist experiment that approached the totalitarian ideal. His system was remarkably resilient and remains popular even among many North Korean defectors who live in South Korea today who blame his son for ruining the country.⁴⁰ The elder Kim was credited with fighting the Japanese colonizers, erecting the state, “defeating” the Americans in the Korean War, and providing the perception of a higher standard and respectability of living. Kim Il Sung presented himself as a true revolutionary.

By contrast, Kim Jong Il was born into luxury, lacked his father’s revolutionary bona fides and personal charisma, and claimed political legitimacy based on his bloodline rather than his own actions. He avoided public appearances and did not command the same widespread personal loyalty. He also assumed the top leadership position amid economic collapse and brewing famine, further compounding challenges in consolidating his rule. Kim Il Sung spent two decades formally grooming his son for succession, yet the two Kims ruled the state in distinct ways. North Korea’s political institutions evolved over the decades and rapidly changed in the 1990s.

The following two chapters begin with a simple assumption: Political evolution is a historically dependent process. Rarely can political institutions be crafted without reference to the political past. In order to understand why and how the contemporary North Korean political system functions, one must start with what the current regime evolved out of. This chapter sketches North Korea’s general political history since its founding. The next chapter takes up a related, albeit more specific, task of describing the establishment and evolution of North Korea’s political institutions. The central point of these two chapters is to show how Kim Il Sung over time built a totalitarian system with its apex in the early 1970s. Kim Jong Il inherited and precipitated a system in decline. This decline rapidly accelerated in the 1990s and opens the theoretical possibility of discussing the resulting specific variety of post-totalitarian rule.

Foundations of the Founding

Kim Il Sung’s North Korea departed significantly from previous Korean political history. It provides a convenient, non-arbitrary starting point for evaluating the evolution of the state’s politics. While Korea’s “5000 years of history” undoubtedly shaped the culture, values, and social relations that make the nation a single people, this history sheds incomplete light on Kim

⁴⁰ Bradley Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006).

Il Sung's early government institutions, their specific functions, and how they related with society.

Much has been written on the birth of the state and speculation about its pending death. Neither evaluates the entire story. The state changes as it grows older. The formative years critically shape the state's life, but they do not predetermine its destiny. North Korea's relations with its neighbors have affected its political development. Traumatic events and opportunity alike have fostered its evolution. This chapter looks at that evolution in progress. North Korea is a young state, but it is very ill. The prognosis remains unclear whether North Korea will rebound from the 1990s or suffer chronic illness until its eventual demise. However, to answer these questions and others, one must briefly look to the evolution of North Korea's politics.

The Chosun Dynasty reigned over a united Korea from 1392 to 1910, but its lasting imprint on the structure and character of the North Korean regime is negligible. Korean political culture from the pre-Japanese occupation era would only survive in the North in the most general sense in terms of social values, beliefs, and customs. Japan's occupation and annexation – along with the strong reaction to it – profoundly shaped the creation of new political institutions on the Korean peninsula.

During Japan's 35 years of formal annexation of Korea (1910-45), Japan imposed a feudal economic structure with land held by only a few owners and industrial production and capital investment geared towards extractive and exported goods. The Japanese dealt with the Koreans brutally, suppressing their national identity and language. Resistance groups organized against the Japanese inside Korea and in nearby China before and during the Second World War. Following Japan's defeat in 1945, these guerilla groups vied for power over Korea. The peculiar nature of the right-wing Japanese administration led most resistance groups to take on a leftist persona. The dearth of indigenous, non-communist groups left the United States, for example, only one serious contender to recognize as the non-communist Korean government in 1948.

The Japanese occupation made Korea ripe for leftist politics, but leftism was secondary to the primary demand that the new polity be anti-Japanese. Before it had fully consolidated power following the Japanese defeat, the Kim Il Sung faction moved towards a land reform effort that initially privatized the large land holdings the Japanese had consolidated. The socialist goal of collective agriculture was put on hold; the initial effort was to move away from the Japanese administration, prompting the community party to form individual agricultural plots. While the Korean Workers Party eventually advocated for a more socialist line, prioritizing heavy industry and defense over agriculture and light industry, the anti-Japanese element proved more important than socialist doctrine.

The new Korean government was more concerned with its intensely anti-Japanese/anti-imperialist orientation than returning to a pre-modern Chosun political order. Previous land

owners and other “collaborators” with the Japanese or Americans were considered anathema and poor marriage partners, radically reshaping social relations in the North. Many of the previous elite were killed outright as collaborators, while others either moved to the South or recreated themselves as part of the new dominant social and political order as the new guerilla government in Pyongyang marginalized and denounced this group.⁴¹

Despite this intense anti-Japanese sentiment, the party’s demand to pursue a more modern state encouraged it to very cautiously utilize the skills of these individuals. The Japanese left thousands of trained administrators on both sides of the DMZ after their abrupt departure in 1945.⁴² These administrators brought their skills to the new Korean governments and helped bring traditional Korea into the modern world. Both Koreas developed a modern bureaucracy and increasingly utilized and developed science and technology as industrializing states. The pre-modern Chosun political institutions had relatively little bearing on the new North Korean polity, in particular. Some Korean nationalists in the North and South are reluctant to recognize this historical point, but the Japanese colonial period left a tremendous mark on Korea, Koreans, and their political institutions.

Further, Kim Il Sung’s faction was geographically and politically distanced from the Chosun Dynasty. These guerillas were from Korea’s northern provinces and lower classes. This was a double strike against them in the Chosun system. The Kim Il Sung faction did not demonstrate any affinity towards or significant contact with the Chosun government. Kim’s guerrillas after the Japanese defeat and even through the Korean War actively vied for power against those who may have had some contact with Chosun institutions. The Kimilsungists labeled those who stayed in Korea to fight the Japanese as “collaborators” and tried to purge them as Kim tried to position himself on top of a new Korean regime. During the occupation, Kim’s group was based in China, more distanced from the center of Japanese power on the peninsula, and faced criticism from competing guerilla groups that they had abandoned Korea during the colonial period. Korean leaders who may have known something of the preceding Korean political order did not participate in building the DPRK’s political institutions. The guerilla experience would be the main indigenous Korean influence on the DPRK’s founding.⁴³

Also, Kim and his comrades did not finish middle school. These uneducated guerillas made up Kim Il Sung’s political elite. These men likely did not have much serious exposure to Chosun political institutions personally or through reading history. Further, they were focused on ousting the Japanese, not learning how to govern. There were no Lenins among the Kimilsungists; they distrusted intellectuals and actively purged them at various stages after consolidating power. The Kimilsungists lacked the capacity to develop sophisticated political

⁴¹ Cumings, *North Korea*, pp. 132-33. Ipyong Kim, pp. 10-11.

⁴² Alexandre Mansourov, “Kim Jong Il’s military first politics,” in Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim (eds.), *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 40 – 41.

⁴³ Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

institutions on their own or draw from the past. Instead, they followed the lead of their main international backers and their own collective personal experience leading a small guerilla army.

Finally, the Soviets contributed to North Korean institutions. The DPRK's first constitution was written in Russian and translated into Korean. The 1948 constitution was modeled on the Soviet Union's 1936 "Stalin Constitution." In 1948 and 1949 when the North Koreans referred to "suryong" (meaning "chieftain"), they referred to Stalin, not Kim. Kim later made sure "suryong" referred only to him.⁴⁴ Yet Stalin's aims were limited in Korea. He sought to install a friendly regime rather than get involved deeply in the regime as he did in Central and Eastern Europe. North Korea had greater room to depart from Stalin's political model than the states behind Europe's Iron Curtain.

Kim was not merely a puppet of the Soviets even in the early years after the Japanese defeat. Kim's political star was already shining among his peers before the Soviet tapped him for the job. He commanded up to 300 men in a fractionalized guerilla movement only a few thousand fighters strong, mounted at least one offensive inside Korea, topped Japan's "most wanted list" in 1939, and most importantly, avoided total liquidation by the Japanese as many other guerilla groups suffered. After returning to Korea following the Japanese defeat, Kim's political proposals won out amongst indigenous forces over the Soviet-supported factions in 1946. Following a Soviet fallout with its first choice Korean leadership team, Moscow turned to Kim Il Sung as its favored leader in Korea.⁴⁵ Soviet influence was undoubtedly important but only one element of the founding of the state.

Kim's autonomy from the Soviets grew quickly. The KWP merged the North Korean and South Korean Communist Parties in 1946 – a full two years before the establishment of the state. Kim, the party, and the state concentrated on reunification, not foreign policy. With a significant military advantage over the South and a depleted U.S. military presence in Asia following Washington's rapid demobilization after World War II, Kim effectively lobbied Moscow to allow him to reunify the nation by force in 1950, precipitating the Korean War.⁴⁶

The Korean War (1950-53) was a tremendously important event in Korean history and 20th century world history. Deprivation was extreme on both halves of the peninsula. The American general in charge of the Far East Bomber Command reported that there were no more targets in North Korea, because everything was destroyed. North Korea's population contradicted by more than ten percent, every major industry was ruined, and agricultural production shrank to a fraction of pre-Korean War levels.⁴⁷ North Korea was virtually a blank

⁴⁴ Charles Armstrong, "The Nature, Origins, and Development of the North Korean State," in Samuel Kim (ed.), *The North Korean System in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 50.

⁴⁵ Armstrong 2004.

⁴⁶ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007).

⁴⁷ Aidan Foster-Carter, "North Korea. Development and Self-Reliance: A Critical Appraisal," in (eds.) Gavan McCormack and Mark Selden, *Korea, North and South* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), pp. 115-20.

slate in every material way. For ideological purposes, the DPRK media cites the importance of the Korean War experience regularly as the great effort to achieve the state and party's core goal of national reunification.

The Korean War is important, but it was not a revolutionary struggle. For the North, it was an early action of a government that preceded the war and survived it. A band of anti-Japanese factions with Kim Il Sung the most prominent among them launched the war, and Kim Il Sung emerged from the war still precariously on top. The Japanese occupation and defeat – not the Korean War – revolutionized Korean politics. Before, during, and after the Korean War, Kim Il Sung worked to eliminate internal opponents and strengthen his grip on the DPRK. The Korean War was one more tool, not a cause, for Kim to establish his totalizing regime.

By the end of the 1950s, Kim eliminated his major domestic opponents and fashioned a totalitarian system. North Korea's institutions evolved – notably in 1972, 1992, and 1998 with constitutional revisions – but they evolved from this Stalinist-guerilla fusion starting point coupled with a legacy of the imperial Japanese modes of administration. Stalinist Russia, the Kimilsungist guerrillas, and Imperial Japan shared totalizing aspects that sought state supremacy over all aspects of society that profoundly shaped the DPRK's founding institutions and ideology.

Kim Il Sung and Totalitarianism, 1956 - 1990

1950s: Consolidating Power. Kim Il Sung consolidated his power in the 1950s, purging remaining opponents, and making Soviet support less important for internal control. He removed domestic opposition to allow the communist party to monopolize politics under his direction as the totalitarian model predicts. In December 1955, Kim introduced the country to a comprehensive ideology, *Juche*. *Juche* is an inherently flexible, nationalistic philosophy that reined supreme over the distinctively “Kimilsungist” political institutions until his death. The injection of nationalism is important, because it marked Kim's final departure from any Soviet puppet status. Kim had removed internal challengers enough that he could depart further from Soviet influence and assert cherished independence. North Korea never reached its self-reliant ideal, but this ideal serves as a source of pride and ideological conviction to this day. Like the Vietnamese, Koreans of all sorts proudly recognize their independent history and have fought fiercely to defend that status. When other states were absorbed by foreign occupiers, Korea remained independent. This is part of the reason the Japanese occupation was so hated, and why the North Koreans constantly chide the South Koreans as American puppets. Kim Il Sung tapped into this nationalism and placed himself and the ideologically-guided party at the center of the new regime.

At the first opportunity after Khrushchev's “secret speech” that denounced Stalinism, Kim Il Sung's domestic opposition criticized what they saw as Kim's Stalinist tendencies. The

Soviet-Korean faction (those residing in the Soviet Union during World War II) and the Yenan-Korean faction (those fighting in Mao's army during the period) departed from Khrushchev's model in one important way –Khrushchev denounced Stalin after the totalitarian dictator's death and Kim Il Sung was still very much alive.⁴⁸ Kim responded to the criticism by finally purging these two other guerilla factions and asserting his personality cult. After Kim liquidated factionalism, North Korea had a party elite of generally like-minded revolutionaries with intense personal devotion to Kim Il Sung, despite concerns about continual purges and evidence of corruption.⁴⁹

Kim Il Sung called the Third Party Congress in April 1956. Rather than following the Soviet lead away from the totalitarian ideal, Kim further centralized his power and the power of the Korean Workers Party. He instructed the party to implant its representatives within the government and in the military organizations (down to the company level) to ensure proper policy implementation in accordance with the party line. Party representatives would have to approve any operational military action and controlled promotions, transfers, leaves, and general indoctrination.⁵⁰ Party representative established youth and women's organizations, agriculture and industry work federations, trade unions. They closely controlled education and made great pains to absorb society.⁵¹ Kim did not develop a strongman dictatorship along the personalist model by maintaining power through simple repression. His new polity proved much more robust, utilizing a massive party apparatus to control society as well as government.

Kim Il Sung utilized a single comprehensive party and all encompassing ideology as the totalitarian ideal type predicts, but he also put himself firmly on top of the party. Kim's oft-cited "personality cult" runs much deeper than most analyses explicitly recognize. The Korean War created human suffering that outlasted the war. The large numbers of orphans encouraged the state to establish the School for the Offspring of Revolutionary Martyrs, renamed the better known Mangyondae Revolutionary School. The school instilled an ideal that the state was the new family with tremendous psychological impact on these boys and young men.⁵² It bred intense devotion to Kim Il Sung and the revolution that later generations not personally marred by the Japanese occupation or the Korean War would not appreciate in the same personal way. Though some other totalitarian regimes used similar methods to fill the ranks of the secret police, graduates of the Mangyondae Revolutionary School came to populate the top leadership positions in the North Korean system as first-generational revolutionaries aged. Kim Il Sung put

⁴⁸ Tai Sung An, *North Korea: A Political Handbook* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resource Inc, 1983), pp. 34-47. Yang, pp. 374-79.

⁴⁹ Scalapino and Lee, pp. 775.

⁵⁰ An, *North Korea: A Political Handbook*, pp. 99-100.

⁵¹ Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea: Part II* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 701-11.

⁵² Bruce Cummings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: The New Press, 2004), pp. 106-7.

in place an ideological system with greater potential to be long lasting among this group of elites than other totalitarian states.

Though the regime used repression extensively, it did not survive by it. It was a more stable polity, because it could appeal to intense ideological and nationalistic sentiments and articulate them in *Juche* thought. The system also gained legitimacy internally in the early years from the economic results it produced. Casual observers of North Korea understandably associate it with economic backwardness. This characterization is generally appropriate after the 1970s, but in the years following the Korean War, the state saw real economic gains. North Korea expanded agricultural production and reduced the number of people required to work the fields. They shifted workers into the greatly expanding industrial sector and developed an educated workforce. The state enjoyed double digit growth annually in the post-Korean War 1950s and roughly six percent annual growth in the 1960s, leading one *Le Monde* journalist to note that North Korea was “one of the greatest economic powers in Asia.” North Korea was doing better economically than the South Korea, and the North even accepted defectors from the South. North Koreans did not live in a socialist paradise, but they could reasonably conclude that life was getting better and was superior to the alternative. They attributed this success to the command economy – another area where this regime followed the totalitarian ideal type.

1960s: The Sino-Soviet Split. The Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s prompted North Korea to play China and the Soviet Union off one another. It provided North Korea greater political independence and new economic and security challenges. The *Juche* ideology’s emphasis on independence and more general Korean nationalism produced a reluctance to rely on Chinese or Soviet benefactors. However, what North Korea gained in political independence from this posturing, it lost in critical economic aid. North Korea had to extend its seven-year plan to ten years as the plan’s goals were not achieved in the shorter timeframe. Greater independence also produced a type of greater insecurity. North Korea could not rely on either the Soviets or the Chinese wholly to provide for its security. It intensified the self-reliant line and started efforts towards its own nuclear capacity.⁵³ While North Korea’s heavy-industry supporting command economy was based on the Stalinist model, the state followed Mao’s lead in the Great Leap Forward to modify the Korean economy in the Chollima March.

With more independence in the 1960s, the state was faced with more responsibilities. Technocrats emerged in the military and economic spheres to augment the revolutionaries with more competent administration. In 1962 Kim Il Sung announced the party must put “equal emphasis” on military and economic goals, signaling his ability to direct all policy spheres.⁵⁴ Kim quickly reversed his slight movement away from the ideologically-driven command economy. Revolutionary generals argued that the state should provide defense before

⁵³ Hoare and Pares, pp. 117-19.

⁵⁴ Scalapino and Lee, p. 594-602.

considering economic goals. Kim Il Sung ultimately heeded his revolutionary compatriots' advice and restricted the role of economic technocrats once again. Consequently, as Soviet aid dropped, the initial gains of industrialization reached diminishing returns, and Kim Il Sung's strategy to arm the entire population and build extensive and expensive underground military facilities required a greater share of the country's increasingly scarce resources, the state's economic growth slowed. Kim demonstrated some willingness to listen to and empower institutions other than the party during his period of rule, but it was limited and always under the watchful eye and formal authority of the party.

The economy slowed starting in the mid-1960s and 1970s, stagnated in the 1980s, collapsed to below subsistence levels in the 1990s, and modestly rebounded in the 2000s. However, a certain segment of society recalled the period of post-war reconstruction and industrialization that produced rapid growth as more than a one-time strategy. With nostalgia, they argued that these socialist strategies could again be put to use, reflecting the party's general position of applying past policies to the contemporary situation.⁵⁵ As will be shown in the empirical chapters, this memory had a meaningful impact on policy debates in North Korea in the 1990s and 2000s.

By the Second Party Congress in 1966, Kim installed his revolutionary brethren in all of the key posts and eliminated the technocrats. By the end of the decade, though, he purged many of these loyal revolutionary compatriots. Kim alone would be the revolutionary hero and would not allow even this close group of comrades to remain in high places of power. Kim followed the totalitarian model's expectations for a permanent purge. Kim replaced some of his revolutionary generals with revolutionary civilians and technocrats. One must demonstrate loyalty to Kim and the party line, but even that did not assure one's (political) survival from arbitrary terror. Officials naturally develop differing ideas about policy, and they may express them. However, Kim Il Sung's use of purges like other totalitarian dictators prevented these views from advancing or undermining the state's centralized control.⁵⁶

Kim interpreted *Juche*, not the party, as Marxist-Leninist doctrine would support. While the party began as an important institution, it came to occupy a decidedly second-place role. The party would sit atop and constrain the bureaucracy but follow the orders of a single man. Party representatives resided inside every major unit of the bureaucracy, military, and workplace. They assured policy implementation did not depart significantly from Kim's line and espoused ideological correctness. Just as the party maintained tight control over the rest of the system, Kim tightly controlled the party and asserted legitimacy through simple repression, a well-developed personality cult, a general ideology, and even a recognition of economic growth.

⁵⁵ Foster-Carter, pp. 120-28. James Hoare and Susan Pares, *North Korea in the 21st Century* (Folkestone, UK: Global Oriental, 2005), pp. 37-45.

⁵⁶ Dae-sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 159-268. An, *North Korea*, Ilpyong Kim, pp. 117-27.31-

North Korea approached the totalitarian ideal type described in the previous chapter in the late 1950s and 1960s with a level of personal power that even Stalin and Mao did not achieve.⁵⁷

1970s: Apex of Power. Kim had so solidified his position atop the system that Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee perceptively argued in the 1970s that profound institutional change (through evolution or revolution) was unforeseeable in the near future. “Only when organizations now totally subordinate to the party... acquire some sense of separate interest and some degree of autonomy will the present structure of the party, including the methods of ordering authority, undergo significant alteration. The degree of pluralism attained in the total society, in short, will determine the extent to which party monolithism and the cult of personality that tends to accompany it can be reduced.”⁵⁸ In their view, this was unforeseeable in the near future as North Korea was the “world’s purest monocratic system.”⁵⁹ Still, this position would not naturally propagate itself and required close and increasingly difficult efforts to maintain.

North Korea’s 1972 constitution codified Kim’s personal power. On the heels of Kim Il Sung’s important and highly celebrated 60th birthday, the new constitution created the position of president for Kim Il Sung, instituting an unprecedented concentration of presidential power unseen even in Stalin’s Soviet Union or Mao’s China.⁶⁰ Kim Il Sung drew advisers from his revolutionary brethren and put them in high positions in the party. They were rewarded for general (ideological) knowledge. Specialists and those with technical knowledge were tolerated in the party starting in the 1960s when the Sino-Soviet split provided North Korea greater independence and thus created more responsibilities, but technocrats still had no opportunity for senior leadership in the 1970s.⁶¹

The 1972 constitution firmly established the supremacy of the party over the state. It formally downgraded the main legislative body, the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA), discarding the previous legal fiction that the SPA was the supreme organ in the North Korean system. It downgraded the state’s main executive body, the cabinet, renaming it the Administrative Council. The new constitution shrank the number of ministries from thirty seven to twenty two, and granted the party more functional control over the Administrative Council, particularly in economic affairs where economic technocrats had temporarily exerted greater influence in the 1960s. Most of the officially high-ranking revolutionaries held senior positions in the party structure and low- and mid-level officials stopped rotating between the party, military, and government roles. They increasingly developed functional expertise in one

⁵⁷ Armstrong 2001, pp. 43 – 53.

⁵⁸ Scalapino and Lee, p. 756.

⁵⁹ Scalapino and Lee, p. 788.

⁶⁰ An, pp. 133-45.

⁶¹ Hak Joon Kim, *North and South Korea: Internal Politics and External Relations Since 1988* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 68.

institution, compartmentalizing roles and information that Kim Il Sung and his revolutionary comrades could control.

Kim's speeches and writings explicitly and consistently identified the government bureaucracy as an enemy to the good. Like other communist states, party members maintained key posts in the government bureaucracy in order to insure proper policy implementation. The Foreign Minister, for example, was a member of the Politburo. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Armed Forces, Trade, External Economic Relations, and the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the Academy of Sciences all had formal roles in foreign policy, but in practice the party was sufficiently staffed and empowered to control these bureaucratic elements under Kim Il Sung's oversight.⁶² Foreign policy decision-making centered on the Party Secretariat's Department of International Affairs not the separate Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The party's decisions would be sent to the rubber stamp parliament and then implemented through the Politburo.

The party was the most important organ advising policy decisions, making policy decisions, and executing policy. Remaining institutions existed as support staff to the party's orders. This decision-making and implementation process operated under the supervision of the Central Committee of the Party – and the President.⁶³ Ideology informed macro-political decision-making which was reflected in the state's institutional formation.

Kim continued to rule through the party by implanting political advisers with wide-ranging power in the military and government bureaucracies. These implanted representatives delivered regular reports to the party apparatus. Party control of the government expanded in the Fourth (1961) and Fifth (1970) Party Congresses, although the extent of this expansion cannot be firmly identified.⁶⁴ Particularly in the arena of foreign affairs, the DPRK needed greater capacity in the 1970s. In the early years, North Korea had diplomatic relations with as few as seven countries, allowing the condensed party structure to deal with foreign policy. By the 1970s, Dae-sook Suh notes, the government had to assume greater policymaking roles due to the greater workload, reflected in the 1972 constitution.⁶⁵

While Suh's analysis was restricted to foreign affairs, one could surmise that similar pressures faced other areas that increasingly required more specialized knowledge. The government moved from a purely administrative role to having greater policymaking

⁶² Buzo 1999, pp. 16 – 52. Byung Chul Koh. "North Korea's Foreign Policymaking Process," in Jae Kyu Park (ed.), *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 49 – 55.

⁶³ Se Hee Yoo, "Change and Continuity in North Korea's Foreign Policy," in Dough Joong Kim (ed.), *Foreign Relations of North Korea During Kim Il Sung's Last Days* (Seoul: Sejong Institute, 1994).

⁶⁴ Suh, pp. 3-6.

⁶⁵ Suh, pp. 9-11. Jae Kyu Park, "Power Structure in North Korea," in (eds.) Jae Kyu Park and Jung Gun Kim, *The Politics of North Korea* (Seoul, Korea: The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University, 1979), pp. 111-42.

responsibilities as suggested by an infusion of new personnel, more frequent meetings on substantive questions, and the Cabinet Premier introducing the new budget to the SPA. By contrast, the KWP Central Committee had already reduced its plenary meetings to once or twice a year. Government personnel increasingly met in joint meetings with Politburo personnel.

The party was positioned over the military and the government, creating a three tiered political structure. Kim codified personal power but maintained ideology as a guide and constraint on political action. The important role of the party, ideology, continual purges, and command economy as key conduits for Kim to control the state and society made his state more closely resemble the totalitarian ideal than other models of non-democratic rule.

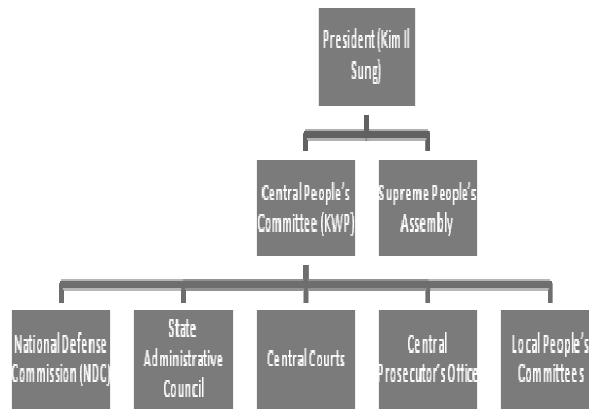


Figure 3.1: Macro-Political Organization Under Kim Il Sung

Kim Il Sung’s ideologically-driven process failed to foster the third goal of prosperity after the initial gains of post-war reconstruction and modernization diminished. Kim may have been well informed about what occurred, but his leadership often lacked the personal and/or institutional capacity to understand why it mattered. In 1972 – 74, for example, the Minister of External Economic Affairs Kong Chin Tae presided over the purchases of massive western industry, including the world’s largest cement factory. North Korea planned to produce exportable products. The enterprise was not economically viable even considering the cheap North Korean labor. Some industries could not produce a product while others could not market it abroad. The 1973 oil crisis and rise in energy costs made the energy-inefficient production even more unsustainable. The short-lived experiment left North Korea with a massive debt and no new productive industry. The North showed no inclination to pay down its debt. It was the first socialist state to default, causing its credit rating to plummet and effectively removed any hope of access to foreign capital other than aid.

Kim was not above blaming and even purging officials for failed policies, yet he promoted Kong to Vice Premier in 1975. In a rare interview with a western media outlet, Kim told *Le Monde* in 1977 that the investments failed, because the West was not able to purchase the

North Korean goods⁶⁶; Kim seemed to not understand the severe economic folly of the project and its tremendous long-term consequences on the North Korean economy. Kim Il Sung was an ideologue and revolutionary, not a technocrat. At the time, he empowered the KWP's State Planning Commission with economic decisions while the government ministries could only carry out policy.⁶⁷ Significant events like this suggest that he did not have the institutional or personal competence to rule pragmatically.

1973 also marked the introduction of Kim Jong Il to the North Korean political scene. Kim Il Sung demoted his younger brother, Kim Yong Chu, and Kim Jong Il took on a then unspecified senior party role. The North Korean media started to praise Jong Il as the "party center." The same year the DPRK Academy of Sciences literally deleted its previous derogatory definition of "hereditary succession" as an exploitative, feudal practice from its Political Dictionary.⁶⁸ Though Kim Il Sung effectively maintained political control through the totalitarian arrangement, it remained unclear at this time if the younger Kim could exert the same power and authority as his father.

By the mid-1970s, some observers claimed that the North Korean government was increasing its role vis-à-vis the party, especially in foreign affairs. Dae-Sook Suh wrote that the 1972 constitution fostered this change, while Robert Scalapino responded that the dual-appointment of party and government officials made such a change of "limited importance." The party and government officials were the same, Scalapino reasoned, and Kim Il Sung could control foreign policy by dividing this authority between several institutions.⁶⁹ Others argued that the state had both ideological requirements and national interests to pursue in foreign policy. Shifting between these goals was common to communist systems, including North Korea where economic demands had come to outpace geopolitical ones,⁷⁰ but did not represent a division between institutional interests.

1980s: Succession Preparation Intensifies. There was some shift afoot by the early 1980s. Kim Jong Il officially became the supreme leader in waiting at the Sixth Party Congress in 1980. To conclusively answer the question how Kim Jong Il may rule differently than his father would have to wait until the 1990s, but North Korea watchers recognized some social and political change brewing in general form. At the 1980 Party Congress, Kim Il Sung warned

⁶⁶ Buzo 1999, pp. 89 – 100.

⁶⁷ An, *North Korea*, p. 114.

⁶⁸ An, p. 150.

⁶⁹ Robert Scalapino, "Introduction," in (eds.) Robert Scalapino and Hongkoo Lee, *North Korea in a Regional and Global Context* (Berkeley, CA: Korea Research Monograph Series, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986), p. x. Dae-Sook Suh, "The Organization and Administration of North Korean Foreign Policy," in (eds.) Robert Scalapino and Hongkoo Lee, *North Korea in a Regional and Global Context* (Berkeley, CA: Korea Research Monograph Series, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986), pp. 1-19.

⁷⁰ Byung-joon Ahn, "North Korean Foreign Policy: An Overview," in (eds.) Jae Kyu Park, B.C. Koh, and Tae-hwan Kwak, *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives* (Seoul, Korea: Kyungnam University Press, 1987), pp. 15-38.

against a move away from revolutionary principles among a post-Korean War generation. As long as Kim Il Sung was alive, his wishes of maintaining the political objectives of the revolution would stand before other goals. Yet the stage was being set for Kim Jong Il to rule differently than his father. The state saw its first major shift towards employing technocrats and Kim Jong Il loyalists in senior positions starting the same year. Some observers called this not only a transition between top leaders but a generational change in which economic pragmatists might rule over militant ideologues.

Everyone was not enthused about Jong Il's selection. At the 1980 Party Congress, Minister of Public Security Yi Chin-su warned against opposing the tapped next leader – a point reiterated in *Nodong Sinmun* as Kim Jong Il's personality cult intensified. The security apparatus purged those who opposed Kim Jong Il's selection.⁷¹

Kim Jong Il demonstrated an early willingness to use not only targeted purges, but also arbitrary repression to assert his power, even when his specific goals were not clearly formed. Kim Jong Il joined his father in rejecting empiricism as eroding revolutionary principles and demanded improved empirical performance from state organizations. His bloody crackdown seemed aimed more at demonstrating his willingness and capability to use arbitrary terror than advancing a certain goal. Kim Jong Il used “Three Revolution Teams” of young and zealous Koreans to suppress empiricists and support three vague goals of ideological, technical, and cultural advancement. Kim demanded officials be both ideologically committed and expert in their specific area.⁷²

In the 1980s, Kim Il Sung reduced his roles as his son increasingly took on more responsibility. As early as 1983, one scholar predicted that the state that Kim Il Sung built into a monolith would likely bureaucratize as the tension between competence and ideology expanded but at that time there was “no clear dichotomy between Red [ideologue] and expert.”⁷³ Tai Sung An and Dae-sook Suh thoughtfully argued that the stage was set for the state to gradually change under Kim Jong Il although it remained unclear what the state would evolve into. Kim Jong Il modified his father's reunification policy, allowing some family reunions and opening inter-Korean economic discussions and promoted his own loyalists to senior positions, particularly

⁷¹ An, pp. 150- 68. Jae Kyu Park, “Introduction,” in (eds.) Jae Kyu Park, B.C. Koh, and Tae-hwan Kwak, *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives* (Seoul, Korea: Kyungnam University Press, 1987), pp. 3-14. ⁷¹ An, pp. 150- 68.

⁷² Chong-sik Lee, “The 1972 Constitution and Top Communist Leaders,” in (eds.) Dae-sook Suh and Chae-jin Lee, *Political Leadership in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), pp. 192-222. Chong-sik Lee, *Korean Workers party: A Short History* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), pp. 114-34. Dae-sook Suh, *Korean Communism 1945-1980* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), pp. 444-48. Kim Jong Il, “Let Us Step Up the Three Revolution Red Flag Movement,” November 23, 1986, <<http://www.korea-dpr.com/lib/Kim%20Jong%20Il%20-%204/LET%20US%20STEP%20UP%20THE%20THREE.pdf>>, accessed August 7, 2008. Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea: Part I* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 559-684.

⁷³ An, p. 176.

post-Korean War graduates of the Mangyondae Revolutionary School. The state may be on some type of new path, but where it would lead and what the resulting regime would look like remained unclear.⁷⁴

Even those arguing the state was slowing changing recognized that the party more tightly controlled the state and society than any other political system. The North Korean system still sought to eliminate dissent. North Korea's previous experience with dissent was a factional system in the 1940s and 1950s that the Kims and their senior leadership sought to avoid repeating. Even those early scholars who detailed the prevalence of various groups and generational change within the North Korean system concluded that by the time Kim Il Sung consolidated his rule, he sat atop the party which in turn dominated the other groups.⁷⁵ In every way imaginable, Kim Il Sung's North Korea approached the totalitarian ideal.⁷⁶

On the eve of Kim Il Sung's death, in-depth studies of the North Korean system continued to apply the totalitarian label. Many did not deny change within the system with the ebb and flow of history, but the fundamental character of the regime remained static. The party controlled the military and government with Kim on top, ideological indoctrination remained important, and the state monopolized the media and planned the economy.⁷⁷ In 1994, "The North Korean political structure, in short, represents the classic case of the monolithic power" where unity defined all the political institutions of the state.⁷⁸ Bruce Cumings argued that, "The North Korea of today is still, fundamentally, the one that was formed in the 1940s. But time goes on, things change."⁷⁹ Cumings recognized the increased role of the younger Kim, especially by the 1980s but basically saw the system as the same despite calling the younger Kim "the world's first postmodern dictator" after Kim Il Sung's 1994 death. North Korea approached the totalitarian ideal type under Kim Il Sung, but significant events in the 1990s fundamentally reshaped the system. The nature of that system, of course, is the primary topic of this study.

The Transition Period, 1991 - 1998

North Korea's political system grew more rational in the 1990s. The type of information senior leadership demanded required a substantially different bureaucratic structure and a renewed emphasis on expertise. The acceleration of North Korea's political evolution in the 1990s is more than the simple political transition from father to son, although the skills and experience of the top leader had an important role. As argued in the previous chapter, three

⁷⁴ Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, pp. 287-97.

⁷⁵ Dae-sook Suh, "Communist party Leadership," in (eds.) Dae-sook Suh and Chae-jin Lee, *Political Leadership in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), pp. 159-91.

⁷⁶ Foster-Carter, pp. 130-33. Tai Sung An, *North Korea in Transition: From Dictatorship to Dynasty* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 7-34.

⁷⁷ Sung Chull Yang, *The North and South Korean Political Systems: A Comparative Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 223-57, 584-93..

⁷⁸ Yang, p. 265.

⁷⁹ Cumings, *North Korea*, p. 134.

events compounded one another's effect to unleash tremendous economic, social, and political forces that hastened the regime's transformation. The Soviet collapse in 1991, Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, and the onset of the famine in 1995 had a profound, combined effect on North Korean politics. This section documents the history of this period, paralleling the theoretical discussion of these changes found in the previous chapter.

Shock One: The Soviet Collapse. North Korea lost its primary economic and security backer in 1991. North Korea depended on Soviet military, energy, and food assistance to keep its economy afloat. Though Soviet Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev reduced Soviet aid to North Korea throughout the 1980s, one-sided "trade" remained at \$3.5 billion as late as 1988. However, by 1991, Moscow completely shut off the aid valve and trade plummeted to hundreds of millions. Furthermore, with the end of the Cold War, North Korea lost its main security guarantor. Moscow eliminated any mention of Russian military assistance to North Korea even in the case of direct attack against the North and formally recognized the government in Seoul in 1991.⁸⁰

North Korea's economy was modeled on the Soviet Union even more than its politics. After the Korean War, Moscow provided technical assistance to build ninety three heavy industrial factories in North Korea,⁸¹ producing a familiar blend of heavy industrial products mainly useful for the military with little investment in light industry and consumer goods. This economic plan required sustained energy input to keep the production chain moving. With the loss of energy aid, the North's industrial base suffered dramatic declines as the state sought new ways to feed its energy needs.⁸²

North Korea's economic woes ran deeper than the rest of the former Soviet satellite states. The energy aid shut off put North Korea one major blow away from not being able to feed its population. North Korea used potent oil-based fertilizers to sustain some level of food production. The fertilizers did long-term damage to the soil over decades of use, and by the mid-1990s, the soil required these fertilizers to produce food. North Korea also suffers very cold winters. Without oil, North Koreans turned to the forests to provide heating fuel. Burning biomass contributed to deforestation and soil erosion that further hindered agricultural production, especially in the most productive agricultural lands. North Korea is a mountainous country with little arable land; indigenous food production is overwhelming concentrated in the

⁸⁰ James Moltz, "Russian Policy on the North Korean Nuclear Crisis," North Korea Special Collection, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, May 5, 2003, <http://cns.miis.edu/research/korea/ruspol.htm>.

⁸¹ Alexander Vorontsov, "Current Russia – North Korea Relations: Challenges and Achievements," Brookings Institution, Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies Research Paper, February 2007, p. 5.

⁸² Peter Hayes, "North Korea's Uranium Exports: Much Ado About Something," Nautilus Institute Special Report, May 25, 2004, http://www.nautilus.org/archives/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/Hayes-DPRKuranium.txt. Duk-Hwan Hwang, "Energy and Mineral Resources of Russia (East Siberia and Far East) and North Korea," Northeast Asia Energy Research Paper, August 2003, [http://www.neasiaenergy.net/nea/e_publications.nsf/1b408c7e1ee7e412492570d0004c5f07/a8070cb49972e0a249256ecb000dec11/\\$FILE/DHHwang.pdf](http://www.neasiaenergy.net/nea/e_publications.nsf/1b408c7e1ee7e412492570d0004c5f07/a8070cb49972e0a249256ecb000dec11/$FILE/DHHwang.pdf).

“rice bowl” in the south of the country, which is prone to severe flooding. Given the state’s policies that contributed to soil erosion, extreme weather could destroy the country’s crop.

North Korea’s geography produces a natural reliance on food imports to feed its population. Pyongyang’s policy choices have magnified this dependence on foreign food supplies, a fact that is particularly inconvenient to an autarkic government. Reduced energy aid shrank fertilizer production and increased the state’s reliance on foreign food sources at precisely the same time when friendly aid sources rapidly diminished. North Korea had to purchase a larger portion of its food from abroad at a time when its industrial production – its economic engine – ground to a halt. The state’s long-term outlook was bleak, and it was one shock away from a debilitating food crisis.

However, North Korea’s new challenges were not simply economic. It still faced off across the world’s most heavily fortified border against a newly democratic enemy. Despite democratization, South Korea elected governments with ties to the former military regime and openly hostile to the North during this period. South Korea clearly outpaced the North economically and potentially militarily – even independent of American backing.⁸³ Of course, South Korea did enjoy American backing, and the United States maintained troops on the Korean peninsula. While President George H.W. Bush acknowledged publicly that the United States had removed all of its tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea by December 1991, the security-conscious North Koreans still had reason to fear the U.S.-South Korean alliance. With its dilapidated economy and no superpower support, North Korea scrambled to survive.

The following year, the two Koreas made history. In February 1992 North and South Korea signed the Basic Agreement, whereby both committed to peaceful reunification, denuclearization, and cultural and economic projects like family reunions and joint ventures. Pyongyang seemingly recognized its challenges and sought to negotiate security commitments and extract the necessary food and energy assistance. Two months later, North Korea revised its constitution. It removed all references to Marxism-Leninism, precipitating calls for “Korean-style socialism.” The Cold War was over, and North Korea was searching for a new international strategy that would have long-standing effects on its political structure.

The Soviet Union was not North Korea’s only ally. It also cautiously relied upon its northern neighbor, China. The two states have a precarious history. The Kimilsungist guerillas helped the Maoists defeat Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalist army in the Chinese civil war. The Chinese reciprocated by sending three million troops to fight in the Korean War. The two states have a relationship forged in blood, but have a historically uneasy relationship. The Chinese have seen Korea as part of its sphere of influence and sought to explicitly dominate – and at times conquer – the peninsula. North Korea tried to play the Soviets and Chinese off one another

⁸³ J.J. Suh, *Power, Interests, and Identity in Military Alliances* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 29-62.

after the Sino-Soviet split but eventually decided to rely more on the Soviet Union, fearing losing its sovereignty to China as a greater threat.⁸⁴

Furthermore, China and North Korea grew apart through the later Cold War years. In December 1979, Deng Xiaoping announced China's radical economic reforms. The People's Republic of China moved away from its Maoist roots. By the end of the Cold War, the relationship had deteriorated. By August 1992, over Pyongyang's strenuous objection, Beijing recognized the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Yet China's interest in regional stability ultimately drove it to protect North Korean interests in international fora, especially the UN Security Council, in the coming years to prevent the real risk of a North Korean collapse. China also provided North Korea with what one former Chinese Foreign Ministry official estimated to be 70-90% of the North's energy aid and approximately one-third of its food aid.⁸⁵ China was not North Korea's first choice as an international backer, but the reclusive state cautiously accepted its support while pursuing its own independent means to provide for its own security and economic needs.

In this context of eroding sovereignty, North Korea took bold action. The state could address its mounting problems with a new relationship with a more distant great power, the United States, or seek to address the security part of its new challenges alone with a nuclear deterrent. On March 12, 1993 the North Korean Foreign Ministry precipitated a crisis, by announcing the state would withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In a rare description of the internal politics within the DPRK, three of the U.S. top negotiators in the first nuclear crisis described their understanding of how the regime made this decision:

"According to later accounts, the idea of withdrawing from the NPT was advanced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and championed by Kang Sok Ju, the First Vice Foreign Minister. Neither was thought of as a bastion of hard line sentiment within the North Korean system. On the contrary, Kang was believed to belong to a group of Foreign Ministry officials who were relatively more pragmatic. Nevertheless, in a political system where currying favor with the two Kims translated into influence and power (or at least survival), the ministry may have advanced the idea of NPT withdrawal in response to the wishes of Kim Jong Il, who may have been looking for a way out of an increasingly difficult situation. The Foreign Ministry also had its own motives, chiefly to reassert

⁸⁴ Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang, "Some New Aspects of Korean-Chinese Relations in the First Half of 1965," June 4, 1965, Accessed from the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5035023B-96B6-175C-93B025BE065B82E8&sort=Subject&item=Korea,%20DPRK,%20in%20Sino%20Soviet%20Split. Soviet Memorandum of Conversation, "Record of Conversation between Soviet Politburo member Nikolai Podgorny and Kim Chung-wong," January 20, 1967, Accessed from the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5035025A-96B6-175C-939A231E7DF03C10&sort=Subject&item=Korea,%20DPRK,%20in%20Sino%20Soviet%20Split.

⁸⁵ Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," *Washington Quarterly* 28(2), p. 42.

control over dealings with the United States. It had never been happy with Kim Yong Sun's leadership role from his perch as head of the Korean Workers Party International Department. Since his stewardship had produced few results, by autumn 1992 responsibility had shifted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In December, Kim Yong Sun was promoted, taken off the American account, and put in charge of North-South dialogue. Later he would claim that he had opposed the North's withdrawal from the NPT. That implied the decision was not simply handed down but perhaps discussed within the small coterie of North Korean decision makers."⁸⁶

North Korea took action that would allow it to reach an agreement in 1994 that traded a nuclear freeze for security guarantees and food and energy assistance. The Kims halted the nation's most potent military program – the plutonium production at Yongbyon – for eight years (1994 – 2002). The move seemed to address the state's core problems without requiring substantial changes that may more comprehensively affect the regime's rule. The military retained its prestige and prioritized resource allocation, the state's economy remained socialist, and wider society was largely unaffected by the decision with the notable exception of gaining some much needed energy. The 1994 agreement was a stabilizer, but other events outside of the regime's control again intervened.

Shock Two: Kim Il Sung's Death. The second shock came in the midst of negotiating the Agreed Framework. In 1994 Kim Il Sung, the state's founder, president, and national hero, died. Kim Jong Il fundamentally gained legitimacy from his father's actions a half century earlier. He inherited the reigns of power, leaving him with a set of political institutions he could not immediately change without cost but also not well suited to his strengths. He could not rule with the same revolutionary authority and faced different challenges. Nevertheless, the younger Kim's institutions and system at the outset were essentially his father's.

Kim Jong Il came to power in this context of economic and security crisis. Lacking military qualifications himself and threatened by military coups from the time of his being tapped as Kim Il Sung successor in the 1970s to the latest failed coup attempt only two years prior, he still concluded the Agreed Framework three months after his father's death. Kim Jong Il did not move immediately to alter his father's institutional structure. Instead, he observed a three-year mourning period traditionally reserved for the death of Korean kings. This show of Confucian filial piety likely appealed to both elite and mass audiences who showed grief for the late president. Traditionally, emerging from the mourning period, sons assume their father's roles. In this culturally prescribed way, the younger Kim bolstered his authority as the legitimate heir to his father's rule.

⁸⁶ Joel Wit, Daniel Poneman, and Robert Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2004), p. 36.

Shock Three: Famine. Within that three year period, the third shock hit. Multi-year extreme weather beginning in 1995 compounded the effect of years of failed food and agricultural policies under both Kims, including reducing production incentives and inefficient food rationing and distribution methods.⁸⁷ The floods destroyed North Korea's crop, and international assistance was not cost-free. It meant recognizing failure. More importantly, international aid came with inspections.

The UN's World Food Program (WFP) requires its staff certify that the aid is going to vulnerable populations and not being wholly diverted to the military or regime elites. Pyongyang objected to intrusive inspections as well as a number of other questions such as whether the donated aid bags could recognize the donor's country of origin (notably including the United States). Faced with more demand than supply of emergency food aid, the WFP grew wary of North Korean demands. While some negotiated aid eventually reached starving North Koreans, the regime's rigid stance allowed up to a million people to starve or die from disease and left a generation of North Koreans malnourished and stunted.

This third shock built on the previous two to produce social changes in North Korea. The regime conditioned its citizens to depend on the state for food and other critical resources. When food never came and regime instructions to work harder or plant patches of grass to eat did not solve the food problem, many died in place. The regime stubbornly held to its administrative solutions to the famine. Socialist orthodoxy demanded the state lead on these issues and not permit market mechanisms. Ideologically-committed revolutionaries and security-conscious elites alike objected to the idea of increased, individual cross-border traffic. Such moves ran counter to socialist principles and risked dangerous information inflows and outflows. Party commentaries continually repeated the risk that society may become infected with capitalist ideas in a way that, they argued, hastened the collapse of the rest of the former Soviet bloc.

Others defied the regime and survived. Young and able-bodied men and women illegally crossed into China in search of food or consumer goods. A new class of entrepreneurs emerged as farmers sold some production in open-air gray markets and traders brought in new goods from China. Those able to participate in this commerce benefited. China strongly backed high-level reform efforts based on its own experiences, and Pyongyang began to tolerate some of this behavior. While periodically shutting down these markets or cracking down on Sino-North Korean border movement, enough incentive remained for citizens to maintain this trade.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets Aid and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁸⁸ There has been some debate as to the whether labeling this market activity "illegal" or "black market" activity is appropriate. Though North Korean law clearly prohibits this activity, some argue that the rule of law is not established and the regime's commitment to tolerate this market activity makes it more appropriate to label it "gray market" activity. However, the state has shown only an intermittent commitment to tolerate this activity, occasionally preferring to enforce the law in the form of crackdowns. The activity, though increasingly widespread,

The social and political consequences both paved the way for rationalizing North Korea politics and society. Socially, a new class of risk-accepting merchants arose in North Korea. Previously, cadres and party members topped the status ladder. The state controlled social advancement. However, with this introduction of independent paths to wealth and power, the state inadvertently allowed individuals to gain status based on their own entrepreneurial abilities. Self-made businessmen enjoyed status outside the state. Status is scarce, so this move cut into the prestige of those same cadre and party members, providing both an individual and institutional reason to oppose market mechanisms.

The famine also weakened society's trust in government. While ideology had been eroding for decades, Kim Jong Il's taking power shifted society's focus somewhat from the revolution to effective governance. Under Kim Il Sung's charismatic authority, the psychic needs of elites and populace could be satisfied by faith in the revolution. Through socialist principle, the state would achieve ultimate victory against the imperialists, promote a moral, non-material way of life, and ultimately transgress the "arduous march." "Good socialists" who entered the party or military earned individual reward in terms of status and wealth as well, providing further incentives for this path. During the famine, however, those who made the greatest gains were those who defied the regime and explicitly pursued individual interests in markets.

Kim Jong Il announced his regime would pursue "emergency management," allowing policies that did not subscribe to the socialist orthodoxy for pragmatic benefit. Such a move shifts the elite and popular focus to results. Kim Jong Il repeatedly cited his father, but increasingly he needed to produce effective policy outcomes. The legitimacy of the Kim regime came to increasingly rely on rational calculations.

Such a move was very risky for Kim. Kim Il Sung was a self-made man, but Kim Jong Il was not. He had to walk a fine line between recognizing the role of self-made men and individual expertise without delegitimizing himself. Once one starts to focus on one's effective performance, it raises the possibility that another person may lead the country more effectively than Kim. The ruling myth becomes increasingly hollow. Kim's almost supernatural ability to "sagaciously" interpret *Juche* philosophy and guide the state like a "shining star" takes on less importance. Kim did not want to move in this direction, but eventually, after immense human suffering, Kim took some measures to address these new ground realities.

The state accelerated its bureaucratization to rationalize politics. Faceless bureaucrats informed policy based on their individual expertise, not their pedigree or status. While Kim and his core advisers remained on top, the hybrid system is much more impersonal and erodes

remains technically illegal and therefore somewhat risk-laden. The reader can develop their own conclusions of the appropriate terminology based of this type of arrangement.

charismatic authority.⁸⁹ This enhanced the role of technocrats, especially in the economic sphere. They were charged with crafting policy that would help extract the state from this deep crisis. The Administrative Council came to employ most of these technocrats. Kim Jong Il would rule differently than his father.

At the same time, Kim needed the military to deter foreign invasion and maintain his ideological mantle of legitimacy. The state still tried to justify its rule in terms of blocking imperialist advances. Kim responded to this dilemma by raising the status of the military nominally. He could hope to well up some support from the military. However, he would also need to divide and conquer his bureaucracies by institutionalizing constraints from competing institutions and the security services to prevent the hostile military from threatening Kim himself.

This was not a Kim-directed change, but the exogenous shocks of the mid-1990s put in play important social and political forces that the state, faced with difficult trade-offs, codified in the 1998 constitution. The shocks encouraged the leadership to incorporate novel elements into the political system in face of potential collapse. While it did not collapse, it emerged from these crises changed. North Korea had less domestic and international reason to keep up socialist constraints on policy choices. Ideological correctness would become just one factor in policy choices rather than guiding policy. It was appropriate, therefore, that South Korea received its highest-ranking North Korean defector in 1997 – North Korea's lead *Juche* theorist Hwang Jang Yop.

Forces outside the state's control prompted changes in North Korean politics. This leads to the conclusion – uncomfortable to many – that Kim Jong Il effectively managed this situation, given his goals. The collapsist school was implicitly correct that the risk of state collapse was high. Their error was in overstating their case as deterministic. While one can easily dispute the morality of his choices, Kim achieved his core objective of staving off collapse by overhauling the state's founding institutions and crafting a new ruling order. He codified this new rule in the 1998 constitution. The role of the party, ideologically-driven policy, and the command economy all suffered under the new arrangement. North Korea moved away from the totalitarian model not by choice but out of state weakness.

Post-totalitarian Institutionalism, 1998 – Present

Towards a New Constitution. By September 1998, North Korea emerged from its transition period and modified the constitution. The new ruling order marked not only a revolutionary break in politics the way Kim Il Sung carried out a half century earlier. Instead, the younger Kim modified, or redirected, the state out of an evolving internal and external environment. The functions and operations of this post-totalitarian institutional state is the

⁸⁹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 1148-49.

primary subject of the previous chapter. The state attempted to address challenges in three core areas: inter-Korean relations, U.S. policy, and economics. Each of these issue areas fundamentally related to systemic survival and incorporated competing economic, military, ideational, and political goals. Though the empirical chapters take up the task of documenting specific policy debates in North Korea on each of these core issue areas in detail, this section describes the broader historical brush strokes of this time of change and the subsequent North Korean political history. North Korea made this decision in a particular contemporary historical context.

In 1998 South Korea elected a political heavyweight, Kim Dae Jung, on a platform that included reconciliation with the North and explicitly discussed reunification as a long-term goal that could be addressed in the future. This gave rise to Seoul's "Sunshine Policy" that involved tension reduction measures, discussion on reuniting families divided since the Korean War, and economic, food, and energy assistance to prepare for eventual reunification. Pyongyang reacted positively to this development in advance of their constitutional revision. North Korea sent 70 letters to South Korean politicians through Panmunjom's "truce village," and the Secretary of the Party's Central Committee commented that the letters signified North Korea's desire to discuss and negotiate with South Korean government officials, political parties, and organizations to "promote coexistence, co-prosperity, common interests, mutual collaboration and unity between fellow countrymen."⁹⁰

The United States focused on North Korea at the beginning of this period through the Four Party Talks. The Talks, involving the U.S., North Korea, China, and South Korea, never got off the ground. Within seven months, they concluded with parties unable to reach basic agreements. However, U.S.-DPRK relations were not yet at a crisis point. Both sides prodded the other to uphold its Agreed Framework commitments, but neither had completely abandoned the agreement to date.

North Korea's economy meanwhile was in shambles. The regime started to emerge from the depths of the famine at the end of the 1990s. Coping mechanisms learned during the famine and Chinese and South Korean aid and investment became so significant that they began to transform the economy from below. Seoul and Beijing urged Pyongyang to allow greater grassroots marketization and take more significant political moves to follow China's post-Maoist development model. North Korean generals and party officials objected, arguing that socialism collapsed in Eastern Europe, because the system opened to foreign and capitalistic influences.⁹¹ But some increased use of markets on a larger scale gradually caught on as economic technocrats cut into the ideological purity and security arguments presented by the party and military.

On the eve of North Korea's constitutional revision, Pyongyang's position on each of these three areas was precarious but not in crisis. It cautiously but positively responded to its southern neighbor's new overtures of economic aid and investment, pursued eased tensions with

90 "North Korea Urges South to Try to Reconcile," *New York Times*, February 20, 1998, p. A9. "Yonhap Views Thawing of ROK-DPRK Relations," *Yonhap*, February 20, 1998.

91 "North Korea, Army Chief Addresses War Anniversary Meeting in Pyongyang," KCBS, July 27, 1998, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, July 29, 1998. Though Chinese diplomacy towards North Korea was a quiet affair, they presumably could point to China's own stable communist political system as evidence that economic opening did not necessarily produce political revolution.

the U.S., and clung to its socialist economic methods at the commanding heights of the economy. Despite heavy rains five times the historical average and immense flooding that destroyed much of the country's rice and corn fields and new U.S. allegations of a suspected underground nuclear site,⁹² North Korea went ahead with introducing its new form of government.

The state reintroduced the newly articulated concept of military first politics in an August 22, 1998 *Nodong Sinmun* editorial and flight tested the Taepo Dong-1 rocket over Japan on August 31, prompting substantial international concern.⁹³ The following week on September 5, the Supreme People's Assembly officially retired the position of president, elected Kim as Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), and codified the new constitution only four days before the important anniversary of the founding of the state. Kim uses drama and important anniversaries to highlight important political events. This succession of events suggests he wanted the country – and the world – to take notice.

The “Kim Il Sung Constitution” was unveiled with a dedication in the preamble to the country's founder: “The DPRK Social Constitution is the Kim Il Sung Constitution; it legally embodies Comrade Kim Il Sung's *Juche* state construction ideology and achievements.” This preface was necessary, because the new constitution proved anything but supporting the political institutions and roles of Kim Il Sung. The younger Kim sought to bolster his legitimacy through referencing the revered leader and this Confucian show of filial piety, but he did not have the personal charisma to rule like his father. He was not a revered war hero, a gifted orator, or even very self-confident. He would rule differently, but this was not a sudden revelation.

The younger Kim codified the mode of rule that had gradually intensified over the last two decades – as Kim Il Sung increasingly passed governing responsibilities to his son. North Korea's political evolution did not start or stop with this constitutional revision. The constitution did not signal an abrupt switch from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism, but it helps clarify when the regime acknowledged a significantly new mode of governance. Kim dramatically laid down a marker to not only his own domestic audience but a foreign one as well that he was in charge after three years of mourning, and he would rule in a certain way. He effectively codified a post-totalitarian state structure, not a transitional polity or one in rapid decline. North Korea had found a fairly stable equilibrium outcome as an impoverished authoritarian regime.

The new regime still relied heavily on ideological indoctrination to control the masses and elites alike. This period saw the increased prominence of military first politics, or military-

⁹² “North Korea May Run Out of Grain in April: U.N.,” *Asia Pulse*, March 13, 1998. John Gittings, “North Korea Admits Food Crisis,” *The Guardian*, p. 11. “ROK To Contribute 50,000 Tons of Food Aid to DPRK,” *Choson Ilbo*, March 9, 1998. “ROK 'Ready' To Provide Additional Shipments of Fertilizer,” *Korea Herald*, March 13, 1998, p. 2. David E. Sanger, “North Korea Site an A-Bomb Plant, U.S. Agencies Say,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1998, p. A1. “ROK Trying Hard To Confirm NYT Report on DPRK Facilities,” *Yonhap*, August 17, 1998. Pak Tu-sik, “'Material Evidence' Is Found for North Korea's Resumption of Nuclear Activities,” *Choson Ilbo*, August 18, 1998. “Torrential Rains Take Heavy Toll in North Korea,” *Associated Press*, August 26, 1998. “DPRK Plagued by Flood,” *Xinhua News Agency*, August 22, 1998.

⁹³ The Taepo Dong 1 rocket can be configured as a medium-range ballistic missile or as a Space Launch Vehicle to put satellites into orbit. The third-stage of the rocket was configured for a satellite launch during the 1998 launch, but the tested technology had dual-use missile implications.

first ideology, first introduced the previous year. Some observers claim the new ideological mantra replaces *Juche*, while others claim it merely supplements it. The state continually cites both to this day. This debate over the supremacy of the party or military mirrors questions of whether the party or the military is now the dominant institution in North Korean politics. Of course, this discussion assumes there is a single dominant institution in North Korean politics and Kim does not seek a divide-and-conquer ruling style as I describe in chapter two. Military first politics reflects the KPA's greater institutional political role as well as Kim's need to placate the powerful institution and leaders. The empirical chapters support this argument by documenting how the military and party pursue policy preferences through the jostling of bureaucratic politics rather than being able to dictate orders.

The military had long enjoyed prioritized resource allocation, but this military-first ideological move raised the military's political and social status. It marks a move away from the party dominated totalitarian model. The regime has long credited the KPA with safeguarding and building the socialist revolution. According to the national narrative, without Kim Il Sung's guerilla fighters, there would be no communist party in Korea. The new ideology extended the military's ideational and practical roles, however. The military-first policy's twin goals of building a "powerful and prosperous nation" required focused attention on ideology, politics, the military, and the economy.⁹⁴ Under military-first politics, the KPA would have a more expansive say in national policy in all four of these areas of national policy decision-making and implementation, not simply the military arena.⁹⁵

The ideology's flexibility allows central authorities to praise the military and focus on empirical results, while maintaining *Juche* and socialist revolutionary demands at the same time. This effort to maximize material and ideological gains demanded an institutional structure that could produce these goals more effectively. Central authorities continued to try to balance the concerns of ideologues and pragmatists, and used competing institutions to promote those goals. The next chapter reviews the history and composition of the main institutions in North Korea, and how they have come to compete for influence and pursue ideological or pragmatic policy goals.

The new constitution formally removed previous roles of the party and simplified the bureaucratic structure. Formally, the military and cabinet no longer reported to party officials.

⁹⁴ Byung Chol Koh. "Military-First Politics' and Building a 'Powerful and Prosperous Nation' in North Korea," Nautilus Policy Forum Online 05-32A, April 14, 2005.

⁹⁵ Some have argued that the military-first politics marked a new role for the military as the supreme institution in North Korean politics, replacing the party. Indeed, one sophisticated take on this new dynamic noted that military-first resembles imperial Japan's "enriching the state and strengthening the army" rallying call or South Korea's developmental dictatorship under Park Chung Hee's Fourth Republic. In some respects, military-first politics more closely resembles fascism than socialism. See Young Whan Kihl, "Emergence of the Second Republic: The Kim Regime Adapts to the Challenge of Modernity," in Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim (eds.), *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), p. 14.

The military did not replace the party as the key organ, rather they were rebalanced as peer organizations. The Korean Workers Party, Korean Peoples Army, and the cabinet jointly dominated national politics under Kim Jong Il.⁹⁶ Despite these important governmental changes and efforts to highlight the event with a major rocket launch, immediate concern about the rocket launch quickly came to overshadow the new constitutional arrangement. Commentators overwhelmingly focused on the state's outward actions while voicing bewilderment at the supposedly one-man-rule state's decision-making. With newfound authority, the three constitutionally autonomous institutions discussed the missile launch publicly.

2000s: Diverging Policies. The new constitutional arrangement and systemic change ushered in a period of disjointed North Korean policy choices. Pyongyang compartmented its inter-Korean, U.S., and economic policies. The more flexible political system capitalized on Seoul's rapprochement, positioned itself against toughening American policy, and allowed domestic economic policy to proceed apace with relatively little interference from outside actors. There was a great deal of back-and-forth on inter-Korean policy documented in the empirical chapters, but the ten years of Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) administrations in Seoul saw a general expansion of economic engagement, social interaction, and political trust building. The gradual reunification policy enjoyed popular support in South Korea following the 1997 financial crisis. Rapid reunification jeopardized the South Korean economy too much; gradually transforming the North Korean economy, society, and politics could set the stage for eventual reunification with fewer costs.

The most dramatic breakthrough on inter-Korean relations occurred in 2000 when Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il met in Pyongyang. The first ever inter-Korean summit produced a series of cabinet-level civilian and military meetings and significant South Korean economic engagement with the North. Progress was anything but smooth and uninterrupted, but discernible. Seoul treated Pyongyang particularly gingerly in an effort to induce social, economic, and political change to the great consternation of South Korea's conservatives and some foreign allies, including the conservative administration in the United States.

South Korean public opinion shifted dramatically after North Korea tested a nuclear weapon in October 2006; South Korea's opposition party's long-held position that this engagement produced no significant results developed a newfound resiliency. The charge stuck particularly well against liberal president Roh Moo-hyun who, by this time, was widely identified as an ineffective president. This helped set the stage for South Korea's election a year later of a conservative president, Lee Myung-bak, who pledged competence and economic revitalization. Lee also promised a tougher North Korea policy that prioritized near-term denuclearization over long-term reunification preparations. Inter-Korean relations soured

⁹⁶ Jinwook Choi. "Changing Relations between party, Military, and Government in North Korean and Their Impact on Policy Direction," (Stanford, CA, Shorenstein APARC Working Paper, 1999).

significantly in the months after Lee's inauguration in February 2008 as the new administration backed off expanding economic engagement, criticized the North's human rights record more vocally, and pursued a policy Pyongyang generally labeled as "confrontational." The diplomatic fall-out from the nuclear test and reaction to President Lee's approach to the North marked the most dramatic inflection point in inter-Korean relations in the decade after North Korea's new constitution.

While inter-Korean relations had one dramatic turn in this ten-year period, relations between Washington and Pyongyang had two. Though this area also saw more ups and downs as more fully documented in the empirical chapters, the broad brush strokes reveal modest gains in U.S.-DPRK progress in the last few months of the Clinton administration in 2000, renewed confrontation in the first six years of the Bush administration, and a return to productive negotiations after the nuclear test and congressional elections in 2006. In late 2000, the United States and North Korea seemed to finally be reaching some agreement on North Korea's missiles. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright traveled to Pyongyang in October 2000 and met with Kim Jong Il in preparation for a possible summit with President Clinton. Pyongyang sent a high-level emissary to Washington to meet with President Clinton and several cabinet officials. However, time proved too short as working-level talks broke down, and Clinton pushed the issue to the next administration.

Pyongyang voiced early skepticism about the new leadership in Washington in early 2001 but refrained from recasting its U.S. policy until Washington completed its policy review. The policy review prompted the new administration to commit to an engagement strategy in summer 2001, though this policy would never be implemented. In the words of the administration, "9/11 changed everything." Washington crafted what Pyongyang labeled a confrontational policy towards it. U.S.-DPRK relations continued in a downward spiral after October 2002 when an American negotiating team traveled to Pyongyang and raised the North's uranium enrichment program. The American delegation reported that the North Koreans admitted to the uranium program, prompting Washington to end its Agreed Framework commitments. Pyongyang claimed it did not admit to a uranium program but maintained a neither confirm nor deny stance towards the uranium program. It cited Washington's abrogation of the Agreed Framework to unseal Yongbyon, verifiably frozen for eight years, and begin its withdrawal from the Nonproliferation Treaty. Negotiations continued on and off with little sustainable progress until the fall of 2006 after North Korea flight tested its longest range rocket, tested a nuclear weapon, and possibly proliferated nuclear technology to Syria.

In October 2006, North Korea tested a nuclear weapon and, the following month, Democrats won enough legislative seats to reclaim the congressional majority. While the nuclear test prompted South Korea to eventually back off its engagement strategy, it helped jumpstart Six Party Talks. Key hardliners in the U.S. administration resigned as engagement advocates enjoyed greater flexibility. Washington reevaluated its squeeze strategy.

As Seoul and Washington traded places with their engagement and confrontational policies, Pyongyang's economic policy saw its own swings. Pyongyang increasingly accepted illegal coping mechanisms during the famine. When the state failed to provide rations sufficient to prevent mass starvation, enterprising North Koreans skirted the law and traded to survive. As the state emerged from the famine, it tried to reassert a measure of control over this activity without prompting another food crisis. On July 1, 2002, it instituted significant wage and price reforms that recognized part of the ground reality. Central authorities also adopted several heavily debated management and enterprise reforms to increase economic efficiency. North Korea took limited steps away from its command economy and the totalitarian ideal.

The state backed off some of these economic decisions in 2005, most notably, reintroducing socialist control over food distribution. However, market reforms demonstrated a certain staying power as the regime again slowly backed off its efforts to crackdown on market measures in favor of their demonstrated ability to enhance the domestic economy. Throughout this period, this debated raged in the official press and has not been definitely resolved. The state has pursued a slow two steps forward, one step back dance towards greater marketization.

Conclusion

History's dynamism makes snapshot theoretical descriptions of states difficult. The Japanese defeat in 1945 and rise of Kim Il Sung revolutionized North Korean politics. The system defined itself as anti-Japanese, yet incorporated some modern elements from Japanese administration. More importantly, it incorporated the guerilla movement's traditions and depended in part on Soviet assistance, especially in the early years. North Korea increasingly asserted its sovereignty as Kim Il Sung consolidated his power after the Korean War and the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s allowed Pyongyang to play the Chinese and Soviet off against one another more. Kim Il Sung reached the apex of personal power in the early 1970s as his totalitarian regime began a slow decline. Kim Il Sung tapped his son as his successor and Kim Jong Il's roles in the North Korean system expanded in the 1980s.

The 1990s saw the most dramatic changes as the Soviet collapse, Kim Il Sung's death, and the famine modified ground realities. Changes outside of the Kims' direct control produced new challenges that the younger Kim attempted to address. After the traditional three year mourning period following his father's death, Kim Jong Il moved to codify his new mode of operations. The younger Kim demonstrated his intention to divide and conquer the bureaucracies, pitting the cabinet, military, and party against one another in helping inform and execute policy decisions. This post-totalitarian style of rule held particular attributes that are described in the theory chapter. Jong Il's divided political system allowed the state to shape economic policy, inter-Korean efforts, and foreign policy towards the U.S. on separate tracks. Though these tracks could be linked, linkages themselves remained a subject of debates between Pyongyang's three main institutions. Kim remained on top and held ultimate authority, but

central decisions reflected a greater diversity of state views as central authorities grappled with competing pragmatic and ideological demands.⁹⁷ North Korea developed a new type of politics that emerged out of Kim Il Sung's totalitarianism that this study label post-totalitarian institutionalism.

⁹⁷ For another view on competing regime goals and policy linkages during this time period, see Haksoon Paik, "North Korea's Pursuit of Security and Economic Interests: Chasing Two Rabbits with One Stone," in Haksoon Paik and Seong-Chang Cheong (eds.), *North Korea in Distress: Confronting Domestic and External Challenges* (Seoul: Sejong Institute, 2008), pp. 95-126.

Chapter 4: North Korea's Political Institutions

Introduction

North Korea has three main political institutions: the Korean Workers Party (“the party”), the Cabinet (“the government”), and the Korean Peoples Army (“the military”).¹ This chapter demonstrates that these three institutions are the most important institutional actors in North Korea and that the others are either nominal or do not exert a systematic influence on a wide range of national-level policy decisions. These three institutions along with Kim’s unique role guide strategic-level policy. They can speak to linkages across issue areas and regularly voice preferences in the North Korean press.

This chapter reviews the history and composition of each constitutional institution and the security apparatus. Since any evaluation of the political history of North Korea under Kim Il Sung necessarily must evaluate the evolving roles of these institutions, much of this discussion is contextualized in the previous chapter. This chapter builds on that discussion, primarily taking up how the three main institutions evolved under Kim Jong Il and evaluating the more marginal constitutional organizations more comprehensively, since they are not part of the wider national political narrative. In this way, I seek to shed light on how each organization has developed or not developed a coherent set of policy preferences and how it can turn those preferences into national policy.

The Korean Workers Party

The party is the most central organization in the totalitarian model. In Kim Il Sung’s polity, the Korean Workers Party was a key organ charged with important ideological work. Applied ideology guided specific policy decisions, and party members were implanted deep within the government and military structures to make sure that government “functionaries” and military cadres carried out the party’s line. The party was the most important institution under Kim Il Sung with his closest personal allies in the guerilla struggle and Korean War taking senior posts in this organization. It was charged with strategic policy goals like pursuing the socialist goals of the revolution, defeating the imperialists – Japanese and American – and forcing national reunification on the North’s terms.

Seen as carrying out a comprehensive ideology, the party prescribed right action from the individual to state level. It had formal authority over virtually every aspect of one’s life, fusing public and private spheres towards a utopian moral order. In the 1950s and 1960s, the party’s revolutionary purpose held greater weight as global communism was much stronger than today

¹ One may reasonably argue that Kim Jong Il himself is another institution. While I do not dispute this, for sake of clarity, I refrain from referring to him as such.

and personal memories of the brutal Japanese occupation and great losses of the Korean War were fresh in the minds of the political class and masses alike.

The North Korean Communist Party in 1945 was fairly diverse. It consisted of roughly equal parts of industrial workers; rural peasants; and mix of petite bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and businessmen. Kim Il Sung did not control the party completely during this period. The party was insufficiently institutionalized. Lower party units may not have received orders from the top leadership or simply did not carry them out at times. Consequently, party consolidation was an earlier priority than even the formation of the state. The North Korean Communist Party merged with the South Korean Workers Party in 1948 to form the Korean Workers Party led by Kim Il Sung. The KWP grew from roughly four percent of the population in 1946 to over eleven percent in 1970 with 1.6 million members.² Kim took a diverse set of individuals with competing loyalties and, through purges and indoctrination, forged a unified, mass party under his control. The political history of Kim Il Sung's North Korea described in the previously chapter is fundamentally a story of the relationship between Kim Il Sung's personal power and his utilization of the party to run the country.

However, as communism failed to achieve its utopian objectives worldwide and died out in most other parts of the world by the end of the 20th century, the Korean Workers Party did not reconstitute itself. It remained a revolutionary organization that relied heavily on suppressing information about the outside world that undermined its stated objectives. The party tried to maintain the totalitarian order, including a monopoly on the means of communication and propaganda. Along with the attendant challenges described previously, greater information inflows challenged the party's information monopoly and narrative that the country was proceeding apace towards a socialist utopia. By the time Kim Jong Il came to power, the party was a fish out of water. Aging officials from a previous era continued to trumpet the importance of applying revolutionary principles to specific policies as the calls rang increasingly hollow.

Further, Kim Jong Il is a different type of leader than his father. He does not enjoy Kim Il Sung's claim to revolutionary politics and lacks his personal leadership qualities. Kim Il Sung was a very strong leader who mobilized a nation in a tremendously perverted direction. Kim Jong Il lacked his father's abilities and internal and external circumstances to pursue the same objectives in the same fashion. The younger Kim modified the way his father ruled. For this section, the most important point is that the role of the party declined under Kim Jong Il. The party is no longer preeminent but it operates more on par with the military and cabinet organizations, engaging one another's arguments rather than simply dictating to the formerly subordinate bodies.

Kim has publicly chastised the party, emphasized other competing institutions, and gradually rationalized policy against the party's *Juche* bulwark. In 1992 Kim Jong Il remarked

² Ilpyong Kim, *Communist Politics in North Korea* (New York: Praeger, 1975), pp.3-8.

publicly that he reads the army's daily newspaper every morning before the party's daily newspaper. The symbolism was not lost on North Korea's populace.³ At the December 1996 graduation ceremonies at Kimilsung University, Kim Jong Il praised the army while noting the party's dwindling abilities. He blamed the party for policy failures during the famine at this important event. The following year, Kim imprisoned or executed several leading party officials but left the military untouched.⁴

These statements and actions set the stage for shrinking the party's role. While consolidating his power, Kim Jong Il could not alienate large numbers of powerful people, yet he also could not afford to leave potential opponents in positions of power. Kim had no need to abolish the party or humiliate revolutionaries. Rather he would simply demote it by enhancing the authority of competing institutions. Under Kim Il Sung, revolutionaries led key ministries. Kim Jong Il kept his father's loyalists as the head of ministries and other organizations but simply did not empower many of these positions any longer. Ministers are now largely nominal positions. These positions are filled by Kim Il Sung's elderly compatriots still in many cases, but their deputies have all the power. Just as Kim Jong Il was North Korea's number two leader for twenty years, his number two counterparts in each ministry now rule. The younger Kim's move allowed these men and their families to save face while achieving his practical goal. Likewise, the 1998 constitution made Kim Il Sung North Korea's "eternal president," as Kim Jong Il took a primarily military – not party – title from which to rule the country.

Some important, trusted officials with strong family backgrounds retain their party titles. Yi Chol, North Korea's Ambassador to Switzerland; Kang Sang Chun, the head of Kim's personal office; and Won Yong Rok, the head of North Korea's unofficial diplomatic representation in Germany all continue to sign external correspondence with their titles of Vice Director of the Party's Organizational Guidance Department. These figures are long-standing, important figures in North Korea, but they derive their power from their inner circle status. They do not control large bureaucracies; they gain power by their access to the Dear Leader. Kang's access to Kim is self-apparent as he heads Kim's personal office. Chol and Won head important overseas missions where Kim's family members live or have lived.⁵ Kim's sons were educated in Switzerland; Yi Chol was responsible for them. Kim's second son and possible heir, the 27-year old Kim Jong Chul was videotaped touring at four Eric Clapton concerts in Germany in June 2006⁶; Won was responsible for him. Ambassador to Switzerland Yi Chol is also rumored to help manage a significant portion of Kim's personal funds abroad.

³ Sung Chull Kim, *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to Systemic Dissonance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 95 -98.

⁴ Hak Joon Kim, pp. 108 – 109.

⁵ Yonhap News Agency. *North Korea Handbook* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 98 – 104.

⁶ Bertil Lintner. "The North Korea Enigma: Sons and Heirs," *Asia Times*, (18 August 2006), <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/HH18Dg01.html>.

These men are important but do not demonstrate the importance of the party despite their retaining their party titles. This highlights the continued role of a few personal relationships at the apex of power, while the bureaucracies increasingly produce impersonal, expert opinion to inform and influence political decisions.

Kim Il Sung created the Party's Central People's Committee specifically to control the bureaucracy⁷; the younger Kim abolished the guidance organ outright in the 1998 constitution. Kim Jong Il was still concerned about control, but he would not utilize the party as an intermediary between him and the military and government. The party still proposes policy, but it has lost its critically important function of directing policy across the otherwise stove-piped bureaucracy. The 1998 revision is said to have reduced North Korea's official personnel by thirty percent over five years in order to save scarce resources during the famine.⁸ This is one explanation for the bold move; the other requires a closer look at the military.

The Korean Peoples Army

North Korea's military also claims to pre-date the state. Although Kim Il Sung's rag-tag group of about 300 anti-Japanese guerillas in the early 1940s looked very different than a Soviet-supplied North Korean military of 1950, the military still argues its origins are rooted in this guerilla experience. The military holds a sacred place in the state's ideological narrative. The military protects the party and advances the revolution. Under Kim Il Sung, the senior levels of the party and military were highly fused. Many senior party members were four-star generals, and the military valued political correctness at least as much as military effectiveness. Militarism was central to the anti-imperialist and reunification goals of the revolutionary state. Consequently, the history of the North Korean military under Kim Il Sung is inherently wrapped up in the general political evolution.

Kim Jong Il separated the political roles of the party and military after his father's death. He granted the military organization direct access to the Dear Leader, without having to subordinate political ideas to party leaders. By 1998, Kim had seemingly raised the National Defense Commission (NDC) to the pinnacle of institutional power. When Kim retired the position of president with his father, he took the ruling title of Chairman of the NDC. The state introduced the military first concept in 1997 and increasingly reiterated it in the following years. There is little doubt that the military plays an important role in the North Korean system, but questions persist as to whether it is the preeminent institution under Kim Jong Il in the military-first era.

Much has been written on the gradual rise of the military in North Korean politics. In 1991 Kim took the rank and title of Vice Marshal of the Korean People's Army. In 1995 after

⁷ Tai Sung An, *North Korea: A Political Handbook* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1983), p. 52.

⁸ Masourov 2006, p. 45.

his father's death, he had himself promoted to the supreme commander of the military. The seating order at important state events like Kim Jong Il's birthday celebrations and Kim Il Sung's funeral changed; it listed members of the NDC before Politburo members. These lists historically had provided a pecking order of officials.⁹ In 1996 Kim expanded the number of national holidays from five to seven. The two new holidays were both named after the military: Foundation Day of the Korean People's Army and the Victory Day of the National Liberation War. Kim had the Supreme People's Assembly elect the Vice Marshal and Director of the KPA General Political Department (the military's top official after Kim Jong Il), Jo Myong Rok, to the second highest office in the land: First Vice Chairman of the NDC. Jo also gave the keynote address at the fifth anniversary of Kim Il Sung's death and visited the White House in 2000 to meet with President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and Secretary of Defense William Cohen.¹⁰

Arguments citing the rise of the military generally note Kim's reliance on that organization. One scholar concluded that "It was the military that carried Kim Jong Il through the most difficult times from 1994 to 2000" and therefore Kim emphasized the role of the military over the party.¹¹ Yet Kim has had an uneasy relationship with the military. He purged 600 officers after an alleged coup attempt in 1992 and completely dissolved the VI Corps in 1995 and replaced it with personnel from the XI Corps due to massive corruption.¹² Further, both Kims have employed an extensive security apparatus. The cabinet, party, and military each have their own security service that checks on the military, the bureaucracy, and each other. Like most dictators, Kim is suspicious of the military and has sought to keep them close so as not to lose control of their extensive coercive potential.

The core question is whether this shift towards the military is a real shift of power or merely for show. Kim has long had a difficult time with the military, so heralding the military's critical role may be an attempt to keep a lid on its power rather than raising its actual authority. It is also possible that evaluating these changes at face value is the correct view. The party is ineffective, and the military's bureaucracy is relatively disciplined. Kim may have decided to rule through the military bureaucracy, because it distorts his policy prerogatives less.

It is important to recognize that the National Defense Commission and the Korean Peoples Army are not the same institution. Arguments citing the rise of the military in North Korean politics inevitably cite the NDC and conflate its functions with the KPA. The NDC is a small senior leadership body, not an institutional representation of military interests. Senior generals take many of these seats, but the NDC is better understood as an extension of Kim's

⁹ Chung In Moon and Yongho Kim. "The Future of the North Korean System," in Samuel Kim (ed.), *The North Korean System in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 236. Yonhap, p. 189.

¹⁰ Hak Joon Kim, pp. 90 – 112. Kim 2001, p. 16.

¹¹ Suh, pp. 79 – 81.

¹² Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), pp. 119 – 20.

inner circle at the top of the system than a broad, deep, and impersonal policy apparatus. Of course, the “inner circle” concept is sufficiently vague that it is not particularly helpful or falsifiable. It encapsulates very different functional roles to different readers. As a rough parallel, the NDC can be conceptualized as a particularly powerful National Security Council with a large representation of generals and more expansive authorities that extend into domestic areas as well. It is unclear if the NDC coordinates policy formation and implementation with reference to institutional positions or draws on independent perspectives to brief Kim. It is also not exactly clear when the NDC weighs in on policy questions or its influence on particular policy choices. What is clear, however, is that the NDC should not be confused with some type of super-Defense Ministry or group of military chiefs with direct and extensive institutional support. The NDC gains power from its direct and personal contact with Kim, not from the depth of new information or policy detail it can provide from an extensive bureaucratic support.

Military-first politics has not catapulted the military into bureaucratic primacy. Rather Kim uses the government, military, and party to check one another and carry out policy collectively. New benefits granted to the NDC and the military establishment have been largely nominal. Kim has honored the military and raised its prestige. Rhetoric and prestige matter but as far as honors placate the military establishment, Kim can reduce dissatisfaction enough to pursue interests in conflict with the military’s actual policy preferences.

With the notable exception of raising the bureaucratic importance of the NDC, each of these actions is merely honorific. These actions were not without purpose. Prestige can be a cheap and effective motivating force. Honoring the military allowed Kim to both dampen mistrust and provide an excuse for dismantling much of the party’s functions. Kim’s actions can be better understood not as a shift from *Juche*-supporting institutions to military-first supporting institutions, but a move that freed his hand in directing the state from many ideological constraints. Kim would pit the military against the cabinet and foster limited debate over some of the core problems facing the country – notably questions of economic reform, reunification, and foreign policy towards the US. Kim Il Sung’s goals of security, prestige, and prosperity remained in an emergency management government where these tangible goals were discussed publicly.

The Cabinet

The People’s Committee was the earliest rendition of the North Korean government. Kim Il Sung described it as the linkage between the party and the masses, serving to implement party decisions on the land reform and industrialization. It executed orders rather than participating widely in policy decision making.¹³ The 1972 constitution not only established Kim Il Sung’s position as President but gave the party greater roles in ensuring the government implemented policy as directed. It renamed the Cabinet the Administrative Council to reflect its

¹³ Ilpyong Kim, pp. 8-9.

position as a support body. The previous chapter describes these changes at some length since the changing roles of the government are integral to the general political history. Although under different names and to different degrees, the government's position in policy decision making was firmly subordinated to the party under Kim Il Sung. It was a relatively insignificant institution until Kim Jong Il substantially upgraded its roles.

The 1998 constitution changed the "State Administration Council" into the Cabinet and enhanced its management authority. The cabinet's primary responsibility is to implement policy promulgated by the rubber stamp parliament. It is the bureaucracy responsible for executing policy. However, with the abolition of the Central People's Committee and vacant position of president, the cabinet has become a formally independent actor, albeit in practice responsible to Kim. The constitution granted the cabinet broad management responsibilities. The cabinet could modify its own structures for implementing policy, change rules of administration, modify strategic-level national management practices, and create, inspect, and abolish key administrative organs.

The new constitution also raised the cabinet's status to the second most important bureaucratic element after the National Defense Commission. Nominally, the Supreme People's Assembly remained above all other elements, but the constitution even removed the formal authority of this body – that rarely meets in the first place – to check the military and government. Despite this heightened authority and real power, the cabinet and its government ministries did not get the praise the military enjoyed. On the contrary, the government ministries continued to be blamed publicly for distorting policy directions when policy outcomes did not meet expectations. Furthermore, Kim's new titles do not reference the SPA or the cabinet, rather he is (in order) the General Secretary of the Korean Workers Party, Chairman of the National Defense Commission, and Supreme Commanding General of the People's Armed Forces (who has never appeared in military uniform).¹⁴

The cabinet is low on prestige but not on power. The cabinet's roles expanded in 1998 especially in the area of the economy. The cabinet became the dominant force in economic policy, and each of Kim Jong Il's three Premiers gained a reputation as the most influential proponent of economic reform against other institutional interests in the security sphere. Economic reform is at the center of many debates on the strategic direction of the state – in and out of North Korea – which cannot be adequately reproduced here. Despite widespread disagreement about the nature and extent of economic reform,¹⁵ Pyongyang has certainly

¹⁴ Yonhap, p. 93.

¹⁵ For debates surrounding North Korea's economic reform, see Choong-yong Ahn, Nicholas Eberstadt and Lee Young-sun, *A New International Engagement Framework for North Korea? Contending Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute, 2005). Ruediger Frank, "Economic Reforms in North Korea (1998 – 2004): Systemic Restrictions, Quantitative Analysis, Ideological Background," *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 10(3), pp. 278 – 311. Young-yoon Kim and Soo-young Choi, *Understanding North Korea's Economic Reforms* (Seoul: Center for the North Korean Economy, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2005).

decentralized some power in the economic sphere. Technocrats and specialists have a greater role in governments guided by policy goals rather than ideology.

The bureaucracy has always housed specialists – even in the political sphere where technical or specialized knowledge seemingly has less utility than in the physical sciences or economics. However, even Kim Il Sung’s rule recognized that international politics required expertise. Foreign Ministers held posts longer than other ministers, and their tenures only grew longer (Table 4.1). While these men were party members, they were granted longer tenures since an effective foreign policy was critical to the state’s existence, and an effective foreign policy required specialized knowledge.

Table 4.1: North Korea’s Foreign Ministers

	Foreign Minister	Years	Duration	Subsequent Position
1 st	Pak Hon Yong	1948 - 1953	5	Executed in 1953 during Kim Il Sung’s power consolidation effort
2 nd	Nam Il	1953 – 1959	6	Died in office of cancer
3 rd	Ho Tam	1959 – 1969	10	Chairman, Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland; Kim Il Sung’s brother-in law; Died in 1991
4 th	Pak Song Chol	1969 - 1983	14	Honorary VP, SPA Presidium
5 th	Kim Yong Nam (Concurrently Deputy Prime Minister)	1983 -1998	15	President of SPA Presidium
6 th	Paek Nam Sun	1998 – 2007	9	Died in office of natural causes
7 th	Pak Ui Chun	2007 - Present		

Source: Compiled from multiple sources by the author

This same role for specialized negotiators and advisers extended within the Ministry. Unlike American diplomats who are trained to become generalists, North Korean diplomats specialize in one area and developed effective tactics to make diplomatic gains disproportionate to the state's power. A string of American negotiators have sat across the table from Kang Sok Ju and Kim Kye Kwan for many years. Whether one finds this an effective means of training diplomats is not the point. It shows the North Korean leadership finds even international politics an appropriate area for specialized knowledge. These specialists report the results of negotiations to Kim. If he did not value this specialized knowledge, he could change the Foreign Ministry's operation or re-empower the party's international relations arm.

The Foreign Ministry has long had an important place in the cabinet. North Korea's first three Foreign Ministers, spanning the first 22 years of the state all served as Vice Premier in the cabinet structure, including one of Kim Il Sung's earliest and most important rivals who was executed after the Korean War.¹⁶ It should come as little surprise that a state so extensively concerned about its external security would place great importance on both its military and its foreign ministry. While key personnel in the foreign ministry have direct access to Kim and may even sit on his inner circle, it is possible to include this organization as part of the cabinet. Formally, it resides under the cabinet structure. More importantly, it conducts its business as a specialized organization. Each of the three main institutions have internal divisions, but the generalizations about their composition and advocacy hold even for the Cabinet-Foreign Ministry relationship.

The Foreign Ministry and other ministries under the cabinet's authority serve as the main interlocutors with foreign embassies in Pyongyang and in important inter-Korean negotiations and talks with significant regional powers, including the United States. Despite requests to meet with party representatives, western Ambassadors stationed in Pyongyang consistently report that the party is uninterested in meeting with them beyond an initial courtesy call. The real work of foreign affairs, including economic engagement, flows through the cabinet ministries, which channel this information through the North Korean bureaucracy. Likewise, the cabinet's Foreign Ministry has spearheaded negotiations with the Americans under Kim Jong Il and advocated internally for diplomatic solutions to the North's economic and security challenges.

The Security Apparatus

Especially in a state where the military is recognized as a key institutional actor in politics, one could reasonably suspect that the security apparatus may serve as a fourth institutional actor. Alternatively, the intelligence and police organizations could support one of the other three political actors, giving it a specific advantage in policy debates. If the security apparatus was a coherent, semi-autonomous body, this may be true. Though it is more difficult to cull public and declassified sources on the North Korean intelligence and police services,

¹⁶ Suh, p. 6.

broad outlines of its structure and functions can be deciphered. The basic conclusion of this section is that under both Kims, the security apparatus should not be seen as an important political player in its own right.

North Korea's security apparatus developed in a time of great flux for the country in the 1950s. However, by 1962 the Ministry of Public Security held wide-ranging powers, including stamping out "anti-revolutionary" activities, conducting domestic surveillance, running overseas intelligence operations, maintaining prison camps, and providing basic crime control and air defense. The party controlled the ministry at each level of its organization, implanting personnel to keep the organization under its control as the party did with the government and military as well. The security apparatus under Kim Il Sung had multiple roles, but it was a singular organization firmly controlled by the party.¹⁷ The security apparatus did not have an independent voice in politics.

In contemporary North Korea, the security apparatus is not a political institution and has been divided into four parts (Figure 4.1). The younger Kim's efforts to divide and conquer the bureaucracy saw a parallel in these coercive bodies. Each of the three major institutional actors has formal control over one of these organizations and the fourth reports directly to Kim. Though informal lines of control further complicate this hazy picture of intelligence control, the general picture still supports the main contention that the security apparatus lacks a discernable influence on a wide range of political decisions. In practice, elites in the party, government, military, and security practitioners themselves fear different elements of the security apparatus, but they cannot employ it to systematically influence policy.

The primary role of the three security apparatuses is to protect the Dear Leader and his state from foreign and domestic threats. However, their similarities do not extend much beyond this, and they are better understood as rival organizations than a coherent body. First, the National Defense Commission formally controls the State Security Department (SSD). The NDC is a small organization composed of senior leaders, including Kim Jong Il, and the SSD plays a critical role as the regime's most significant intelligence agency. The exact nature of this control relationship is not well documented, but it is plausible that Kim Jong Il himself or a trusted colleague like his brother-in-law, Chang Song-taek, may spend a considerable portion of their time managing the SSD directly. At this level, Kim or a trust adviser like Chang could utilize competing security institutions and military elements to control the otherwise unwieldy SSD.

Indeed, the SSD has had a long and deadly history of tense relations with the military. In this regard, it is no different than most communist states.¹⁸ After Kim Il Sung designated his son

¹⁷ Scalapino and Lee, p. 818-24.

¹⁸ Frederick C. Barghoorn, "The Security Police," in H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths (eds.), *Interests Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

as his successor, the elder Kim purged military officers in 1976 – 77 who voiced displeasure with this move. Another purge of military officers for unknown reason occurred in 1987 – 88. The SSD likely carried out Kim's orders. When the SSD exposed an alleged military coup attempt in 1992, 600 officers were purged. Likewise, the SSD uncovered massive corruptions in the VI Corps in 1995, prompting the Corps' reorganization. The SSD helps the top leadership keep the military in check.

Of course, the military also helps keep the SSD in check. Top intelligence officials suffered when they opposed policies favoring the military. In 1998 top intelligence leaders were purged following the introduction of military-first politics. Kim Yong Ryong, the deputy head of the SSD, was executed on made-up charges following his voicing opposition to the military first doctrine. Kwon Hui Gyong, North Korea's former Ambassador to the Soviet Union and the Director of the Party's Central Committee on External Information Collection Department was exiled. Other opponents simply disappeared.¹⁹ These types of actions are not publicly debated. They demonstrate one of the repressive tools at the disposal of the North's top leadership. It is highly unlikely that anyone other than the top leader could amass enough power to order mass purges – without himself being purged.

As part of this complicated web of dividing and ruling the security services, Kim Jong Il's personal protection force is separate from the SSD organization. The KPA and Ministry of People's Armed Forces (MPAF) control the Guard Command. Although the Guard Command is part of the KPA formally, their personnel have a reputation for arrogance and heavy handed tactics against their military colleagues. For example, when Kim visits units, Guard Command personnel keep the rank and file soldiers far from Kim. Stories abound about the Guard Command requiring the soldiers to stand in the dirt off of military runways, while Kim briefly waves from afar or Guard Command personnel hitting the soldiers with rifle butts and generally showing disdain for the average soldier. The truth of individual reports is beyond the point. The Guard Command is another check on potential rogue elements in the KPA and the SSD with a mission of protecting the top leadership.

The KPA and MPAF also technically control the Security Command. The Security Command has a similar function to the Guard Command. It is responsible for investigating and eliminating individuals or groups disloyal to Kim. However, shortly after the younger Kim came to power, he reportedly gave functional control of the Security Command to the State Security Department. The overlapping functions of the Guard Command (KPA) and Security Command (SSD) foster additional competition and internal checks. The complex web of security relationships demonstrates the top leadership's concern about violent overthrow from within and concerted efforts to make sure someone is spying on the spies.

¹⁹ Mansourov, pp. 46 – 47.

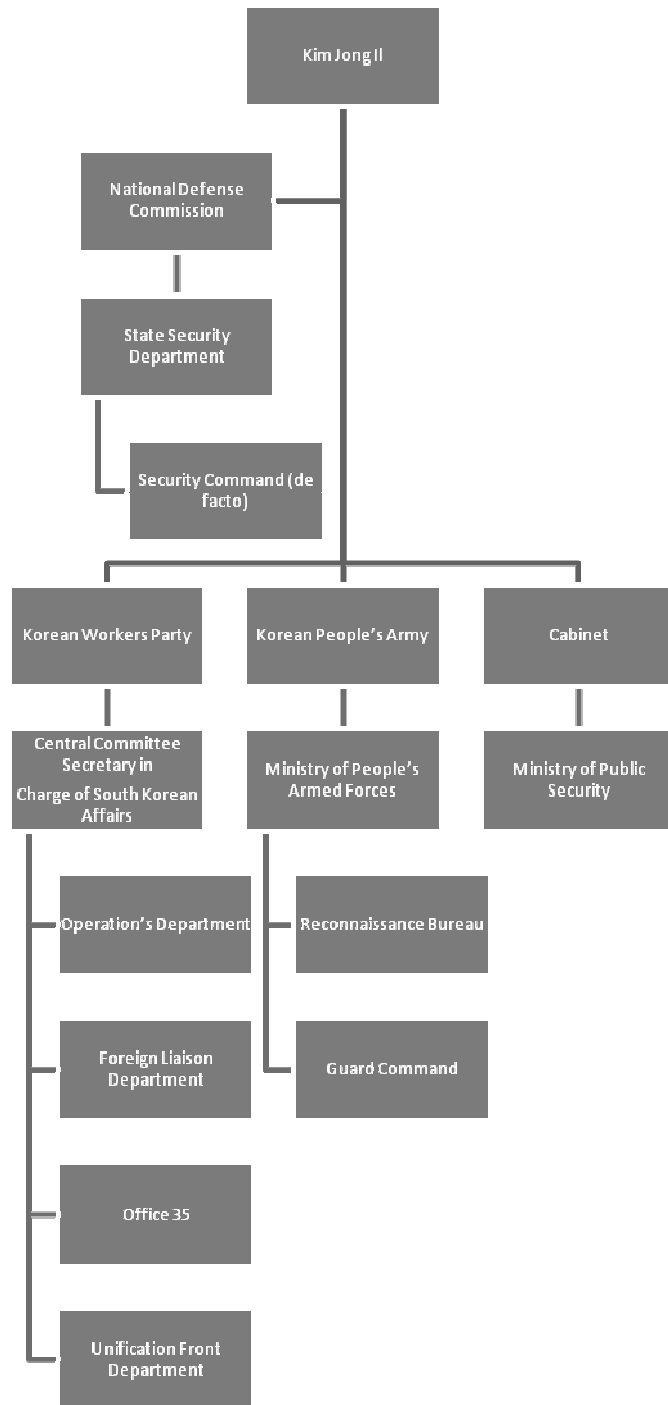


Figure 4.1: Security Apparatus Under Kim Jong Il

More clearly, the party controls a small but elite security services. The Central Committee Secretary in Charge of South Korean Affairs (CCSCSKA) has approximately 15,000 personnel. The party's CCSCSKA controls the important Operation's Department (OD) as well as three other bureaus (Office 35, Unification Front Department, and the Foreign Liaison Department). The OD is credited with carrying out intelligence operations overseas, including the high-level assassination attempts and kidnappings of the 1980s and efforts to raise hard currency through illicit activities. The organization is small, but it also requires close high-level scrutiny to keep it in check.

The cabinet controls the Ministry of People's Security (MPS). The MPS is the lower level security agency that serves as the national police force. It numbers approximately 130,000 people and tries to compete with the SSD. Like the SSD, it was reorganized in the 1990s several times amid concerns about corruption, higher illegal border crossings into China, and its inability to contain low-level disorder after the floods and famine. The MPS lost its function over border control in 1995 and part of its authority to control travel in and out of Pyongyang in 1997; the MPAF took up this role, marking a partial militarization of border control and travel restrictions.²⁰

Though the difference between formal and informal lines of control over the various security agencies in North Korea is by no means clear, there does seem to be a real effort to erect a divide-and-rule arrangement to keep a lid on the military, government, party, populace, and the security apparatuses themselves. Though the empirical evidence is much less extensive than in regard to the national policy institutions, it seems that the three security apparatuses in North Korea check one another. The important point for this analysis is that they do not represent a coherent whole. They do not participate publicly in institutional debates in the North Korean press – even cautious, as the three main political institutions do. While it is possible that the security establishment's influence on national policy is real and hidden, these divisions suggest that the lack of observed political behavior by the security apparatuses can be taken plausibly at face value. Though one may only have moderate confidence in the specific details of the above lines of control given the anecdotal nature of data points, the wider, important point for this analysis should elicit less controversy: the security apparatus is not an institutional player on a wide range of policy decisions.

Supreme People's Assembly

The Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) is formally the DPRK's highest constitutional organ and its leader is the nominal head of state. While the Prime Minister meets with some foreign visitors, the SPA lacks an independent source of power, any real responsibilities, or even a permanent staff. It only meets a few days a year to rubber stamp policy decisions. Under Kim

²⁰ Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr. *The Armed Forces of North Korea* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

Il Sung, the SPA held a moderately more important international propaganda purpose as the communist world presented itself as more democratic than the exploitive capitalist West.

The SPA does not reach the “quasi-independent agency” standard. While on paper the organization has many of the same powers as most democratic legislatures, it lacks any real power in practice. The state determines which candidates will be listed on the ballot without any alternative candidates. Citizens can vote “yes” or “no,” and in many cases citizens must walk to the other side of the voting room to place their ballot in the “no” bin as security officials watch. The regime claimed results were 100 percent in favor of their candidates often rather than more modest claims of election results in the high 90 percent range as in other parts of the communist world. Elections to the organization are meaningless.

The elections themselves are hardly worth protesting, since representatives lack any real power. The SPA is not a coherent, permanent institution. At the height of its authority, the SPA would meet twice a year for rarely more than a week. This capacity has only shrunk. The SPA now meets once a year and Kim Jong Il himself rarely even attends the SPA meetings. The personnel do not appear to have an independent power base or any discernible influence on policymaking.²¹

Sub-national Governments and the Judiciary

Provincial and local governments and the judiciary round out the remainder of the permanent institutions enshrined in North Korea’s constitution. The 1998 constitutional revisions abolished the Party’s Central People’s Committee that formerly supervised local governments and the judiciary. The judiciary is now only subject to the nominal oversight of the Supreme People’s Assembly – an organization formally responsible for all sectors of government but which rarely meets and lacks the institutional capacity or motivation to do much of anything. Though both sub-national governments and the judiciary gained a degree of autonomy in 1998, neither weighs in on national policy questions.

Most information known about North Korea’s sub-national governments is formal but their roles have shrunk as the state has had increasing difficulty providing basic services to its people.²² Sub-national governments are less powerful considering the centralized nature of the North Korean state. Even a question like food distribution is often delegated to a mobilized national institution – the military. A national police force deals with local crime. Most importantly for this analysis, provincial and local governments have not voiced policy position on strategic questions of national policy.

²¹ Scalapino and Lee, pp. 792-800.

²² North Korea is first divided into provinces and special (larger) cities. Below this level of organization reside the counties. Finally, at the bottom one finds municipalities (*si*), towns, wards, villages, and workers’ settlements. Each has a legislative, executive, and judicial organ responsible to the higher level of organization. See, An, p. 56.

Like local governments, the judiciary does not exert a systematic influence on North Korean national political decisions. The judiciary is divided into prosecutors and courts. The railroads and military have their own parallel legal systems. Both the prosecutors and courts have three layers of administration: national, provincial, and local. Local prosecutors' work is supervised by provincial prosecutors. Provincial prosecutors' work is supervised by national prosecutors. And national prosecutors' works is reviewed by the SPA. National-level judges and prosecutors are appointed by the party and rubber stamped by the SPA. In this regard, they must have some political connections to reach this level. Once appointed, they need only to worry about the informal and potentially arbitrary attention of a small number of high-level officials. However, there is no serious judicial check on other government institutions. The courts provide a means to try and imprison alleged common criminals and are one stop on the path towards political prisons. They do not protect individual liberties, enforce the rule of law, or otherwise participate in policy decisions and implementation.

These two institutions complete the permanent bureaucracies that make up the North Korean state. They have some influence on society, but the decentralized nature of these bureaucracies and their parochial outlook prevents them from contributing systematically to strategic, national-level decisions. As we will see in the empirical chapters, individuals from these constitutional entities do not enter the national debate on questions of redirecting the state. They do not lead on any questions that seek to inform, craft, or implement policy.

Conclusion

North Korea's formal institutions have evolved since the founding of the state, yet today's party, military, and cabinet have a systematic impact on national policy creation and implementation. Other constitutional entities – the Supreme Peoples Assembly, sub-national governments, and judiciary – as well as the divided security apparatus do not systematically influence national policy decisions. The primary argument in this chapter is to understand why and how each of these three institutions can be understood as coherent groups, not amorphous clusterings of like-minded individuals, that actually coalesce to influence policy outcomes in a consistent direction. These institutions have a corporate identity and act in such a way as to suggest an institutional worldview that colors reactions to specific events and policy advocacy. The next three chapters test these theoretical expectations by evaluating specific policy debates articulated in the North Korean press from the 1998 constitutional revision to the present to document whether these groups do indeed exert systematic influence on the North Korean policy process.

Chapter 5: Institutional Jostling for Agenda Control, 1998 - 2001

Introduction

The following three chapters provide the empirical tests to the theoretical expectations put forward in chapter two. On specific policy questions, do the cabinet, party, and military provide consistent institutionally-derived policy options to the senior leadership? Do they debate policy alternatives in the press? Does the senior leadership select from this set of policy options presented? Do institutions resist senior policy decisions? In short, these chapters seek to evaluate whether North Korea's second-echelon institutions have had a systematic effect on national-level policy since Kim Jong Il's consolidation of power and whether the system operates more closely to the theoretical expectation I put forward or previously-held models.

This chapter concentrates on the first three years of North Korea's new constitutional arrangement, September 1998 – January 2001. South Korea elected a new president committed to cooperative relations with the North. China maintained its policy of backing North Korea, while prodding it to open up economically. Relations with the United States were strained, but North Korea's main nuclear reactor at Yongbyon remained frozen and the two adversaries made diplomatic progress on the missile issue. China, South Korea, and the United States had many different views about policy towards North Korea but found basic agreement on the need to change Pyongyang's strategic orientation.

In this context, North Korea announced important internal changes in the form of a revised constitution. The party attempted to maintain its position of supremacy over the government and military, while the newly empowered institutions asserted their own policy preferences more forcefully. A systematic reading of the North Korean press reveals divergent policy preferences by institution on questions of both domestic and foreign policy – on the nuclear and missile issues, inter-Korean economic projects, international trade and investment, and resource allocation. The party maintained an ideological approach to economic issues, inter-Korean projects, and relations with the U.S. It rejected marketization efforts, international opening, and diplomatic accommodation. The party tried to keep its institutional supremacy despite the constitutional revision that raised the formal status of the military and the cabinet to its peers.

The military shared many goals with the party but asserted interests distinct from the party and resisted party efforts to claim authority over the military institution. The military rejected economic opening efforts on pragmatic grounds, voicing concern about information security, and opposed inter-Korean rapprochement and diplomatic agreements with the United States. It expanded its purview beyond traditional state-to-state military concerns. The state's "military first" policy encouraged citizens to model their lives on the soldier, not the party member. This highly militarized society now allowed generals – wearing their military hats – to enter the policy fray on questions of economics and foreign policy.

The break from the past was subtle but important. Generals who previously engaged in wider policy debates as party members when these two institutions were more tightly interlinked under Kim Il Sung. Kim Jong Il's divide and conquer strategy separated more clearly the party and military institutions. The KPA no longer had to subject its views to party review and could

voice institutional positions on a wider range of policy questions. In short, under the military first policy, the KPA gained autonomy as the party lost its monopoly on controlling a single, comprehensive policy platform. Though military leaders shared many of the same ultimate objectives as the party, these military leaders articulated a distinct policy outlook than the party based on a different rationale and knowledge base.

The cabinet departed most significantly from the other two organizations under Kim Jong Il's rule. Though the cabinet had been gaining some ground for decades, the new constitution gave it more authority to reject party demands to subordinate itself to the institution previously charged with comprehensive policy guidance. Like the military, the cabinet fought back against party efforts to reassert its bureaucratic hegemony. The cabinet advanced an agenda of economic revitalization through greater market mechanisms. Just as the military's main international mission blurred into linked domestic policy areas, the cabinet's domestic authority blurred significantly into inter-Korean policy and foreign relations.¹ The cabinet argued that its formal authority over economic management gave it a voice on key debates around inter-Korean economic projects and international trade that fundamentally required improved relations with South Korea and the United States. All three institutions attempted to expand their bureaucratic fiefdoms, creating a natural expectation of conflict.

The specific policy disputes during this period suggest remarkable consistency among institutional platforms. Each institution maintained policy positions that fit squarely within this general framework to even include objecting to decided policy when it ran counter to this general policy outlook. However, national policy varied tremendously, reflecting the tension between institutional positions and one platform winning out over the other at a given time.

Furthermore, these institutions pursued contradictory policies simultaneously. For example, the military engaged in deadly military clashes with the South Koreans, strongly condemning its southern neighbor, and calling for war at the same time as the cabinet expanded inter-Korean trade to record levels and warmly congratulated the South on its World Cup success. Though one may assert that central authorities could have put some (but certainly not all) of these actions into motion much earlier, it does not support the centralized models' expectations. If central authorities could not shut off a congratulatory message or naval provocation, for example, then institutions have greater power than the centralized model holds. Put differently, focusing solely on the center leaves significant variance in national policy decisions unexplained.

Of course, policy was not always uncoordinated. Central authorities put the brakes on one institution's advocacy and pursued another's. Most policy disputes tended to erupt as reactions to foreign actions with a few notable exceptions. As a small, highly security conscious state, external events affect policy swings greatly. North Korea is tremendously reactive to foreign actions and acts fairly predictably based on its particular internal and external interests. The remainder of this chapter delves into the specific policy disputes during this three year period to document institutional positions, evaluate this institutional interaction, and when possible, evaluate how central authorities ultimately decided policy on each issue.

¹ Both Koreas recognize in their constitutions authority over the entire Korean peninsula. Consequently, neither officially considers inter-Korean relations "foreign policy."

Taepo Dong-1 Launch

In September 1998, North Korea revised its constitution. To mark the important occasion, the state launched the Taepo Dong 1 rocket for the first time. The rocket overflew Japan, prompted substantial international concern, and overshadowed the constitutional revision. All three bureaucratic actors within the North Korean state responded to the launch, demonstrating their conflicting outlooks on the specific incident and related, wider concerns. The party lauded the Taepo Dong 1 “satellite” launch as a victory for socialism, the KPA praised the Taepo Dong 1 “missile” launch as a military victory, and the cabinet tried to minimize its impact on its negotiations with the U.S., South Korea, and Japan.

The party took credit for the rocket launch, hailing it as evidence of the power of socialist ideology: “The successful launch of our first satellite is the greatest pride of *Juche* Korea and a brilliant fruition of the prolonged and arduous struggle of our party and people.... Today's reality demonstrates the validity of our party's self-reliant economic line.... Apart from socialism, we cannot think of [science and technology] development or a worthy life for scientists and engineers.”² They repeated this idea that the launch demonstrated the value of socialism over the coming weeks. This was a noteworthy national achievement to be celebrated, and it never could have been achieved without the party’s leadership on pursuing a socialist economic line. The party argued that its policy platform produced long-term achievements and national glory.

The party claimed the rocket was a satellite, not a missile. The party often uses highly inflated and threatening rhetoric, but it refrained for doing so in this case, describing the launch as a peaceful satellite. The launch had dual-use applications; the same tested technology could be used to fire a medium-range ballistic missile, putting Japan in range of North Korean missiles, and have peaceful science and technology satellite applications. As will be demonstrated throughout the rest of this study, the party does not try to avoid heightened international tensions. The party’s characterizing the rocket as a satellite was more likely an effort to claim credit for itself rather than to cede the glory to the military instead of an effort to assuage international concern.

The KPA diverged from the party, calling the Taepo Dong 1 a missile launch. As such, it was a military victory, not a party achievement. Kim Yong Chun, Chief of the KPA General Staff, recognized the role of the party and socialism in a major holiday speech, but he stressed the importance of the launch in building a strong army to “mercilessly annihilate” any invaders.³ The rocket was not a product of the party’s science and technology platform but an outgrowth of investment in defense. Both the party and military hailed the rocket launch in nationalistic terms and claimed credit for the historic event. Beyond the prestige associated internally with the launch, claiming credit may allow either institution to further its own agenda and obtain scarce resources.

The launch demonstrated a recurring theme within the party-military interaction. The two institutions often held very similar objectives but came to their policy positions from different directions. Since many of the most senior officials in North Korea hold both military

² “A Historic Event Having Demonstrated the National Strength of *Juche* Korea,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 7, 1998, p. 2.

³ “Kim Yong-ch'un Addresses Military Parade,” KCNA, September 9, 1998.

and party titles, some observers claim there is no meaningful distinction between the party and military⁴ while others prefer to discuss the role of “hardliners” within the state.⁵ This effort to simplify a description of North Korean politics has real merit but it overlooks an additional benefit of recognizing the diversity within this “hardline” camp. There is value in understanding the process of how divergent groups come to the same positions that is masked by looking at only the policy outcomes. Those committed to *Juche* orthodoxy and others committed to military security have different fundamental interests even if they come to similar conclusions in the end. Understanding those interests is important for anyone seeking a fuller understanding of the North Korean system or one who seeks to influence and modify their final conclusions. Military and Party “hardliners” can and do differ on policy advocacy, but more importantly, they find different arguments persuasive. One advantage of going inside the red box is detailing these differences to craft more effective diplomatic strategies, reduce surprise, and ease “intractable” conflict.

The Foreign Ministry, a key organ of the cabinet, projected a substantially more subdued response to the launch. It did not mention the relationship between ideology or the state’s economic system and the launch. Instead, it was the only one of the three institutions to explicitly offer a way forward to negotiate how North Korea would employ the newly-demonstrated technological capability.⁶ After laying out the rationale for continuing talks with the U.S., the Foreign Ministry turned to the rocket launch: “We made it clear that the development, launch, and use of a satellite are internationally recognized rights of a sovereign state for independence.... Through the talks, we consider it fortunate that although it is late, the United States has re-entered the stage of implementing the framework agreement as promised.”⁷

In wake of the launch, this institution took a decidedly measured tone. It agreed with the party’s characterization of the rocket as a satellite but disagreed with the party’s following policy prescription. The cabinet organization reiterated its commitment to the Agreed Framework – an avenue which its bureaucracy controlled. The institution recognized why the U.S. did not supply the fuel oil pledged in the Framework and encouraged a return to the agreement. A Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, “[T]he United States failed greatly in 1998 to meet the timetable for the construction of the light water reactor [LWR] project and for supplying heavy oil because of opposition by the U.S. Congress and because it was unable to procure the funds for implementing the framework agreement properly due to the so-called economic crisis of the members of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization [KEDO]. This caused us to doubt the United States’ will to carry out the framework agreement, and compelled us to suspend the storage of spent fuel and to prepare for more relevant measures.”⁸

In this statement coming just days after the launch, the Foreign Ministry associated the launch with what it saw as the U.S. not upholding its part of the nuclear agreement. The cabinet did not relish in the launch the way the party and military did, rather it used the event to urge a

⁴ Interview, September 2008.

⁵ Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁶ “Foreign Ministry Spokesman Announces Satellite Launch,” KCBS, September 4, 1998.

⁷ “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Comments DPRK-U.S. Talks,” KCBS, September 10, 1998.

⁸ “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Comments DPRK-U.S. Talks,” KCBS, September 10, 1998.

resumption of the negotiating track. It focused on its own contribution to North Korean history: maintaining the Agreed Framework and fundamentally altering its relationship with the U.S. and the outside world. The KPA and KWP did not voice support for negotiations, reflecting their consistent preference for a confrontational approach with the U.S. The KPA celebrated the technical, military applications of the event, the party highlighted an achievement of socialist science and technology policies, and the cabinet focused on the diplomatic consequences and opportunities it presented.

North Korea “launched” its constitution dramatically, but the rocket crisis that followed did not create a situation where a clear decision by the Dear Leader was required. The action put the ball in the court of its foreign interlocutors. The state presumably sought to prod the U.S. in particular into supplying the LWR and heavy fuel oil. Dissatisfied with years of slow-to-no progress on the Agreed Framework’s implementation, the small state tried to pressure the large one. However, revelations outside of the regime’s control intervened to change the discussion before the policy process could run its full course on this issue. The Taepo Dong-1 incident demonstrates how institutional responses vary in accordance with their more general policy outlooks and objectives, yet it did not produce a clear, single policy response. Each institution provided different interpretations and policy recommendations to central authorities as the post-totalitarian institutionalism model predicts and creates a new puzzle for the more monolithic models. As such, it does not say much about how policy disputes are resolved. The intervening crisis would help clarify this issue.

The Kumchang-ri Suspected Nuclear Facility

Following the leak of a newly discovered, alleged underground nuclear facility at Kumchang-ri, American demands to inspect the facility started to overshadow the Taepo Dong 1 launch. The demand provides an excellent early case study of the North Korean bureaucracy in motion. The allegation was new, forcing each institution to voice its position, and it required a single, unambiguous decision by a central authority. The state either would allow the inspection or block it; there would be no uncertainty about the policy outcome. The inspection demand was related to a more general, important, and on-going debate within the North Korean bureaucracy over whether Pyongyang should negotiate with Washington at all. Each of the three institutions explicitly linked arguments for or against allowing the U.S. inspection to wider positions of continuing with the Agreed Framework process or abandoning it outright.

Also, the bureaucratic players knew something the Americans did not: the allegation was factually incorrect. This allows one to see the importance various institutions placed on primarily ideological versus pragmatic action. Interestingly, once the inspection demonstrated there were no traces of nuclear material at the underground facility, the party and KPA did not gloat. The American allegation had been proved wrong, but they had still lost the debate to prevent the inspection in the first place.

The party, military, and cabinet developed three distinct policy responses to the inspection demand. The party rejected the inspections on principle, arguing it undermined the state’s sovereignty. Party commentaries likened the inspection to a police officer’s humiliating demand to inspect one’s house. The party also put the demand in a larger context, arguing this is

only the latest example of American tricks to delay implementing the Agreed Framework. They noted their grave suspicion of the agreement and called for negotiations to end.

The military took a different stance in opposing the inspections. The KPA argued the U.S. should not be allowed to inspect any military sites. Allowing a hostile state to inspect military sites presented a dangerous precedent for the military and likely reflected some concern about inspecting Kumchang-ri itself. Though inspections eventually showed the heavily-guarded site had no traces of nuclear residue, it may have contained conventional military technology that the military would have had to move in the months between the allegation and the permission granted to inspect the tunnels. The military took a pragmatic opposition to the inspection, reflecting institutional interests.

The military also connected their position to a wider concern about negotiating with the Americans, arguing the KPA should have access to all necessary weapons to fight and defeat the Americans, including nuclear weapons. The Agreed Framework's commitment to trade North Korea's nuclear program for security commitments and aid did not appeal to this group. Military articles did not focus on abstract ideas like the party's but berated the Agreed Framework on non-ideological grounds. Suspicious of paper agreements with the Americans and relinquishing their central role in providing for the state's security, a spokesman reiterated that the KPA as an institution had always opposed the Agreed Framework. This reflects a consistent institutional policy position and suggests institutions resist decided policy when possible and actively pursue policy reversals.

The cabinet, again through the Foreign Ministry, first presented the American demand to the rest of the bureaucracy. It initially did not comment on the accusation, but then discussed the possibility of allowing a one-time inspection in exchange for economic aid. The Foreign Ministry took what the rest of the bureaucracy called an offensive demand and turned it into a platform that would advance the cabinet's institutional agenda. The cabinet and Foreign Ministry had long sought economic concessions from the U.S. While the U.S. rejected the cash demand and Pyongyang settled for continued U.S. food aid instead, the cabinet demonstrated both its commitment to achieving substance over symbols and its main vehicle for negotiations – the Agreed Framework. After months of debate, the state implemented the cabinet's advocacy amongst competing proposals.

The Foreign Ministry led off, announcing the U.S. allegation of the underground nuclear facility. A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry said, "The U.S. side suspected that we were building an underground facility to promote a nuclear program in secret. During the talks, the talks were also delayed by the assessment that our satellite launch was a ballistic missile test and by the claim that issues that had already been agreed upon [U.S. supplying heavy fuel oil] had to be reconsidered due to the negative atmosphere that was formed.... we made our position clear that we will take practical measures to show that we cannot be unilaterally bound under the framework agreement and sacrifice our own nuclear power industry if the United States again takes a backward step in carrying out the framework agreement."⁹

⁹ "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Comments DPRK-U.S. Talks," KCBS, September 10, 1998.

Utilizing brinkmanship tactics, the Foreign Ministry was not shy about making threats of scuttling the Agreed Framework. Four years had passed since the agreement's signing and most of the heavy fuel oil still had not arrived. Yet the institution left an opening at the end of the statement, urging the Americans to take forward steps by supplying the fuel oil. The cabinet was the only institution publicly advocating this line. The inspection demand, coming on the heels of the criticism of the Taepo Dong 1 launch, accelerated more fundamental debates about whether the state should continue to negotiate with Washington at all at this time.

Negotiations continued despite increased discussions in Pyongyang about abandoning talks. The Foreign Ministry reiterated its statement, implicitly indicating the value it placed on open lines of communication: "at the DPRK-U.S. high-level talks in New York, the DPRK made clear its position to show in practice its will not to sacrifice its nuclear power industry." The party's newspaper spun the Foreign Ministry statement in a different direction, summarizing it with a focus on the ultimatum and missile "slander."¹⁰ The party newspaper concurrently ran a signed editorial—evoking the name of both Kims—describing its view that, "enemies within and without were making desperate efforts to disintegrate and stifle Korean socialism with the fictitious 'nuclear problem.' [Kim Jong Il] frustrated their maneuverings with a bomb-like declaration... For dozens of years he together with the president [Kim Il Sung] has crushed every one of the imperialists' moves to isolate and stifle the DPRK."¹¹ While the Foreign Ministry presented the DPRK's interests in New York, the party advocated crushing American "deception" and refocus on ideologically-driven military means to complete the revolution and reunify the nation.

The party would not stand for the U.S. trying to "stifle and isolate" Korea, repeating ideological sentiments questioning Washington's underlying goals. For party ideologues, imperialists only schemed to crush socialists, so it was naïve to believe one could compromise with them. The party objected on principled grounds to the U.S. inspection demand, indicating such a move undermined socialism, security, and sovereignty. It connected this specific incident with its opposition to negotiations. The cabinet and party highlighted different elements of the same statements and interpreted American moves in different ways.

The KWP's position stemmed from the 1950s that through socialism and military might, the state would defeat the imperialists. The party refused to be swayed by imperialist pressure through the Agreed Framework apparatus, including the inspection demand. The party's position arose out of ideological conviction, intense distrust of the "imperialists," and its view that a nuclear weapon strengthened the state's defense and enhanced its international prestige.

Consequently, the party said Pyongyang should block inspections. Through Kim Jong Il's wisdom and "scientific" understanding of world politics, the state would "smash the commotion of the nuclear inspection maneuver of the imperialist allied forces." The party explicitly specified that they based their international strategy on ideological correctness: "[O]ur party was able to consistently adhere to the socialist principle while not even once wavering from the aftermath of the modern revisionism and modern social democracy.... This is the secret behind our party and people's display of invincible feats in a time when the imperialists'

¹⁰ "KCNA Reviews 11 Sep Pyongyang Press," KCNA, September 11, 1998.

¹¹ "Nodong Sinmun Lauds Kim Jong Il as 'Sun of Nation'," KCNA, September 14, 1998.

maneuvers to isolate and crush us has reach[ed] an extreme point.”¹² The party expressed its vision for the DPRK’s future through a single ideological prism.

The party linked the inspection demand to its more general rejection of the Agreed Framework: “We are not afraid even if the agreement breaks down. We are not willing to be restricted by it while having our sovereignty violated.”¹³ The party’s alternative is clear: the class enemies must be confronted through military might. “[N]o matter how hard they may try to embellish capitalism and launch all sorts of ideological-cultural offensives, they will never be able to avert the hatred of our people for the class enemies. Just as a wolf cannot take the form of a sheep, the aggressive nature of the imperialists will never change. Fighting against the enemies to the end is the thoroughgoing class stance of our people.”¹⁴ For the party, U.S. action was a constant. The U.S. may attempt to present its position as compatible with mutual gains, but it was simply trying to trick the North. The U.S. only sought to bring down the socialist system. Opposing the Agreed Framework was a sacred duty of protecting the socialist system.

Indeed, suspicion of negotiations extended beyond the specific framework agreement. The party also objected to the pending Six Party Talks, calling them a platform for “treason.” “The so-called multilateral party talks, which profess the security of Northeast Asia, are nothing but a repetition of the six-party talks by divisionists who often used the talks to intensify division and to fabricate the concept of two Koreas... the talks are an anti-reunification idea that is simply unrealistic and cannot be accomplished... Therefore, the multilateral security dialogue is a criminal act that can never be forgiven... On behalf of the nation, we firmly denounce the South Korean puppets’ proposal of multilateral security dialogue, which sells national interests and permanently divides the country.”¹⁵

The two Koreas had already joined the UN as separate countries and signed the Basic Agreement, recognizing one another as the DPRK and ROK, respectively. The party’s position again was locked in the past. However, the past was not irrelevant. It used the nostalgic argument for reunification as another talking point against the new negotiating proposal. Bilateral talks were bad enough but multilateral talks that included the South Koreans risked recognizing the government in Seoul as a legitimate, separate state. This “divisionist” move could be presented as an affront to Korean nationalism, but the party’s argument failed to carry the day.

More directly, party commentaries denied the underground facility and rocket launch had any military uses but ended with a thinly veiled threat that the satellite could be used as a missile: “whether the launch of our artificial satellite is used for military purposes or not entirely depends on the attitude of the United States and other hostile forces.”¹⁶ The party injected more brinkmanship into the situation as it pursued a confrontational agenda. Just as boldly confronting the Japanese in the 1940s allowed them to move from a band of fringe guerilla

¹² “The Respected and Beloved General Is a Great Man Among Great Men Possessed With Outstanding Farsightedness,” KCBS, October 16, 1998.

¹³ “U.S. Allegation on Facility Called Violation of Sovereignty,” KCNA, September 19, 1998.

¹⁴ Chin Ung, “Class Consciousness of the Working Class,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 21, 1998, p. 3.

¹⁵ “Anti-Reunification Multilateral Dialogue Cannot Be Realized,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 29, 1998.

¹⁶ “Do Not Make Unnecessary Rackets,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 25, 1998.

fighters to the state's elite, confrontation with the Americans may somehow pay off in achieving national goals and glorifying their – or increasingly their families' – lifelong efforts.

The KPA added to the mix, showing its distinct opposition to negotiations after the inspection demand surfaced. The (North) Korean Broadcast Station announced, "Our people and People's Army are strongly united around Comrade Kim Jong Il, the respected and beloved supreme commander, and fully prepared for any military adventure by the U.S. imperialist warmongers. If the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean puppets dare to light a fire of aggression against our Republic after all, this will only be a foolish self-destructive act like jumping into the fire carrying gunpowder."¹⁷ This original rhetorical flourish likely demonstrated the military's difficulty of justifying publicly its specific concerns about U.S. inspections of the site. The KPA would not want to admit that the heavily-guarded site may have some military applications or allow a hostile state access to the facility.

Although less colorful, later publications exposed the KPA's institutional policy more clearly. The KPA expressed its long-held opposition to negotiating with the Americans; negotiations had only gone forward because other, unspecified bureaucratic interests won out. For the military, the inspection demand proved their opposition to negotiations was correct and institutional opponents were wrong: "The Korean People's Army expected nothing from the [framework] agreement and had no interest in dialogue and negotiation through diplomatic channels. Now, the United States, throwing away the mask of 'appeasement' and 'engagement' which it had once worn for some time, is openly revealing its design to invade the DPRK, threatening to break the Agreed Framework and spreading a plan for the second Korean war. The present developments prove that the KPA's judgment and stand were completely correct."¹⁸ The KPA opposed the diplomatic track – past, present, and future.

The bureaucratic players also blamed the Americans in distinct ways. The Foreign Ministry sought to inject greater nuance into the debate. Abandoning negotiations outright was not the only way to register displeasure with the inspection demand. Current difficulties in negotiations could be more narrowly sourced and potentially overcome. The Foreign Ministry noted that inter-branch conflict in the U.S. prevented it from upholding its preliminary obligations under the Agreed Framework. By contrast, the party sourced the cause of this outcome to the "insincere attitude of the United States toward implementing the agreement" and dismissed the Foreign Ministry's more nuanced explanation: "The United States has recently been unable to pay a penny to build the light-water reactors, due to this or that pretext." The party expressed a more fundamental suspicion that lent itself to a radical break from negotiations altogether.

When the party commentary recognized the role of congressional opposition at the end of the article, it claimed this showed why the agreement will never be implemented and should be abandoned, "Hard-line conservatives in the United States did not approve in Congress the budget for the heavy oil supply. Therefore, prospects for the heavy oil supply are dim. Nevertheless, the United States is helpless about this.... It is self-evident that in this situation, we cannot pin our

¹⁷ "U.S. Imperialists' Dark Design To Light a Fuse to a New War," KCBS, September 19, 1998.

¹⁸ "Army's Anger over U.S. Nuclear Moves has 'Reached its Limit'," KCNA, December 12, 1998, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, December 14, 1998.

hopes on the agreement with the United States.... [W]e have no intention to adhere to the Agreed Framework. Even if the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework is broken, we have nothing to fear. Rather, we will be freer.”¹⁹ The latest hang-up in the Agreed Framework was more evidence it should be eliminated altogether rather than an issue to be addressed at the negotiating table.

Party commentaries drew on historical examples or pure ideological exhortations but overwhelmingly searched for current evidence to bolster their consistent policy advocacy towards confrontation. The party followed-up by publishing another ideological article on how the “imperialists’ aggressive nature cannot change” and how the U.S. slyly sought to split the North Korean leadership by falsely presenting a “peace strategy” which is “simply another version of war strategy.” The party recognized the possibility (if not current reality) of divisions within the state and concluded by presenting its advocacy as superior to its internal opponents’: “Only when the revolutionary people of the world, penetrating into the imperialists’ aggressive and plunderous nature, further intensify the anti-imperialist and anti-U.S. struggle, can global peace and security be ensured.”²⁰ Accommodation was counterproductive.

An unattributed (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) broadcast presented a more moderate path: “If the U.S. side persists in inspecting our underground structures, we can show them to it. However, if they prove to be civilian structures, the U.S. side must compensate for its aspersions on the DPRK.”²¹ The policy option did not seemingly originate in the party or from central authorities as four days later the party continued to call for preventing the inspection and scrapping the Agreed Framework.²² The position was out of step with the main current of thinking expressed in the North Korean media. Such a move can be personally dangerous and helps explain why the piece was unattributed. It also demonstrates how new ideas can be floated internally to minimize the personal and professional risks associated with being the individual out of line with the rest of the state.

The cabinet later pursued this option more explicitly, suggesting the article probably originated there. The cabinet negotiated specifics of U.S. compensation for inspecting Kumchang-ri and eventually reached a settlement that became state policy. Central authorities selected between the competing options fiercely debated in the North Korean press. Though the cabinet’s proposal to accept food aid for inspections and maintain the Agreed Framework won out, this was far from a foreordained conclusion. Before the central authorities selected the compensation-for-inspection solution, another crisis intervened to make the decision more difficult. The cabinet won its policy of continuing negotiations (albeit in an increasingly difficult environment), and lost on its economic construction agenda for the time being. The existence of competing proposals and arguments from below that inform top-level decisions is out of step with the monolithic models. The nerve center does not select policy without reference to its institutional supports, and those institutional supports present a consistent policy platform in line with the organization’s interests.

¹⁹ “The United States Will Be Held Fully Responsible,” *Nodong Sinmun*, October 17, 1998.

²⁰ Kim Chong-son, “The Imperialists’ Aggressive Nature Absolutely Cannot Change,” *Nodong Sinmun*, October 27, 1998, p. 6.

²¹ “KCNA on Ill-Intentioned Remarks of Ex-U.S. Secretary of Defence,” KCNA, October 19, 1998.

²² Choe Song-kuk, “We, Too, Have the Right To Make Independent Choice,” *Nodong Sinmun*, October 23, 1998, p. 6.

OPlan 5027

A related crisis soon dominated North Korea's relations with its neighbors and the United States. The newly revised Combined Forces Command's Operation Plan (OPlan) 5027 outlined joint U.S.-South Korean military actions in case of a military contingency on the Korean peninsula. The U.S.-South Korean command first wrote the defensive plan in 1973 to prepare for a possible North Korean invasion of the South and revised several times. However, the 1998 revision was the first version to detail more expansive plans to permanently eliminate the DPRK if it ever attacked the South. Previous plans focused on ending a second Korean War quickly, but the revised plan put forward the contingency response goal of "abolish[ing] north Korea [sic] as a state."²³

All of the DPRK's institutions united in opposition to this development, but they still maintained divergent responses. The party linked the OPlan development to the inspection demand, highlighting a general U.S. "hostile policy" towards the DPRK. They capitalized on the negative atmosphere the OPlan revelation created to advance its predetermined opposition to inspections and the Agreed Framework. The new facts fed into an existing platform. The KPA reacted in stronger terms, calling the move tantamount to a declaration of war. Though the military and party use the "declaration of war" characterization loosely, it does register a high level of dissatisfaction and call to stiffen defense measures. The cabinet explicitly recused itself from this public discussion, noting that bilateral relations had deteriorated so much that the cabinet could not present an alternative to the confrontational approach in the contemporary political climate.

The party jumped on the OPlan news, connecting the document to the inspections issue. "Worse still, the U.S. Defense Department in a recent 'Report on U.S. Security Strategy for East Asia' said that they would 'exercise military power' to prevent the DPRK from resuming 'nuclear development.' As seen above, developments are turning for the worse and the U.S. is putting tougher pressure upon the DPRK for its refusing to accept the 'inspection.' However, any 'pressure' and 'threat' will not break our determined position of principle. We declare once again that our underground facility is not related with nuclear activity and that, accordingly, we will not in the least allow any 'inspection' of the facility."²⁴ Although not explicitly sourced to the party, the party newspaper subsequently published another ideological article elucidating many of the same points, stressing that the party's ideological pureness could transcend any challenge.²⁵ The OPlan was a long-term document that surfaced during this crisis. It did not have a clear linkage to the inspection issue, but the party was willing to bridge the issues to advance their agenda. The party sought to link each of these actions that it could label hostile to support its principled argument that Pyongyang should harden its U.S. policy.

The KPA opposed the inspection in much stronger and direct terms than the party as one may expect from the institution most directly responsible for military plans. The spokesman for the KPA's General Staff also linked the OPlan with the inspections demand. The state must

²³ Global Security, "OPlan 5027 Major Theater War – West," <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oplan-5027.htm>>, accessed July 15 2008.

²⁴ "'Inspection' cannot be allowed; KCNA commentary," KCNA, November 27, 1998.

²⁵ Sung Chae-sun and No Yong, "The Emerging Powerful State of Juche is a Great Socialist Ideological Power," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 30, 1998, p. 2.

respond to this OPlan news, the military argued, by adopting the military's position on inspections and emphasize the military's interests as one would during wartime. "Our revolutionary Armed Forces will respond toward the challenge of U.S. forces of aggression with annihilating strikes without forgiving it at all. . . . The puppet South Korean traitor, who had maintained his existence with flunkeyism and submission, curried favor with his master in response to this bragging [of 'regime change' in OPlan 5027], and preposterously raved that the North must accept the inspection of the underground facility. The Japanese reactionaries, who viciously raved that our satellite launch was a ballistic-missile launch, are again making vicious attempts. At such a time, U.S. conservative hardliners made the violent remarks that they would abrogate the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework and make a resolute response if no inspection of our underground facilities was conducted. This is, in essence, like a declaration of war."²⁶

Calling actions a "declaration of war" in the official press is common enough that it does not merit particular attention, but a long series of articles and broadcasts delineated the statement as important. For the next week, soldiers, sailors, veterans, workers, students, intellectuals, and foreigners all allegedly supported the KPA General Staff's view.²⁷ North Korea's elites likely did not read these propaganda articles as genuine expressions of interest by these groups, but the extreme repetition did indicate that the KPA wanted to highlight this statement in a way that is rarely seen. The position had apparently taken some hold in senior KPA circles.

The KPA General Staff statement rejected negotiations in general and built on the negative atmosphere to advance its institutional agenda against economic reform and opening. Though national policy on economic planning would soon change in the military's favor, the institution never wavered from its core precepts. The KPA linked the launch response, inspection demand, and OPlan to its long-held argument that the state should reject U.S. "appeasement efforts" (negotiations) and economic opening. Instead, North Korea should be a closed society and emphasize military security. "Lately, the U.S. imperialists are hyperbolic about aggravating a situation which resulted from the matter of our non-existent underground nuclear facility and satellite launch because they aim to come up with an excuse to light the fuse of war in accordance with Operation Plan 5027. It is obvious why the United States has launched into implementing Operation Plan 5027, relieving itself of appeasement and engagement, with which they briefly disguised themselves. As it has failed to destroy our socialist system even with its strategy of isolation and suffocation and the strategy of appeasement intended to lead us to reform and openness, it finally has lost its sense and launched into a reckless adventure. Originally, our revolutionary forces never had any expectations toward the appeasement policy proposed by the United States, which is inherently trying to demolish our socialist system. . . . The general situation formed today clearly reveals that the sharp caution and the revolutionary position of our revolutionary forces were extremely just. . . . Although we do not want a war, we also will not avoid a war."²⁸

²⁶ "KPA General Staff Statement," KCBS, December 2, 1998.

²⁷ "Military Officials React to KPA Statement," KCBS, December 2, 1998. "War Veterans in DPRK Support KPA Statement," KCBS, December 2, 1998. "Intellectual Views Significance of KPA Statement," KCBS, December 4, 1998. "Young People, Students Denounce U.S. War Moves," KCNA, December 6, 1998. "Workers Resolve To Annihilate U.S. Imperialists and Their Stooges," KCNA, December 6, 1998. "Foreign Groups Hail Statement Of KPA General Staff," KCNA, December 10, 1998. "Operation Plan 5027' Under Fire," KCNA, December 13, 1998.

²⁸ "KPA General Staff Statement," KCBS, December 2, 1998.

The KPA statement pays some lip service to socialism, but it is not a class-focused statement. However, it fit well into the party's ideological conviction that capitalism and socialism cannot coexist. A contemporary party commentary draws out the class distinction at much greater length and focus, showing how the party came to the same conclusion that reform and opening must be abandoned by a different logical path: "Today, when the U.S. imperialists and their dirty hirelings have openly taken off their cunning masks of dialogue and negotiation and have taken out their swords of aggression, what do we realize most keenly, and what awakens us once again? They are the firm anti-imperialist revolutionary idea of our party, which is firmly holding revolutionary arms in its hands, and its firm anti-U.S., class spirit with which we have always fought relentlessly.... We are keenly realizing now how just and wise it is for us to have consolidated our resolve, a thousand times, to firmly hold our bayonets and cherished a class-oriented belief in our hearts.... Based on their class-oriented stand, they also must have clear-cut views, a firm faith, and a firm resolve...[We are engaged in] a life-and-death class struggle in which for us to live, they must die, and in which for them to live, we must die."²⁹ The party's position is necessarily zero-sum, removing any possibility of effective compromise or value in give-and-take negotiations.³⁰ The central problematic is the class struggle not a more narrow military confrontation.

U.S.-DPRK relations had soured. Pyongyang had to object to the OPlan; it could not accept as legitimate a document that threatened to eliminate the state – regardless of the circumstances or caveats outlined in the military plan. However, the OPlan leak did not likely change any planning or strategic thinking in Pyongyang. The state operated under the oft-repeated assumption that the U.S. wanted to wipe the country off the map – even absent North Korean aggression. It probably came as little surprise that in the event of a second Korean War the U.S. and South Korea would attempt to eliminate the DPRK. Both Koreas attempted to force reunification in the Korean War and committed themselves to this principle in their respective constitutions throughout the Cold War.

In this case, unobservable, private discussions may have significantly diverged from the public rejection of the OPlan. In particular, the Foreign Ministry's public role may show only part of its advocacy. A Foreign Ministry statement said, "DPRK diplomats have little to do because the DPRK-U.S. relations are rapidly turning toward military confrontation."³¹ The Foreign Ministry removed itself from the public discussion, but it likely did not remove itself from behind-the-scenes politicking. Such a move would be anomalous and puzzling given its general policy advocacy, access to Kim's inner circle, and important institutional equities involved. Though no one continued to press the compensation-for-inspections idea in the official press, the party continued to publicly oppose it.³² These commentaries would be puzzling if no one was pushing this agenda privately.

²⁹ "Make the Punishment Merciless," KCBS, December 4, 1998.

³⁰ Won Kyong-ho, "Picking Up A Wrong Object and Adopting A Wrong Method," *Nodong Sinmun*, December 22, 1998, p. 6.

³¹ "DPRK Diplomats Have Little To Do for DPRK-U.S. Relations, Says Foreign Ministry Spokesman," KCNA, December 7, 1998. The Foreign Ministry's response is further significant in that it juxtaposes its institutional role as implementers of the Agreed Framework against the military's institutional role of conducting war.

³² Kim Chong-son, "We Cannot Afford To Be Only Counting on the Agreed Framework," *Nodong Sinmun*, October 10, 1998, p. 6. Choe Song-kuk, "A Test War for a Preemptive Strike," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 22, 1998, p. 6.

The Foreign Ministry was the only institution not on record opposing the phantom proposal. Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju negotiated the Agreed Framework and is reputed to be one of Kim's two dozen or so inner circle advisers. Given his institution's advocacy and personal ties to the Agreed Framework, it is possible that he attempted to leverage his position privately to present the inspections-for-compensation idea to central authorities. Indeed, the proposal eventually became state policy over party and military objections. Although impossible to firmly verify at this point, the pieces of the puzzle seem to point to a role of the Foreign Ministry in pushing this agenda.

Outcry over North Korea's rocket launch, inspection demands, OPlan 5027, and continued failure to provide Agreed Framework commitments effectively muted cabinet moderates who publicly advocated negotiations. Party and military hardliners seemed to gain the upper hand. Though the regime eventually allowed inspections for aid, hardliners won out in internal deliberations for a change in linked issue areas. Their calls for a more planned economic structure – for ideological and security concerns associated with increased openness – carried the day. Though this trade-off process remains hidden from view, it is plausible that Kim, not completely comfortable with ceding to the American demand during this heightened state of tensions but taking actions to preserve the Agreed Framework, sought to placate party and military demands in other areas. Such moves could also reduce Pyongyang's dependence on its neighbors and the United States at a time when such reliance seemed even less prudent than normal. Indeed, each institution had previously advocated publicly that the state should link issue areas. The state announced the change in economic policy in the important New Year's Joint Editorial.

The Second Chollima March

The 1999 New Year's Joint Editorial announced the state would pursue a "Second Grand Chollima March" in line with the party and military's advocacy. Chollima is a winged mythical horse reputed to be especially fast. The first Chollima March was an administrative push to quickly accelerate economic construction and provide the country's food needs by collectivizing agricultural land. Started in the late 1950s, Kim Il Sung's plan mirrored Mao's Great Leap Forward in actions and initial failures. However, the first Chollima March finally started to produce gains once Kim Il Sung introduced private incentives for over-quota production a few years into the program.

The Chollima March has a positive connotation in North Korea. The economy grew following the post-Korean War reconstruction until the 1970s. There are several large statues of the Chollima horse in Pyongyang to commemorate the administrative push that the state credits with pulling the state out of poverty. For much of the isolated and indoctrinated population, the improved economic situation was because of – not in spite of – forced collectivization. Kim's announcement of the second Grand Chollima March denoted a move towards nostalgia and renewed centralized economic control over agriculture.³³ It marked a tremendous policy win for the party and military and defeat for the cabinet. It committed to recentralizing economic plans and cracking down on market activities. For the party, this was an ideological win; it was a

³³ Kim, "North Korea in 1999," p. 152. Bradley Martin, "All the Winged Horses..." *Asia Times*, January 8, 2000, <http://www.atimes.com/koreas/BA08Dg01.html>, Accessed July 17, 2008.

move towards socialist orthodoxy. For the military, it was a move to restrict information outflow and reassert state control over the economy. For the cabinet, it meant removing production incentives and more inefficient food distribution methods that contributed to prior food shortages.

The renewed administrative push for economic construction filtered into all three strategic issue areas of the economy, reunification, and anti-U.S. policy. The party in particular attempted to reassert its larger “rice bowl,” or bureaucratic domain, following this first post-1998 constitution NYJE. The move to annex further bureaucratic fiefdoms triggered reaction, especially from the cabinet. National policy became more disjointed than during any other period under consideration with different institutions pursuing different agendas simultaneously. The result is puzzling for the monolithic ideal types but squarely explained by post-totalitarian institutionalism’s theoretical expectations. The monolithic ideal types expect top-down control of a unified policy. Policy should not be self-contradictory in significant ways nor should institutions openly fight over controlling the agenda, yet the rise and fall of one institution’s influence relative to another’s continued.

The party began to reestablish its bureaucratic clout over the economy. In a front-page editorial in the government’s newspaper only four days after the NYJE, the KWP interpreted Kim Jong Il’s new guidance as requiring a “redoubled” socialist push to build a powerful country. North Korea’s ideological mantra refers to a “powerful and prosperous nation.” The party editorial makes clear its preference for powerful over prosperous and calls on the cabinet to implement the party’s policy preferences: “No goal of nation building is more sacred and greater than the building of a powerful nation.... The most important in this is for all the [cabinet] functionaries to grasp the wishes reflected in the New Year’s joint editorial and have their minds made up to implement them to the end. The basic idea of the joint editorial is that we glorify this year as the year of a great turning-point for building a powerful nation by accelerating another great Chollima march under the leadership of the respected and beloved general just like we have built the socialist fatherland of independence, self-reliance, and self-defense from scratch under the guidance of the great leader through the [first] Chollima march. Building a powerful socialist nation is a long-range blueprint that the great Comrade Kim Jong Il has long elaborated as well as a shining milestone for nation building.” The party’s position was not a stretch; it cited Kim’s decision to give it greater power in economic management and tried to preemptively whip the competing bureaucracy to get in line.

The party continually reminded the government that Kim Jong Il ruled on this economic question and they must get on-board. The cabinet did not reply in the press initially, but the party was well aware of their opposition. In case the cabinet “functionaries” did not get the message the first time in the front-page article in their own newspaper, the party continued, cabinet functionaries “must see that the rules and order are thoroughly observed in the economic work and remain vigilant against and reject any tendency that runs against the principles of the socialist economic management, no matter how trifling it may be.”³⁴ The party published further articles on functionaries’ duties under the new NYJE guidance, clearly relishing their newfound

³⁴ “Functionaries of the National Economic Organs Should Vigorously Shoulder the Weight of the Building of a Powerful Nation,” *Minju Choson*, January 5, 1999, p. 1.

authority.³⁵ For the party, their role to direct policy ran deep. It must apply to all sectors at every level. They even published articles on the proper *Juche* method of the “cannon’s roar signaling the potato farming revolution,” noting its “grandeur” and contribution to a powerful state.³⁶ The party pushed its authority quickly and forcefully while it still had the bureaucratic upper hand.

The party addressed the possibility, and their expectation, of bureaucratic resistance. This expectation suggests bureaucratic resistance is not uncommon and part of the system. The party would not be surprised if the cabinet tried to subvert subtly the NYJE, rather it prepared for this real possibility. Indeed, the cabinet did exactly that. It recognized the NYJE’s clear policy guidance that awarded leadership on economic policy to its institutional rival with a very different economic agenda, but it also immediately began undermining that goal. The possibility of bureaucratic resistance is completely alien to the monolithic ideal types but an expectation of the post-totalitarian institutionalism model. It is an important component of the model that shows these institutions do not simply set the agenda for senior decision-makers – a key function in its own right – but actively press an agenda regardless of central decisions. Though this certainly does not rise to the level of resistance found in democratic states with well-established opposition parties and organizations, but it does indicate a level of bureaucratic autonomy not recognized in the monolithic descriptions of the North Korean system.

The cabinet replied in a front-page article in the party newspaper that they will adhere to socialist principle but made clear to spin the need to focus on rational results. In short, they were waving a white flag while holding their guns steady. They resisted decided policy, capitalizing on the inherent vagueness of high-level proclamations, and attempted to push their agenda against the tide of decided policy. “What is important in the cabinet's work as the nation's economic headquarters is to precisely establish combat operations to thoroughly implement the party's economic policy in conformity with actual conditions and to carry out works in a revolutionary and effective way.... The goal of combat, which was legislated through the cabinet's decision, is to revive the economy, which has suffered temporary difficulties, within the next few years, and raise the level of production already attained by all sectors of the national economy.”³⁷ The NYJE was a win for the ideological purists but the general guidance could still be cloaked in a pragmatic need for results. The party cited its delegated claim to authority over economic management but had a difficult time implementing this agenda.

Furthermore, the party attempted to expand upon this policy win by interpreting Kim Jong Il’s Chollima March declaration as a clarification of the new constitutional arrangement. The party presented the government as its subordinate. The party contended that the government must relegate its preferences to the party’s ideologically-guided demands and follow its planning, citing authority granted from Kim Il Sung rather than Kim Jong Il. The party wanted to claim victory in the bureaucratic war, while the cabinet refused to recognize complete defeat even in this individual economic battle: “In the course of leading the socialist economic

³⁵ Chong Song-il, “Activities of Functionaries,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 4, 1999, p. 1.

³⁶ Kim Chin-o, “Roar of the Cannon Signals Revolution in the Potato Farming,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 3, 1999, p. 3.

³⁷ Choe Yong-tok, “Cabinet Committees and Ministries Are Carrying Out Economic Operations and Commands in a Revolutionary Way In Order To Implement the Joint Editorial,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 7, 1999, p. 1.

construction, the great leader [Kim Il Sung] consistently adhered to the principle of giving priority to the ideological work. The great leader's firm creed was that as long as their ideas are set in motion, the masses can fulfill any kind of difficult and vast tasks.... Armed with the spirit of self-reliance, the whole population is vigorously speeding up the second grand march of Chollima aimed at opening a new great turnaround in the economic construction. The centralized, planned guidance over the economy is further strengthened and the work of establishing discipline and order in the economic construction is being deepened in accordance with the demand of the new state organizational system."³⁸ For the party, the "new state organizational system" looked very similar to the old one; it meant the party on top, pursuing a centralized, planned economy with ideologically-directed decision-making.

The party repeated this notion that the NYJE did not simply grant it more discretion in economic affairs; the party noted its guiding roles were comprehensive. The Chollima March reference implied that the party was back on top and the constitutional revision three months earlier could be "reinterpreted" into non-existence. Kim Jong Il had just completed the three-year mourning period for his father a year earlier. The party tried to present the constitutional revision not as the final word on the younger Kim's *modus operandi* but just one decision that could be undone. The party wanted its institutional supremacy back, but neither the military nor the cabinet was prepared to satisfy the party's desire.

Kim Ki-nam, Secretary of the KWP's Central Committee, laid out the party's view that the economic guidance extended into reunification and anti-U.S. policy issue areas too. In a major speech marking the sixth anniversary of Kim Jong Il's election as the NDC Chairman, Kim Ki-nam emphasized economic self-reliance and enhancing the role of the defense industry to promote economic growth: "Our national defense industry has also become a precious asset in building a country with a powerful economy... It is our party's consistent principle and firm position to advance the construction of the economy and national defense and to invariably adhere to and develop our independent economic structure. We should consider the foundation of the self-reliant economy, which we established by tightening our belts and exerting every effort, and the national defense industry, which is based on its foundation as a valuable asset to the revolution, and further enhance and develop them."³⁹ Since the party's economic agenda meant investing in defense to promote growth, it naturally addressed policy towards those states that the military expenditures sought to counter. Lower-level party officials drew out this point more forcefully and starkly.

The party's economic policy gave it pretext to address both reunification issues and U.S. policy. The North's administrative push in economic policy and greater self-reliance meant reducing its dependence on South Korean investments in inter-Korean economic projects. Party officials returned to traditional arguments that the South must join the North in communism to reunify the nation. "The country-selling traitors in South Korea, given to toadyism and reliance on outside forces under the veil of 'the government of the people,' have raised increasingly high

³⁸ Hwang Chang-man, "Great Leadership That Embodies the Socialist Principle in Economic Construction," *Nodong Sinmun*, March 1, 1999, p. 2. See also M.A. Yi Yong-ho, "Our Firmest State Organizational Structure," *Minju Choson*, February 2, 1999, p. 2.

³⁹ "Party Leader's Speech on Kim Jong Il Anniversary Praises Country Turned into Fortress," KCBS, April 9, 1999, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, April 13, 1999.

barriers on the path to reunification. This reality demands even more pressingly the nation's adherence to the principle of national independence. Today the only way out for South Korea from its present crisis lies in the attainment of reunification through coalition with communism and with the North.”⁴⁰

Likewise, the party took aim at the South Korean Ministry of Unification. The Ministry is charged with inter-Korean dialogue and economic projects. Their main interlocutors in the North are in the cabinet. The party labels the ministry anti-reunification, citing again the party's preference for reunification through force: “The South Korean people should step up more courageously their struggle to get all anti-reunification institutional devices – including ‘the National Security Law,’ ‘the ministry of Unification,’ and ‘the National Security Planning Agency’ – scrapped or dismantled.... And, by doing so, they will hasten the day for the 70-million to reunite as one.”⁴¹ The party won its desire to reapply Kim Il Sung's economic policies; now it attempted to implement the long-term Kimilsungist peninsular policy of removing U.S. troops and pressing the South into submission.

Not surprisingly, the KPA agreed with the party that the state should prioritize military resources and take a militaristic stand in reunification and anti-imperialism efforts. Citing again only half of the “powerful and prosperous nation” mantra, the Chief of the General Staff, Kim Yong-chun, said, “We have to achieve independent reunification of the fatherland and consummate the *Juche* revolutionary cause amid the fierce struggle against the enemies. The people's army should... guarantee with military force our people's struggles for the reunification of the country and for building a powerful state.... All the situations more clearly show how the imperialists' aggressive and brutal nature will never change and that the victory of the socialist cause can only be guaranteed through the bayonets of the revolution.... This is our army and our people's unchanging firm standpoint and firm will.”⁴²

These two institutions openly and consistently advocate a reunification policy line that some observers claim is so unrealistic that no institution or individual could genuinely hold such a view. North Korea's reunification rhetoric must be mere propaganda. By 1999, South Korea could likely defeat North Korea on the battlefield even without American support.⁴³ North Korea's military hardware has increasingly become antiques and an emphasis on missile and nuclear technology suggests a deterrent rather than offensive orientation of the portion of its military gaining the most resources. Reunification propaganda only serves to keep the masses in check by reinforcing an empty ideology, but serious policy advocates must have abandoned this view.

However, dismissing these positions as rhetoric without substance misses the DPRK's peculiar reality and the difference between short-term and long-term objectives. Kim Il Sung

⁴⁰ Han Ung-ho, “The Great Unity of the Nation Is the Basic Cornerstone of the Reunification of the Fatherland,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 7, 1999, p. 5.

⁴¹ Choe Mun-il, “The Five-Point Program for the Great Unity of the Nation Is the Great Banner for the Reunification of the Fatherland,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 3, 1999, p. 5.

⁴² “Meeting Marks Army Anniversary,” Korean Central Broadcasting Service (KCBS), April 24, 1999, in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, April 26, 1999. “North Korea, Army Chief of Staff Kim Yong-Chun Gives 67th Anniversary Speech,” KCBS, April 24, 1999, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, April 25, 1999.

⁴³ J.J. Suh, *Power, Interest and Identity in Military Alliances* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

reportedly could not sleep at night in the late 1940s, because he was so consumed with thoughts about his nation's division.⁴⁴ Today's Kimilsungists likewise seek to strengthen the North's means to force unification despite its requiring tremendous sacrifice and even greater risk. They take the long view and emphasize their greater resolve than the Americans. They emphasize guerilla tactics and special operations forces and encourage the severely weakened radical left in South Korea. Though conditions are far from ripe for invasion or fomenting revolution in the South, these revolutionaries and military men argue that history is not foreordained and the conviction of the North Korean soldier means victory will be theirs.

Those permitted to read this study may find these people's logic unrealistic and flawed but that does not imply that it does not represent their genuine advocacy. With the personal risks an accommodation-driven reunification poses to elites and their families, it is perhaps not surprising that some elites prefer the status quo with the distant possibility of a unified Korea in their favor. Indeed, imposing this same metric of rejecting "unrealistic expectations" as impossible and mere rhetoric makes the North's nuclearization and attending extreme sacrifice equally implausible, yet it is their reality. These institutions have taken observable steps to advance these general agendas. In short, North Korea is not well positioned to reunify the nation by force but that does not preclude ideologues and cadres from trying to position the state now for the long-term possibility of completing the revolution.

The party and military sought to expand their authority after the NYJE to each of the major policy areas by rearticulated their comprehensive platform. Both institutions continued to link the reunification question with anti-U.S. policy. The U.S. must be driven off the peninsula if Pyongyang is to reunify the country. Reunification means absorbing the South's economic and agricultural production potential and makes the state sustainable. As such, both the party and the military took the opportunity to reiterate their long-standing, institutional opposition to the Agreed Framework – the cornerstone of addressing U.S. policy through accommodation rather than confrontation.

Laying out its complete U.S. policy anew, the party explained only eight days after the NYJE why it objected to negotiations with the United States: "The U.S. implemented none of the Geneva agreement although four years have passed since its adoption. Moreover, the ground for the light-water reactors has not been broken today when nearly half of the set time elapsed. The U.S. has not faithfully discharged its obligation to supply heavy oil, with the result that its shipment is in arrears. The U.S. sanctions against the DPRK have not yet been lifted, and the nuclear threat is further increasing. In fact, the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework has been reduced to an empty paper. In the final analysis, we have gained nothing but economic losses in 'reward' for earnestly implementing the Geneva agreement. The U.S. is clamoring about 'missile threat' and the 'suspected underground nuclear facility' in the DPRK, politicizing humanitarian food assistance together with its followers. What it seeks in this is to disarm the DPRK. This is a declaration of abandonment of the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework, a declaration of war and provocation against the DPRK. If the U.S. wants, let us kill the Agreed Framework and take our own way. This is our position."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007).

⁴⁵ "U.S. Can Not Flee From Responsibility," KCNA, January 9, 1999.

The party's position was consistent but also stretching the authority that the Chollima March reference provided it. It attempted to run as far as it could with the new authority. Seeing an opportunity, the military jumped on-board too. Also within days of the NYJE, the KPA announced its renewed institutional opposition to the Agreed Framework that, the statement claimed, stemmed from the very inception of negotiations: "The United States' insincere attitude and stand toward the Agreed Framework prove once again that the position of the Korean People's Army is right. From the outset, our People's Army did not have expectations for the Agreed Framework, nor was it interested in dialogue and negotiations through diplomatic channels. When the nuclear crisis was concocted on the Korean peninsula in 1993 and hostile forces violated our sovereignty by raising the ridiculous issue of inspecting the objects, our Army strongly called for responding to this with resolute self-defensive steps. There has been no change in such position and attitude by our Army thereafter. Rather, its position and attitude have become more solid.... The KPA's position is that diplomatic negotiation is not the only way for solving matters."⁴⁶

The military once again argued that it never supported accommodation with the U.S. It goes so far as to explicitly note its institutional opposition to high-level decided policy. It wanted to continue the nuclear crisis created in 1993 when the North announced its intention to withdraw from the Nonproliferation Treaty and reprocess plutonium. For the military, this was not an empty threat or diplomatic tactic. It was part of a long-standing military plan to enhance its war-making potential. A nuclear North Korea may be able to raise the stakes high enough to dissuade the U.S. from joining a peninsular war and eventually allow the North to move forward on its historical mission to reunify the peninsula on its own terms.

All bureaucratic actors were not on the same page. The NYJE did not indicate a permanent policy win for the party. They no longer sat atop the bureaucracy and directed all policy choices as editorials earlier in the year hopefully claimed. The cabinet reasserted its role in economic affairs. It published an article citing the "cabinet's plan of operation" in regards to agricultural policy without reference to party guidance.⁴⁷ The cabinet decided to ignore the party's demands that it get on board with its expansive agenda. The cabinet continued to rely on pragmatic policy metrics in making economic policy and opposed efforts to end the Agreed Framework. The North's main avenue to nuclear weapon status – the Yongbyon nuclear reactor – remained frozen. Relations with the U.S. were strained and diplomatic progress slowed, but Pyongyang did not radically depart from the diplomatic structure. Inter-Korean projects experienced the most national-level policy variance in the coming months. Policy coordination declined as the three institutions pursued policies in contradiction with one another – a development unexplained by and puzzling for the monolithic theories but accounted for by institutional politics under Kim Jong Il's authority.

⁴⁶ Hong Hwang-ki, "Nothing Can Be Expected From DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 12, 1999, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Kim Chin-o, "The Cabinet Maps Out a Plan of Operation and the Ministry of Agriculture Implements It," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 4, 1999, p. 1.

Uncoordinated Institutions

Despite the New Year's Joint Editorial's decisive statement on socialist economic construction, the cabinet actively undermined the policy. While the party attempted to extend its domain, the cabinet largely disregarded party guidance – or at best provided lip service to it. As a result, each institution pursued contradictory, strategic objectives simultaneously. Though the regime already demonstrated its willingness to shift strategies over time, this period would be particularly puzzling for those subscribing to the monolithic ideal. The military, party, and cabinet each maintained a consistent strategy, but the nation did not. During this period, national-level policy was notably fragmented and disjointed.

One scholar describing inter-Korean relations during this timeframe perceptively noted how the North's uncoordinated bureaucratic actors pursued their own policy lines. "Rarely have they [inter-Korean relations] seemed more bifurcated or more puzzling than in June [1999], when a naval battle erupted on the Yellow (West) Sea while simultaneously on the other side of the Peninsula cruise ships of the Hyundai group – Korea's largest *chaebol* – continued to ferry South Korean tourists to the scenic Mt. Kumgang on the northern side of the demilitarized zone as if nothing was happening."⁴⁸

The KPA was the sole participant and spokesperson for naval clashes, while the cabinet controlled the economic projects. The bifurcated policy that worked at cross-purposes is puzzling if one expects the state to act as a monolith or at least as a coordinated entity. However, these actions square well with each institution's consistently expressed preferences. Institutions started to move on their agendas as lines of institutional dispute resolution appeared to not be fully developed. Indeed, events beyond inter-Korean relations further demonstrate that distinct bureaucracies tried to cautiously test the extent of their authority during this period.

North Korea continued to negotiate in Geneva with the U.S. on its demand to inspect the suspected underground nuclear facility despite party and military opposition.⁴⁹ Washington rejected Pyongyang's demand for \$300 million but offered continuing existing food aid. Bilateral talks reached an impasse. After months of stalemate, Kim Jong Il traveled to China – his first trip abroad since his father's death. The move marked a long trend of private North Korean consultations with the Beijing leadership followed by Pyongyang announcing its willingness to talk. Two weeks after Kim's trip to China, North Korea consented to American demands to inspect Kumchang-ri in return for continued American food aid and U.S. training on potato farming.⁵⁰ Despite losing on the administrative economic push, the cabinet won on the compensation-for-inspections proposal.

Unfortunately, there is no data available on the final stage of decision-making. Though such information would undoubtedly improve our understanding of the policy process, this information gap does not prohibit a theoretical understanding of the state's policy formulation

⁴⁸ Samuel S. Kim, "North Korea in 1999, Bringing the Grand Chollima March Back In," *Asian Survey* 40,1 (2000), p. 160.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Olson, "North Korea and U.S. Meet on Inspection of Atom Plant," *New York Times*, January 17, 1999, p. A4.

⁵⁰ "North Korea Chief Making 1st Trip, to China," *New York Times*, March 3, 1999, p. A3. David E. Sanger, "N. Korea Consents to U.S. Inspection OF A Suspect Site," *New York Times*, March 17, 1999, p. A1.

and execution. What is most important for validating post-totalitarian institutionalism's theoretical expectations over the monolithic ideal types is the consistent policy expectations of each institution, conflicting policy goals and approaches between institutions, and the separation of wins and losses on an issue basis. Institutional divisions exist on core political questions and central authorities tend to select from these options in crafting and implementing policy.

The cabinet won its advocacy on the inspections issue but lost on the economic agenda. No single institution could claim permanent, comprehensive supremacy over another as the party enjoyed under Kim Il Sung. Institutions continued to resist one another's wins according to their preconceived policy platforms even after central authorities decided policy. Institutional leaders attempted to get the rest of the regime on board for policy implementation even after decisions. It was not automatic. Kim's central authority is critical, but it often does not end debate. The North Korean system is locked in an equilibrium outcome of institutional interaction defining the range of policy options, institutional competition informing and influencing policy decisions, and similar competitive dynamics playing itself out in implementing decided policy.

The United States inspected Kumchang-ri in May 1999. The inspection turned up empty tunnels without nuclear traces. The news opened the door for further diplomatic overtures. By the end of the month, former Defense Secretary William Perry traveled to North Korea to offer a deal: if Pyongyang halted missile flight tests, then Washington would remove substantial sanctions and improve diplomatic ties.⁵¹ Perry met with the figurehead SPA Presidium Chairman and held meetings with key players in the Foreign Ministry, Kang Sok Ju and Kim Kye Kwan. The Foreign Ministry issued a simple statement saying, "The talks took place in a sincere and frank atmosphere full of mutual respect."⁵² The cabinet's win put it in an advantageous position to expand its comprehensive policy agenda.

Two weeks after the long-debated inspection and Perry's visit, the North Korean media first mentioned the inspection. Instead of continually repeating in ideological essays that the North Koreans were correct that the tunnels indeed lacked any traces of a nuclear use, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling for a return to the Agreed Framework, "The visit proved objectively that the underground facility in Kumchang-ri is an empty tunnel, not related to nuclear development at all. As a result, it was clearly proved once again that we have been sincerely implementing the Geneva Agreed Framework."⁵³ There were no party commentaries or KPA statements on the inspection. Their euphoria for pursuing a confrontational policy towards the Americans was on hold. They had to find other ways to undermine the state's decided policy of accommodation with the U.S.

Instead of speaking about the inspection issue, the KPA responded with actions. It sent patrol boats across the Northern Limit Line – the disputed sea border between North and South Korea.⁵⁴ The UN Command drew the line in 1953, although the North Koreans refused to

⁵¹ Nicholas D. Kristof, "North Korea Unresponsive In U.S. Talks, Envoy Reports," *New York Times*, May 30, 1999, p. A6.

⁵² "DPRK's Kang Sok-chu, U.S. Special Envoy Perry Hold Talks," KCNA, May 28, 1999.

⁵³ "Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Kumchang-ri Facility," KCNA, June 9, 1999.

⁵⁴ For a detailed evaluation of conflict surrounding the NLL, see Terence Roehrig, "Korean Dispute Over the Northern Limit Line: Security, Economics, or International Law?" *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies* 3:194 (2008).

recognize it in the armistice. The NLL proceeds from the Military Demarcation Line at the center of the DMZ and hooks northward, hugging the North Korean coast. The NLL recognizes portions of the West (Yellow) Sea north of the 38th parallel as South Korean waters. Pyongyang prefers the Maritime Military Demarcation Line which continues as a straight line from the middle of the DMZ. The land border between the two Koreas slopes southward as it reaches the west coast of Korea, providing the North with segments of the West Sea south of the 38th parallel. The border dispute has been a long-standing area for clashes.

The KPA regularly sends patrol boats across the NLL. However, this time they engaged a South Korean warship. A South Korean warship attempted to chase the North Korean warship back across the Northern Limit Line. When the North Korean warship refused to retreat, the two navies exchanged gunfire, and the South Korean navy sank the North Korean vessel, killing all 20 North Korean sailors on board.⁵⁵ An unnamed source familiar with the overhead imagery leaked, “There was plenty of time for North Korea's military leadership to tell them to back off, but clearly they wanted to send a message that they were not about to back down.”⁵⁶

Interestingly, the KPA statement blamed the Americans for its role in establishing the Northern Limit Line decades earlier and only blamed Seoul as a “puppet military, under the command of the U.S. Forces.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the KPA's actions stalled the cabinet's inter-Korean negotiations. The next day, the North suspended talks with South Korea “for the time being.”⁵⁸ However, the cabinet quickly resumed them, concluding an eleven-day inter-Korean negotiating session within three weeks of the incident. The talks broke down over an unrelated issue regarding family reunions.⁵⁹

Without recognizing the competing bureaucratic interests within North Korea, U.S. officials called the clash a “stupid” mistake; others said the regime was not serious about negotiations. This incident provides more evidence of the importance of correctly understanding North Korea's internal politics if one seeks to interact with or influence them. Donald Gregg, a knowledgeable former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, noted “like everything the North Koreans do, no one is entirely sure why they did it” while another unnamed senior official simply labeled the action as the North Koreans again doing “something stupid.” Some congressional opponents to the Agreed Framework cited the clash as evidence of the talk's futility; viewing the state as a singular entity, they said North Korea was not serious about negotiations.⁶⁰

In fairness, these comments may have been aimed more at influencing the U.S. foreign policy agenda than analyzing the situation. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the analytical paucity

55 Sheryl WuDunn, “South Korea Sinks Vessel From North In Disputed Waters,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1999, p. A1. “UN Command-DPRK Talks Begin Amidst Firing Incident,” *Yonhap*, June 15, 1999. Song Sang-kun, “A ‘Disgraced DPRK’ Is Likely To Purge Its Military,” *Dong-a Ilbo*, June 16, 1999.

56 David Sanger, “Korean Clash May Ruin U.S. Reconciliation Bid,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1999, p. A10.

57 Pak Rim-su, “KPA Delegate Comments on Sea Border,” KCBS, August 26, 1999.

58 Sheryl WuDunn, “North Korea Suspends Contact with South,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1999, p. A10.

59 “ROK Appears To Have ‘Little’ Idea of How To Handle DPRK,” *Choson Ilbo*, July 4, 1999. Sang-chol and Yi Yong-chong, “Exclusive Interview With North Korean Chief Delegate PakYong-su,” *Chungang Ilbo*, July 2, 1999.

“Erik Eckholm, “South Korea Halts Talks In Dispute on Families,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1999, p. A4.

60 Sanger, June 17, 1999, p. A1.

of the monolithic model of North Korean politics; the comments indicated foreign policy specialists saw the move as perplexing, to be dismissed as an anomalous act or indicative of a strategic policy contrary to negotiations. These analysts did not recognize – at least publicly – the possibility that the clash was uncoordinated bureaucratic freelancing and reflected different agendas within the DPRK. It would be entirely consistent to expect that the KPA wanted to derail inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK talks, while the cabinet seriously pursued diplomatic rapprochement.

The naval incident delayed negotiations briefly. By the next month, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling on the U.S. to return to the Agreed Framework. Competing institutions interpreted the statement the following week differently. Facing different interpretations of its statement within the DPRK, the North Korean Foreign Ministry had to publicly clarify its own statement: “It has only been several days since the press statement of the spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry was issued, but this is already drawing great attention at home and abroad and bringing about a positive response. In the press statement, we once again put forth the principled position that we do not consider the United States the sworn enemy, and that if the United States recognizes our sovereignty and freedom of choice and treats us with good faith, we will develop relations with the United States based on the principles of equality and reciprocity. This is our Republic’s fundamental position and consistent attitude regarding the United States.”⁶¹ On behalf of the entire system, the Foreign Ministry was ready to deal.

However, the whole republic did not support this position. As the Foreign Ministry called for developing relations, the party indicated its desire to escalate military confrontation. Three days after the Foreign Ministry clarified the state’s “consistent attitude,” an unnamed detractor using the party’s boilerplate language cited the Foreign Ministry’s statement and concluded quite differently: “The touch-and-go situation prevailing on the Korean peninsula reminds one of a time bomb that may go off at any moment. The present situation compels us to maintain a higher vigilance and stronger revolutionary stand than ever before. Our armed forces and single-hearted unity, which have become invincible thanks to our party’s military-first politics and military-first revolutionary leadership, regard it as their inborn quality and intrinsic mode of counter-action to return fire for fire and artillery fire for pistol fire. The further the United States escalates pressure upon us, the stronger our reaction will become, bringing unpredictable consequences.”⁶²

The Foreign Ministry had authority to entertain negotiations, but the party actively sought to derail those negotiations and advocated military escalation. Its efforts for the time being would not bear fruit as the Foreign Ministry could pursue its agenda. The KPA’s effort in the West Sea and the party’s more general opposition did not prompt the regime to reverse course on its U.S. policy.

⁶¹ Kim Ho-sam, “Faith Must Be Shown in Action,” KCBS, July 30, 1999.

⁶² “More on DPRK Warning U.S. of ‘Unpredictable Consequence,’” KCBS, August 3, 1999.

Missile Negotiations and the Inter-Korean Summit

At the same time, a U.S. intelligence leak revealed that North Korea was preparing its Taepo Dong-2 rocket for launch later in the summer. If successful, the leak indicated the rocket would put the United States within North Korean missile range.⁶³ Party and army organs denounced the allegation and the United States more generally until the Foreign Ministry announced that the U.S. had agreed in Berlin to remove some sanctions against the DPRK.⁶⁴ The Foreign Ministry called the move “a reflection of the U.S. political will to stop pursuing its policy hostile to the DPRK and to improve relations” which “create[s] an atmosphere favorable for a negotiated solution to outstanding issues between the two countries.”⁶⁵ The announcement again only temporarily took the wind out of the sails of institutional opponents. The state stepped down its threat to test fire another long range missile and planned to return to the table.

The party and military again lost. Rhetorically, the KPA dug up the NLL issue again. The KPA rejected the maritime border’s validity and reiterated earlier claims that the border extended 35-40 miles south of the NLL.⁶⁶ It was a tenuous effort to antagonize the other side. The old trick did little as much bigger agreements were in the works. U.S. and North Korean negotiators agreed in Berlin that the U.S. would “ease some sanctions” in exchange for North Korea suspending any long-range missile launches.⁶⁷ The Clinton Administration upheld its pledge five days later, marking the first easing of U.S. sanctions against North Korea since 1953. The Foreign Ministry could point to concrete progress that the negotiating track allowed, shoring up its position internally vis-à-vis the party and military.

A Foreign Ministry statement paralleled the divisions within the U.S. political establishment on North Korea policy with divisions within North Korea on U.S. policy. The institution stated explicitly that some elements within the North Korean leadership preferred the confrontational path to the cabinet’s negotiating path: “At the Berlin talks held in September and November both sides agreed to hold high-level talks to discuss pending issues in near future, depending on a climate to be created for them. However, Republican congressmen are threatening to prevent the administration from carrying out its policy towards the DPRK.... It is hard to guess which is the true U.S. policy out of the conflicting policy options of the two parties.... In fact, we hear assertions made by different domains in the DPRK that the present U.S. Administration's policy towards the DPRK is intended to disarm and destroy it step by step

⁶³ Bill Gertz, “Pentagon predicts N. Korea will test long-range missile,” *Washington Times*, June 18, 1999, p. A5. Elizabeth Becker, “U.S. Says Photos Show North Korea Preparing for Missile,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1999, p. A3.

⁶⁴ Kim Nam-hyok, “No Maneuver of Isolation and Suffocation Can Budge Us,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 14, 1999, p. 6. Choe Hak-chol, “Absolutely No One Can Frighten Us,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 19, p. 6.

⁶⁵ “DPRK Not To Launch Missile,” KCNA, September 24, 1999.

⁶⁶ “ROK To Defend Existing Northern Limit Line,” *The Korea Herald*, September 4, 1999. “DPRK Repudiates Border, South Korea Rejects Change,” *Kyodo*, September 2, 1999. Doug Struck, “North Korea Says Sea Border Invalid, Claims New Waters,” *Washington Post*, September 3, 1999, p. A19. “DPRK Declares Sea Border with South Invalid,” *Hong Kong Agence France-Presse*, September 2, 1999.

⁶⁷ Paul Shin, “North Korea Unlikely to Get Significant Economic Benefits from Easing of U.S. Sanctions,” *Associated Press*, September 17, 1999. Keiji Urakami, “Clinton Announces Plans to Ease Sanctions on N. Korea,” *Japan Economic Newswire*, September 17, 1999. John F. Harris, “Officials Defend Plan to Reward N. Korea; Missile Pledge Could End U.S. Sanctions,” *Washington Post*, September 14, 1999, p. A24. David E. Sanger, “Trade Sanctions on North Korea are Eased by U.S.,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1999, p. A1.

in the end. They prefer the Republicans' assertion to be adopted as a U.S. policy to compel them to confront the U.S. militarily. In other words, we are fully prepared for both events: improvement of relations with the U.S. And showdown with it."⁶⁸ The Foreign Ministry's discussion of "different domains in the DPRK" and use of the third person to refer to North Korean institutions that prefer a confrontational approach suggests further that the Foreign Ministry is the institution committed to a negotiated solution to outstanding issues between the U.S. and North Korea and battles internally against those that fundamentally disagree with this approach.

Despite historic movement on sanctions, the KPA continued to press its concern about South Korean warships in the West Sea. The KPA reaffirmed its resolute stand against South Korean ships in "North Korean waters," arguing that the U.S. prodded the South Korean "puppets" to sink the North Korean warship. The statement is particularly interesting since it came in December, a full six months away from the height of the crab season that makes the waters lucrative and around which the inter-Korean naval clashes usually develop. The KPA usually denounces any clashes quickly after the event, and they could not cite any new evidence that the U.S. "prodded" the South Koreans to defend their territorial waters. The KPA talking point was grasping at straws to find any recent evidence to object to negotiations with the U.S.

The KPA continued, "The U.S. imperialists have worked hard to disarm the DPRK under the name of 'improvement of relations,' while escalating its military pressure upon the DPRK. However, the Korean people have taken firm and resolute measures against their moves, neither yielding to their military pressure nor being taken in by any appeasement and deception." KPA stood ready to win another Korean War, it concluded.⁶⁹ Lacking more recent evidence of U.S.-DPRK or North-South confrontational policies, the KPA's argument against diplomatic progress weakened. Central authorities did not register any sympathy with the KPA's argument.

The cabinet enjoyed a string of recent policy wins, but it did not become permanent. Engagement continued in a stop-and-go fashion. Working-level U.S.-DPRK talks in mid-November 1999 failed to produce results, while Japan and North Korea announced the following month that they would resume normalization talks previously stalled since 1992.⁷⁰ At the end of January 2000, North Korea agreed to send a delegation to Washington to discuss the missile issue. However, by end of March, the state had reversed itself: "We cannot visit the United States with the cap of a terrorist," according to the North Korean ambassador to China, Chu Chang Jun, referring to North Korea's position on the terrorist list. Such a move would force North Korea to negotiate from a position of weakness, he reasoned.⁷¹ Concurrently, the state

⁶⁸ "DPRK ForMin Denounces U.S. Congress Debate on Korea," KCNA, December 8, 1999.

⁶⁹ "U.S. Design To Stifle DPRK Comes Under Fire," KCNA, December 30, 1999.

⁷⁰ Gaku Shibata, "Lawmakers, N. Korea to Urge Talk Resumption," *The Daily Yomiuri*, December 4, 1999, p. 1. "Seoul Welcomes Normalization Talks Between North Korea and Japan," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, December 3, 1999. Calvin Sims, "North Korea, Apparently Seeking to End Its Isolation, Agrees to Resume Talks with Japan," *New York Times*, December 4, 1999, p. A8. Shingo Ito, "Japan, North Korea Sign Deal to Resume Rapprochement Talks," *Agence France Presse*, December 3, 1999.

⁷¹ John Pomfret, "N. Korea Threatens to Skip Talks; Visit to U.S. Tied to Removal From List of Terrorism Sponsors," *Washington Post*, March 29, 2000, p. A20. "DPRK Ambassador: U.S. Must Drop 'Terrorist State' Label," *Hong Kong Agence France Presse*, March 29, 2000.

pursued a blitz of establishing new diplomatic relations with Western states, including Italy, Australia, and Britain.⁷²

Pyongyang seemed to be moving generally in the strategic direction of accommodation, although it would not abandon its characteristic brinkmanship tactics. Deciphering between tactics and strategic reversal is difficult but important. When the cabinet raises a new demand like removal from the terrorist list when an agreement is about to be concluded, it suggests a brinkmanship tactic to secure more concessions rather than a more strategic effort to abandon negotiations altogether. The party and military's negotiating demands are much more far-reaching, preventing any real possibility of acceptance by the other side, such as a complete and immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula or South Korea joining the North in communism. Neither the military nor the party advanced the terrorist list removal demand this time, indicating the Foreign Ministry was just trying to get more out of the deal than was originally negotiated. Still, the tactic delayed the missile meeting until the following fall. In the interim, the two Koreas made historic progress towards easing tensions.

The June 13-15, 2000 Summit in Pyongyang between South Korean President Kim Dae Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il was the first summit between the two Koreas. Ending only ten days before the important fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Korean War, Seoul and Pyongyang pledged to wide-ranging cooperative endeavors aimed at reducing inter-Korean tensions and paving the way for eventual reunification. Kim Dae Jung argued that rapid absorption of North Korea, even if it could occur peacefully, would severely damage the South Korean economy.⁷³ Seoul sought international cooperation to develop and open North Korea's economy to pave the way for gradual reunification and to exert some leverage over Pyongyang in the process. Meanwhile, North Korea gained economically from this cooperation but some within the regime voiced concern that significant opening risked unraveling the state. They cited the former communist states of Europe as evidence that economic change precipitated political regime change. These distinct views between the DPRK bureaucracies came into sharp focus around the historic summit.

The cabinet argued that the political consequences of economic changes were manageable. Economic projects could be contained to avoid political consequences and provided a means to rehabilitate the North's dilapidated and declining economy. Immediately following the April 8 announcement of the June summit, the cabinet quickly and publicly supported the inter-Korean dialogue. It is possible to infer that the cabinet even had a role in

⁷² Howard W. French, "Suddenly, Reclusive North Korea Reaches Out to the World," *New York Times*, March 17, 2000, p. A8. "N. Korea hails Italian visit as start of new chapter in ties," *Agence France Presse*, March 29, 2000. "2 French Cos Seek to Advance into N Korea," *Asia Pulse*, March 16, 2000. Lincoln Wright, "Downer Decision Soon on Relations with N. Korea," *Canberra Times*, March 28, 2000, p. A3.

⁷³ Economic disparities between the two Koreas far surpassed the economic disparities between West and East Germany at the time of their reunification. With the economic scars of the 1997 Asian financial crisis fresh in the minds of most South Koreans, President Kim's conclusion held widespread appeal within his country. Bringing North Korea up to sixty percent of the living standard of South Korea – a figure noted for its assumption that it would prevent mass migration from the North to the South – would cost approximately \$319 billion in 1990, but the economic disparity had grown by the time of the summit in 2000 to approximately \$1.7 trillion. This disparity doubled about every five years. See Marcus Noland, *Economic Integration of the Korean Peninsula* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2000), p. 192-93.

pushing the summit behind the scenes, considering all other major actors remained in opposition before and after the Summit announcement and earlier cabinet efforts to promote inter-Korean economic projects. Only two days after announcing the first inter-Korean summit, Premier Hong went on record to support the talks: “Our people... fully support and concur with the North-South agreement reached on 8th April on holding highest-level talks between the two sides. They are also filled with the burning determination to expeditiously realize the fatherly leader's behest for the fatherland's reunification.”⁷⁴

During the summit, Kim Jong Il openly admitted to Kim Dae Jung that the party objected to the inter-Korean negotiations. Party Secretary Kim Yong-sun told South Korean President Kim Dae Jung that the U.S. military must remove all its troops from the peninsula. Kim Jong Il interrupted, “What problem would there be if the U.S. military remained?” Kim Yong-sun began presenting the party line, and Kim Jong Il replied, “Secretary Yong-sun, stop that. Even though I try to do something, people under me oppose it like this.”⁷⁵

This incident could have been staged. However, North Korea's highest-level defector has described Kim as one who often publicly castigates senior officials on a whim.⁷⁶ Political psychologists note he is prone to impulsive remarks and stands.⁷⁷ In short, it is also possible that this display actually reflected different bureaucratic positions within the state that Kim seeks to control. Indeed, public debate in the North Korean media after the summit and a joint announcement of a dramatically new inter-Korean policy further suggest Kim's statement reflects the political reality in Pyongyang rather than an effort to deceive international observers.

Diplomatic progress between the two Koreas spilled over into U.S.-DPRK relations. Clinton Administration officials announced the same day that the U.S. would drop a broad array of sanctions against North Korea and leave open the possibility of removing the DPRK from the terrorist list.⁷⁸ Two days later Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced a newly-scheduled trip to South Korea and China the following week, explicitly noting her intention to build on recent momentum to reach an agreement with North Korea to halt its missile launches.⁷⁹ North Korea too responded quickly, announcing its suspension of missile launches during Albright's trip to the region. The United States pledged to reopen missile talks with North Korea on the development and proliferation of long-range missiles.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ KCBS 4-10-00

⁷⁵ “Kim Jong-il interrupts own official to say U.S. forces may stay after reunification,” *Choson Ilbo* August 9, 2000, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 11, 2000. “Kim Jong Il could accept U.S. military presence,” *Daily Yomiuri* August 10, 2000, p. 1, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). Don Kirk, “A North Korean Shift on Opposing U.S. Troops?” *International Herald Tribune*, August 10, 2000, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Hwang Jang Yop, *Nanun Yoksaiu Chilliril Poatta [I Saw the Truth of History]* (Seoul, Hanul, 1999).

⁷⁷ Jerrold Post, “Kim Jong Il of North Korea, In the Shadow of His Father,” in *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁷⁸ David E. Sanger, “U.S. Says It Will Soon Drop Its Sanctions on North Korea,” *Washington Post*, June 15, 2000, p. A1. Yoo Cheong-mo, “Washington expected to ease N.K. sanctions by June 25,” *Korea Herald*, June 15, 2000. George Gedda, “U.S. working on sanctions lifting for North Korea,” *The Associated Press*, June 15, 2000.

⁷⁹ “Albright To Visit Seoul 23-24 Jun To Coordinate DPRK Policy,” *Yonhap*, June 17, 2000. Jane Perlez, “After Korean Talks, Albright Plans Seoul and Beijing Trip,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2000, p. A3.

⁸⁰ Charles Lee, “N. Korea Pledges to Abide by Missile Test Freeze,” *United Press International*, June 21, 2000. Jane Perlez, “North Korea's Missile Pledge Paves the Way for New Talks,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2000, p. A8.

The 50th anniversary of the start of the Korean War came and passed on June 25. North Korea cancelled its annual celebration of the anniversary, while Kim Dae Jung controversially scaled back the remembrance and used the holiday to highlight the importance of promoting inter-Korean peace.⁸¹ By the end of the summer, the two states reached tentative agreements on family reunions, opening liaison offices, establishing military-to-military communications (e.g., hotlines), economic cooperation, and rail and road connections across the DMZ.⁸² North Korea joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July and sent its Foreign Minister to the ARF meeting. By August, Pyongyang held a ten-day meeting for the leaders of each of South Korea's major newspapers, broadcast stations, and newswire. South Korea repatriated 63 North Korean spies serving prison sentences in the South, and Kim Jong Il's aide, Kim Yong-sun, visited Seoul to reaffirm inter-Korean economic projects. The cabinet's agenda was on a roll, and the party and military grew marginalized for the time being.

U.S.-North Korean negotiations proceeded apace on the missile issue. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Kim Jong Il had voiced support for a deal that would allow foreign governments to launch satellites on North Korea's behalf. Such a deal would permit North Korea to maintain and advance its rudimentary satellite presence and the accompanying economic benefits without worrying the region and the U.S. about its missile capability. The North Koreans replied that this offer was said in jest, raising questions whether the offer was miscommunicated or later rescinded due to Kim's rethinking the idea or internal deliberations.⁸³

During this period, missiles and nuclear developments dominated the U.S. agenda for negotiating with the North. Based on interviews with senior North Korean officials and direct experience with the American deliberators, Bob Carlin and John Lewis concluded that bureaucratic politics helped explain Pyongyang's reaction to U.S. efforts:

“In some cases, the United States faced perplexing DPRK demands or delays, which were often connected to turf battles within the DPRK. For issues on which the DPRK Foreign Ministry had the lead—and that meant virtually anything directly connected with the Agreed Framework—the Americans could usually arrange meetings with minimal difficulty. Issues outside the clear purview of the Agreed Framework, by contrast, raised problems because they engaged competing bureaucracies within the DPRK hierarchy. As noted above, the missile talks were difficult for many years because the Foreign Ministry could not make a convincing case that this subject was a significant foreign policy issue for the ministry rather than purely (or mostly) a subject that fell to those elements in the

⁸¹ Calvin Sims, “Seoul Mutes War's 50th Anniversary,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2000, p. A8.

⁸² John Burton, “Hopes of Reunion Increase for Divided Korean Families,” *Financial Times*, July 1, 2000. Doug Struck, “North Korea's Diplomatic Strides Pay Off,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 2000, p. A16. “2 Koreas Agree to Reopen Liaison Offices,” *Korea Times*, July 31, 2000. “The Two Koreas Continue to Report Progress in New Talks,” *New York Times*, August 31, 2000, p. A6. “New Cross-border Railway Aims to Open Economic Exchanges between Koreas,” *Associated Press*, September 18, 2000.

⁸³ Paul Shin, “Putin raises question of North Korean missiles with Kim Jong Il,” *Associated Press*, July 20, 2000. Michael R. Gordon, “North Korea Reported Open To Halting Missile Program,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2000, p. A6. “DPRK Leader's Comments on Missile Program Proposal Not Perceived as Joke,” *Interfax*, August 15, 2000. Kim Chong-il Was 'Entirely Serious' About Missiles to Putin,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 15, 2000, p. 1. Doug Struck and Joohee Cho, “N. Korean Dismisses Missile Idea; Offer to End Program Made 'Laughingly',” *Washington Post*, August 15, 2000, p. A1.

Workers party and the military involved with the production and sale of missiles. In this instance, moreover, the Foreign Ministry had an even more difficult case to make, not least because the United States did not act if it were seriously concerned about the issue, and which it did not begin to do until 1999. Before that, the talks never had a chance to develop a momentum of their own or move beyond mere repetition of the U.S. position. Repetition of talking points, not surprisingly, was never sufficient to put the message through to the right places in the DPRK leadership on a priority basis.”⁸⁴

By October 2000, President Clinton’s time in office was short. His Administration rushed to make progress on the missile issue. With less than three months left in office, President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and Secretary of Defense William Cohen met in Washington with North Korea’s second-highest ranking official, Vice Marshal Cho Myong-rok. The North sent a uniformed official but one representing the state; Cho carried a letter from Kim Jong Il. Both sides signed an agreement to “improve fundamentally their bilateral relations.... The two sides agreed to work together to develop mutually beneficial economic cooperation and exchanges to explore the possibilities for trade and commerce... To further the efforts to build new relations, the DPRK informed the U.S. that it will not launch long-range missiles of any kind while talks on the missile issue continue.” And “It was agreed that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will visit the D.P.R.K. in the near future... and to prepare for a possible visit by the President of the United States.”⁸⁵

Later that month, Secretary of State Albright visited Pyongyang. Both governments labeled the trip productive, but high-level commitment to improved relations soured as technical discussions the following month yielded no results.⁸⁶ Citing the on-going Supreme Court battle in late 2000 over who won the U.S. presidency, President Clinton decided to forego a U.S.-DPRK Summit and left the missile issue to his successor.

In 2001 North Korea’s movement on the missile issue and inter-Korean reconciliation again became more disjointed. Pyongyang adjusted its policy towards the U.S. considerably as the incoming Bush Administration defined a new approach. Pyongyang reacted in predictable ways as the cabinet’s continued advocacy for a negotiated solution became more difficult to sustain. Party and military positions on U.S. policy began winning out internally. They effectively argued that the U.S. sought to “suffocate” North Korea and foster rapid regime

⁸⁴ Carlin and Lewis, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Robert Carlin and John Lewis, *Policy in Context: Negotiating with North Korea, 1992 – 2007* (Stanford, CA: CISAC Paper, 2008), p. 43

⁸⁶ Tom Carter, “Cho, Clinton discuss concerns about terrorism, proliferation,” *The Washington Times*, October 11, 2000, p. A13. David E. Sanger, “North Korean at White House, Continuing a Warming Trend,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2000, p. A3. Steven Mufson, “Clinton Might Visit N. Korea Next Month,” *Washington Post*, October 13, 2000, p. A19. Tom Carter, “Clinton plans first-ever presidential trip to N. Korea; Albright will visit Pyongyang to pave way,” *Washington Times*, October 13, 2000, p. A1. “US, NKorea Could Restore Diplomatic Ties During Clinton Visit,” *Agence France Presse*, October 13, 2000. Jane Perlez, “Albright Greeted with a Fanfare by North Korea,” *New York Times*, October 24, 2000, p. A1. “Albright says Kim ending long-range missile launches,” *Kyodo*, October 24, 2000. Hong Won-sang, “ROK Government's Response,” *Taehan Maeil*, October 24, 2000. “Lee, Albright, Kono Discuss Pace of Improving Ties with N.K.,” *Yonhap*, October 24, 2000. Jane Perlez, “Albright Reports Progress in Talks with North Korea,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2000, p. A1. “Clinton will Not Visit North Korea During Asia Tour: White House,” *Agence France Presse*, November 4, 2000. Jane Perlez, “U.S.-North Korea Missile Talks Stall; Clinton Trip Is in Doubt,” *New York Times*, November 4, 2000, p. A6.

change. Nevertheless, the state showed its ability to pursue distinct policy lines on U.S. policy, reunification, and economic management. The cabinet shifted to merely limit the party and military's agenda on U.S. policy and focused on maintaining its momentum in inter-Korean relations and market-based economic construction.

Conclusion

The first 27 months after North Korea's September 1998 constitutional revision saw tremendous institutional jostling for bureaucratic supremacy and agenda control. The party tried to treat the military and cabinet as its subordinates, directing policy out of an ideologically-guided lens, and the military and cabinet resisted this power grab. The constitutional revision formally made them peer institutions and diluted the party's ability to dictate to the others. The military and cabinet's fighting back against the party's assertion of continued dominance reflected inter-institutional jostling over specific policy questions. Institutions advocated and even implemented policy preferences in contradiction to one another.

Although central arbitration between institutional policy positions remains hidden from view, policy was markedly uncoordinated in the early months after the announcement of this new constitutional arrangement. The three institutions simultaneously implemented contradictory policies. These contradictions led thoughtful contemporary observers to note this posed a theoretical puzzle for the monolithic interpretations of the North Korean state. If policy was defined at the top, how did one explain the fundamental contradictions pursued simultaneously in North Korean policy? The post-totalitarian institutionalism model helps explain this puzzle.

The party, military, and cabinet held distinct policy outlooks on a broad array of strategic policy questions. They debated policy in the controlled media and advanced institutionally consistent policy platforms. National policy varied as central authorities selected between one of the policy options presented from below. Policy innovation did not originate from the "nerve center." In every major case, policy was first proposed by one of the state's institutional organs. The range of policy alternatives is more restrained and predictable than previously analyses have allowed. Kim may be impulsive, but a close reader of the North Korean press can delineate the type and scope of North Korea's policy responses to external events.

This chapter demonstrates not only distinct institutional views and advocacy, but the critical role of these institutions to define the agenda. Though Kim and his central leadership is not bound by these options, they have generally selected from a range of ideas presented and debated between these institutions. The North Korean system is more inclusive of a wider group of elite opinion and pluralistic than previous characterizations allow. Institutional debates are prevalent and observable and provide the contemporary analyst charged with predicting North Korean actions an opportunity to critically narrow the body of possible actions by looking at those being seriously discussed within the regime. As will be discussed later in this study, recognizing the drivers of North Korean strategic decision-making further reduces the uncertainty laden in any effort to predict a state's meaningful actions.

The following chapter evaluates a distinct time period after North Koreans generally agreed in the press that the external environment had changed. It provides another opportunity to

confirm or deny the empirical validity of this new model's theoretical expectations. The following chapter shows how institutional positions remained constant, but central authorities responded to the new U.S. policy with a confrontational policy. However, the state also compartmented its U.S. policy from inter-Korean and economic marketization efforts. In short, North Korea continues its pattern as a post-totalitarian institutional state beyond the timeframe analyzed in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Segmenting Policy and Issue Linkages, 2001-2006

Introduction

From 2001 – 2006 North Korea continued to react to its external environment. The three major bureaucracies maintained their general policy frameworks, and the state pursued a moderately varying policy. This period demonstrates how Pyongyang can segment different aspects of its policy. Each institution advocated a comprehensive platform, but each could only pursue part of its agenda at a given time. During this time, institutions tried to extend policy wins in one area by arguing that other issues were closely related and therefore should be linked to the original policy question. The most significant instance of this linkage strategy was found in U.S. policy. With the downturn in U.S.-DPRK relations, the party and military enjoyed greater freedom in this area and repeatedly attempted to link the U.S. with South Korea and marketization efforts to stem the cabinet's agenda in those areas as well. The linkage strategy failed as Washington and Seoul diverged significantly on North Korea policy, and Pyongyang's central leadership pursued distinct policies towards the two allies. Though the party and military cited contemporary examples of what they termed the U.S.'s "hostile policy" to put U.S.-DPRK diplomatic progress on hold, central leadership still accepted the cabinet's advocacy to advance inter-Korean projects and marketization efforts at the same time, demonstrating how Pyongyang can separate issue areas.

The Bush Administration reviewed Washington's North Korea policy in the first few months after inauguration. During this period, the North Korean bureaucracy debated its future direction towards the United States, but the state deferred major changes until the end of Washington's policy review. The policy review concluded in the summer of 2001 that engagement was the only option but before it could be implemented, terrorists struck the United States on September 11, 2001. Washington's focus changed to fighting terrorists and state sponsors of terrorism. Citing statements by high-level officials, including the 2002 "Axis of Evil" State of the Union Address, party and military officials argued that North Korea too may be targeted for regime change operations. By late 2002, U.S.-DPRK relations hit a low point as Pyongyang concluded that the U.S. "abrogated" the Agreed Framework. Party and military calls to scrap the Agreed Framework won out as the state reversed course, ending its eight-year nuclear freeze of the Yongbyon nuclear complex and moving to withdraw from the Nonproliferation Treaty.

The U.S.-DPRK relationship was only one of the three major issues at play during this period, and inter-Korean relations and marketization efforts proceeded on a different track. Inter-Korean relations generally improved as the liberal South Korean Presidents Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moon-hyun (2003-2008) prioritized inter-Korean engagement where the previous conservative governments in Seoul had pursued tougher lines. The North Korean cabinet likewise pushed an agenda of inter-Korean rapprochement. Party and military actors tried to undermine inter-Korean projects by linking Seoul to Washington, now seen in Pyongyang as especially hostile. The bureaucratic tactic had some limited success but central authorities seemed to recognize the stark differences between Seoul and Washington's policies.

North Korea's marketization also progressed during this period. The cabinet actively pushed economic changes, and on July 1, 2002 the state introduced significant wage and price

reforms. The party objected to these “capitalist” impulses on ideological grounds, and military officials openly worried about foreign ideas seeping across the border as trade intensified. Defectors and spies could penetrate the state more easily, they argued in the press. Though the state has implemented several market reforms, it has not yet shown a deep, irreversible commitment towards reforming its economy, mirroring the debating positions of institutional opponents.¹

Internal debate continued in the press on all three issue areas, and central authorities selected from the universe of policy options presented from below. These discussions took place prior to policy decisions. Though the internal social and economic situation along with South Korean and Chinese aid decisions seemed to drive central authorities’ decisions on marketization, Pyongyang again demonstrated a reactive orientation in its U.S. policy and inter-Korean efforts. North Korea’s institutions presented distinct policy lines, but the external environment pushed central authorities towards one institution’s policy advocacy over another’s.

Towards Economic Reforms

Pyongyang debated and made preparatory moves toward marketization during the U.S. policy review, but it refrained from announcing any major changes. As President Bush was sworn in to office in 2001, Kim Jong Il made a major trip to Southern China. The trip was noteworthy as it provides rare insight into how Kim arbitrates between competing interests below him. Kim took an unusually large and diverse delegation on this long trip to China’s financial centers and Special Economic Zones. In Kim’s rare trips abroad, he usually takes only a few senior Foreign Ministry and party officials. This time, however, he took multiple senior members of the party, military, and cabinet organizations. He brought all the major players needed to establish a coherent, long-range economic policy for the state. The state moved significantly towards marketization plans, but it did not implement these changes while relations with the U.S. remained in limbo. Full realization of economic opening required improved relations with the United States to provide security amid opening.

The delegation visited cities that had developed rapidly since 1985 under China’s relatively open economic arrangement for these areas. The most important stop was China’s main financial center, Shanghai. Kim Jong Il last visited Shanghai in 1983 when its level of development was roughly akin to Pyongyang’s. Kim was reportedly shocked at the differences between Pyongyang and Shanghai when he returned in 2001 despite being briefed prior to this trip.² North Korea’s press coolly noted that “Comrade Kim Jong Il expressed his opinions on visiting Shanghai, which has changed beyond the imagination of the world’s people in a short period of time.” Privately, he reportedly exploded in anger, harshly scolding the Party Secretary in charge of reunification, Kim Yong-sun, upon seeing how far Shanghai had eclipsed Pyongyang. Memoirs of those close to Kim report that he is subject to fits of rage and his uncontrollable screaming can “shake the windows.”³ His screaming was so loud that foreigners could hear his words through a door. The Dear Leader blamed the KWP Secretary for

¹ McEachern, Patrick, “Benchmarks of Economic Reform in North Korea,” *Korea Yearbook* 2008:1, pp. 231-46.

² Yu Sang-chol, “Kim Chong-il ‘Shocked at Shanghai,’” *Chungang Ilbo*, January 19, 2001.

³ Michael Mazarr, “Kim Jong Il: Strategy and Psychology,” in *On Korea: KEI Academic Paper Series* (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute, 2008), pp. 1-21.

Pyongyang's insufficient development – when every major institutional actor had representatives in the room. He seemed to blame the party's economic model for the state's lack of development; the state soon thereafter departed in some substantial ways from this economic model.

Despite this scolding, the North Korean media reported that the Premier of the Chinese State Council Zhu Rongji allegedly congratulated the Korean Workers Party on its “correct leadership” that had “reaped big achievements in all sectors.” Kim Jong Il replied publicly, however, that Shanghai “carried the sublime ideal... demonstrating pride on the land of China.” He lauded China's “cataclysmic change,” approving of Shanghai's specific development path that incorporated substantial marketization and Special Economic Zones.⁴ China and North Korea have long had a tenuous relationship as North Korea has attempted to assert its sovereign place as an equal while concerned that China treats it as a younger brother.⁵ It would not be an easy decision for a North Korean leader – especially if he was primarily committed to a nationalist ideology – to follow China's lead, but within a few months, Kim empowered the cabinet to take a different approach to economic development that shared some early steps as China's path.

The party minimized Kim's statements. The institution touched off a debate after Kim's decision. It did not simply accept the supreme leader's pronouncement, and the cabinet still had to engage the party to pursue its economic agenda that Kim authorized. Again, this resistance shows the relative autonomy of North Korean institutions in advancing the organization's interests. The fact that the party would cautiously dispute the wisdom of Kim's pronouncement is more significant than the substance of their argument.

The party argued that socialism improved the state's material condition in face of distinct crises that China never faced. China's experience simply was not particularly relevant. The party tapped into the anti-Chinese, Korean nationalist sentiment by presenting the party's goals as a moral imperative that should be judged by historical, not short-term, standards. The party's achievements were more comprehensive than a narrow reading of the economy; viewing all three issue areas together, the party argued, it has created a dignified, Korean system in line with revolutionary principles: “[Chinese] General Secretary Comrade Jiang Zemin expressed satisfaction with the fact that the DPRK people have overcome manifold difficulties and achieved significant developments and new achievements in many sectors, including economic construction, North-South reunification, and foreign relations under the leadership of the DPRK's Workers Party... our people regard living and carrying out the revolution under a superior socialist system by upholding the great leader and under the party's strong leadership, as the utmost dignity and pride. They are also overflowing with the firm determination to advance toward the independent road, the socialist road, which they selected to the end.”⁶ The party noted how it is involved in all three strategic issue areas, pushing North Korea's specific, “superior” variety of socialism. They are claiming that their position exemplifies what it means

⁴ “DPRK Reports Leader Kim Jong Il's Visit to PRC,” KCBS, January 20, 2001.

⁵ Warren Cohen, *East Asia at the Center* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007).

⁶ “DPRK-China Friendship Will Be Strengthened and Developed Century After Century,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 23, 2001.

to be Korean and for which Koreans have struggled for centuries. Koreans are not Chinese, and the party will defend the Korean way.

The cabinet's economic journal shot back with its own spin on socialist ideology, nationalism, and the party's proper role. The cabinet criticized the party's position as focused only on the short-term morality of individual actions without recognizing the downstream consequences of building a socialist utopia. Through promoting "actual profits," the DPRK could return to the socialist paradise and civilized life in line with its revolutionary principles: "We are accelerating the construction of a powerful state while highly displaying superiority of socialism in all fields of revolution and construction. However, this is not merely intended to overcome impending economic difficulties but to turn our nation into a paradise of people where people would enjoy a better wealthy life. For us to resolve the problems on life including the food problem and to make a breakthrough in building an economic power, we should thoroughly discard shortsighted work attitude and work style in overall economic works. It is particularly important to ensure actual profits." These two institutions offer competing ideas of moral action and taking pride in Korea's specific path. The party focuses on the road – the individual action – to determine its morality while the cabinet injects the consequences of actions into the decision-making calculus.

The cabinet publication instructs workers on how to produce agricultural products "in the *Juche* method" albeit according to foreign prices and "investment effectiveness." The cabinet tried to stretch the flexible *Juche* ideology to justify its policies, but the argument was tenuous. Economic data tended to favor the cabinet's position; marketization proved more economically beneficial in contemporary North Korea than the party's socialist push. However, the party's advocacy enjoyed an ideological advantage; it simply represented the socialist principles more simply and clearly. Though neither side conceded either the empirical or the ideational debate completely, this did reinforce generally an ideology versus pragmatism back-and-forth.

As part of its refusal to cede the anti-Chinese, nationalist position to the party, the cabinet portrayed marketization efforts – even if it had parallels in China – as "Korean-style socialism." It did not cite the Chinese experience as justification for its policies, rather this was used to discredit the moves internally. Nevertheless, the cabinet remained on the defense on these questions, as their party and military critics drew comparative parallels to China and Eastern Europe. The Eastern European example was used more often by marketization's internal critics; the cabinet's position risked unraveling the socialist system and collapsing the state. For North Korean elites, this was used as something to be avoided.

Kim's authorizing the cabinet's economic position based at least in part on his observations in Southern China indicates a degree of pragmatism in his decision-making. He essentially worked as an unwitting comparativist, viewing the outcomes of China's distinct policy path with some envy. Ideological and nationalist arguments about the morality of the decision itself or the "Korean-ness" of the policy failed to dissuade a policy change. Likewise, party contentions that the cabinet effectively cited a spurious correlation between marketization and development failed to persuade central authorities. The tremendous differences that had grown between Shanghai and Pyongyang seemed to push the state to develop significant economic changes similar to some early moves by Deng's China that Pyongyang would implement the following year.

The cabinet won this policy battle, but it did not stop the party from resisting the cabinet's authority. Within a month, an article in the government's newspaper appeared, demanding that the cabinet follow the "party's policy-level guidance... in this year's socialist economic construction."⁷ The cabinet ignored the demand and pursued its economic agenda as the state's decided policy line. Indeed, it increasingly seemed that real power of the economy lay with the cabinet. Foreign business and government officials treated the cabinet as the key economic policy bureaucracy. Premier Hong met with the Russian Railways Minister Nikolay Aksenenko to discuss a possible, highly lucrative project to connect South Korean and Japanese markets to Europe via North Korea and the Trans-Siberian railway. He did not meet with party or military representatives.⁸ Likewise, several European Ambassadors to the DPRK have noted that their official business, most notably including economic cooperation efforts, flow almost exclusively through the cabinet bureaucracy. The party is not interested in meeting with them to discuss projects that require some degree of opening.⁹ The cabinet had an increased role in economic affairs, but it still would take several months for Pyongyang to decide on its specific course of action. By the end of 2001, central authorities reportedly decided to inject more market mechanisms into the North Korean economy and started to implement these changes on July 1, 2002.

Issue Linkages: Inter-Korean and U.S. Policy

Pyongyang's inter-Korean policy remained ill defined during this period as the state considered whether to segment warming inter-Korean relations from cooling DPRK-U.S. relations. Party officials objected to negotiating with South Korea as an affront to the state's dignity. The party could only support inter-Korean talks if the South met all of the North's core demands before negotiations began.¹⁰ The party again showed that it did not measure success or failure based on pragmatic metrics but on the morality of the act itself; the party tried to monopolize the moral discourse, citing its role as the authoritative interpreters of *Juche*. Predictably, the cabinet refuted the party by citing the need for continued inter-Korean projects for economic advancement.

South Korean President Kim Dae Jung prioritized inter-Korean cooperation and planned a trip to Washington to convince the new administration to follow his lead. The dynamic Kim was reportedly convinced he could get Washington on board, allowing inter-Korean policy to transform North Korean society, economics, and eventually, politics. By most accounts, the March 2001 summit was a disaster.¹¹ The South Korean media speculated widely that if Washington moved away from the Agreed Framework, it may kill Kim Dae Jung's "Sunshine Policy." The South Korean president would have a difficult time convincing his divided political

⁷ "DPRK Daily on Major Economic Sectors To Be Developed in 2001," *Minju Choson*, March 13, 2001, p. 2.

⁸ "North Korea, Russia Express Interest in Linking Railways," ITAR, March 17, 2001, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, March 21, 2001.

⁹ Interviews Conducted May – September 2008.

¹⁰ "South Korean Paper Analyses North's Delegation to China," KCNA, January 21, 2001, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, January 12, 2001.

¹¹ David E. Sanger, "Bush Tells Seoul Talks with North Won't Resume Now," *New York Times*, March 8, 2001, p. A1. White House Press Release 2001 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010307-6.html>>, accessed July 25, 2008.

landscape to continue to follow the Sunshine path.¹² As it would turn out, Pyongyang's reaction to the summit was a greater concern than South Korean internal politics. Party commentaries claimed the summit demonstrated that Washington only had aggressive intent, so the KPA stood ready to fight another war.¹³ The state followed the party's advocacy and postponed inter-Korean ministerial meetings two weeks later.

However, two weeks passed between the U.S.-ROK summit and Pyongyang's postponement announcement. In the interim, North Korea made several conciliatory gestures towards the South. Pyongyang allowed separated families to exchange 600 letters – an important South Korean demand – only two days after the summit. Furthermore, North Korea sent an unprecedented delegation to Seoul to express the state's condolences at the funeral of Chung Ju-yung, the founder of South Korea's largest *chaebol*, Hyundai. Only after two weeks of internal debate did North Korea take action by postponing – not canceling – scheduled inter-Korean ministerial meetings. The weak response demonstrated that Pyongyang sought to register its displeasure but had not yet given up on engagement with Seoul or Washington. Central authorities could select a middle path between different institutional positions. Importantly, North Korea's post-totalitarian institutionalism moderated state policy in both a general sense and in specific instances – a point taken up again in the concluding chapter. The following month, the North Korean cabinet reached out to Washington.

Cabinet Premier Hong addressed the Supreme People Assembly to present his economic vision and extend a foreign policy olive branch. This is the most high-profile speech the cabinet Premier regularly delivers each year. After giving the necessary accolades to the party and socialism, the Cabinet Premier described his dual commitment to market incentives and promoting “friendly” relations with the U.S. “In keeping with the changed environment and conditions, the cabinet will uniquely pioneer the method of the management and operation of the socialist economy in our own way. All the sectors and units of the people's economy should thoroughly embody the demand of the Taean work system, properly combine the state centralized uniform guidance with the creative ingenuity of lower units in economic management, and strictly apply the socialist principle of distribution so that everyone can work to his best ability and get paid according to the work done.”

The Premier advocated modifying the very essence of the 1960s-era communist (Taean) work system with monetary incentives for individual workers; Taean specifically sought to root out this type of individualism. He placed his institution's advocacy within a specifically Korean context, protecting his argument against critics charging it betrayed the nation. Future commentaries modified the “socialist economy in our own way” language to “our-style socialism” or “Korean-style socialism,” indicating again the continued importance of nationalist sentiment and how all institutional actors tried to tap that nationalism.

¹² “ROK Official Says Seoul Urges U.S. To Resume Talks With DPRK 'Soon',” *Korea Times*, March 26, 2001.

“CFR Urges Bush to Support Seoul's Policy of Engaging N. Korea,” *Yonhap*, March 26, 2001. Howard W. French, “Seoul Fears U.S. Is Chilly About Detente with North,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2001, p. A9.

¹³ “There is Nothing to Gain From the Policy to Crush Us,” *Nodong Sinmun*, March 18, 2001. “U.S. Urged To Properly Understand Its Opponent,” KCNA, March 19, 2001. “Hatred,” KCBS, March 21, 2001. “The Ringleaders Who Strain the International Situation,” KCBS, March 22, 2001.

Hong also discussed the cabinet's *Juche* foreign policy. The cabinet interpreted this ideological phrase as promoting friendly relations with all countries and without mentioning confronting the U.S. militarily: "In the future, we will continue to implement our *Juche*-oriented foreign policy in a consistent manner, and develop friendly and cooperative relations with other nations so that the sovereignty of our country and the dignity of our nation shines even more. We will expand and develop great unity in a full-fledged manner with all countries of the world who are friendly to our country."¹⁴ If Washington decided to pursue cooperative relations with the DPRK, the cabinet could push for reciprocal action. The Premier's major speech is noteworthy not because the regime claimed to be peace-loving, rather because it came amid constant party commentaries calling for confronting the imperialists and developing the state's military capabilities instead of negotiating.

In May 2001 Kim Jong Il authoritatively announced that the jury was still out on the North's strategic direction in relation to the U.S. Institutions debated policy options for months, but Kim had not yet made a decision. He pledged to a high-level EU delegation in Pyongyang led by Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson in his position as President of the EU that North Korea would "wait and see" about the Bush Administration's policy review. The state was at a fork in the road; institutions defined the paths ahead in different directions, but Kim would ultimately decide which road to take based on his and institutional advisers' interpretations of Washington's new policy. In the meantime, North Korea pledged a unilateral moratorium on launching long-range missiles until 2003 despite military objections. Kim Dae Jung welcomed the announcement and said he hoped Washington would resume missile talks with Pyongyang.¹⁵ The U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, announced Washington would resume negotiations with Pyongyang within a few weeks as the policy review was reaching its conclusion.¹⁶

An American scholar, Selig Harrison, traveled to Pyongyang the following month. He warned that the perception a tougher line in Washington's policy emboldened hardliners within the DPRK: "What I sensed in this visit is that the hard-liners in North Korea have gotten a new lease on life as a result of the Bush administration. They have put North-South progress on hold and I am afraid they will continue to gain strength unless the tone of the administration changes and the Bush administration reiterates its commitment to pursue normalization."¹⁷ Some may dismiss Harrison's "sense" that hardliners were gaining as non-falsifiable interpretation of meetings of one engagement advocate. However, the wider point is that Harrison's interviews document differences of opinion among elites and their willingness to express differences to a foreigner.

Indeed, in advance of a decision from Kim, North Korea pursued divergent policies simultaneously. North Korea's bureaucracies acted in accordance with standard operating procedures and contradicted one another but did not take any truly bold decisions. The KPA

¹⁴ Hong Song-nam, "On Juche 89 (2000) Work and Tasks for Juche 90 (2001) of the DPRK Cabinet," KCBS, April 5, 2001.

¹⁵ "Peace lies with Bush, says N Korean leader," *The Australian*, May 4, 2001, p. 9. "North Korea to Keep Ban on Missile Tests," *The Globe and Mail*, May 4, 2001, p. A8.

¹⁶ "Talks between U.S., N.K. Depend on Timing of Review": Fleischer," *Yonhap*, May 11, 2001. "N. Korea, U.S. May Meet on Sidelines of ARF Meeting," *Kyodo*, May 11, 2001.

¹⁷ John Pomfret, "N. Korea Said to Warn of New Missile Tests," *Washington Post*, June 4, 2001, p. A15.

indicated its willingness to launch more short-range missiles – a regular occurrence – and sent its naval vessels south of the NLL again, prompting another clash with the South Korean navy on the anniversary of the Korean War’s outbreak.¹⁸ As the two Korean navies engaged each other in the West Sea again, the cabinet hosted a unification forum at Mt. Kumgang on North Korea’s east coast, celebrating the one-year anniversary of the June 15 declaration on North-South cooperation. Official representatives from the two Koreas attended the forum, South Korean visitors continued to vacation at Mt. Kumgang, and inter-Korean trade set another new record high.¹⁹ However, Yongbyon remained verifiably frozen and the state refrained from test firing any long-range missile systems. Central authorities waited for a critical variable to decide which road to take and which bureaucracies to empower. Kim seemed to be still committed to “waiting and seeing” as he pledged to the EU delegation. He would not have to wait much longer.

Pyongyang Reacts to New U.S. Policy

The completed U.S. policy review concluded in late July that the U.S. should engage North Korea. Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the Administration’s “strong support” for Kim Dae Jung’s Sunshine Policy and the U.S.’s willingness to meet the North Koreans anytime, anyplace without precondition.²⁰ The announcement was good news for the cabinet, but the North Korean media did not sound off in response. It only repeated standard calls for the U.S. to remove all troops from the Korean peninsula and reiterated the party’s “principled stand” against the U.S.²¹ After waiting for months for the result of this policy review and debating courses of action, one would expect a robust response in short order, but Pyongyang’s bureaucracies did not reply for weeks.

Kim Jong Il was on a long trip when Powell announced the result of the policy review. Kim was en route to Moscow via the Trans-Siberian railroad.²² It is unclear if no one left in Pyongyang had authority to present a new view on the American proposal in the North Korean media or that doing so would have little utility with the main decision-maker away for the next month. Only upon his return did the bureaucracies begin presenting their contradictory views on the policy review in the official press. This seemed to suggest at the very least that Kim’s train contained the core audience of the institutional debate. However, before Pyongyang reached conclusion on the U.S. policy review, new instructions coming out of Kim’s trip to Russia intervened to change the emphasis of debate.

Upon Kim’s return from his summit meetings with the Russian president, all media outlets ran several editorials lambasting the U.S. pursuit of missile defense and the U.S. “exaggeration” of North Korea’s missile threat. This was certainly not the first time Pyongyang objected to U.S. missile defense plans, but it was a notable increase. Putin sought North Korean

¹⁸ “North and South Korean Vessels Clash at Sea,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2001, p. A8.

¹⁹ Samuel Kim, 2001.

²⁰ “Colin Powell Departs for China,” *Yonhap*, July 28, 2001. “Bush 'Tentatively Scheduled' to Visit ROK Oct Prior to APEC,” *Korea Times*, July 29, 2001. Steven Mufson, “Powell Urges Resumption of N. Korea Talks; U.S. Expresses Strong Support for S. Korean 'Sunshine Policy',” *New York Times*, July 28, 2001, p. A13.

²¹ “DPRK Radio to ROK Reiterates Position on Dialogue with U.S.,” KCBS, August 1, 2001. Doug Struck, “Koreas' Relations Bog Down; North Recoils from Hard Line by U.S.,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2001, p. A1.

²² Patrick Cockburn, “Russians Warm to Korea’s Trans-Siberian Kim,” *Independent on Sunday*, August 5, 2001, p. 18. Dave Montgomery, “Russia, N. Korea uphold missile ban,” *Ottawa Citizen*, August 5, 2001, p. A9.

assistance on missile defense for over a year. North Korean missile launches strengthened Washington's arguments in favor of deploying the high-tech defense despite Russian and others' objections. The North Korean Broadcast Station even read a translated Russian newspaper article on the air that rejected U.S. pressure on North Korea as an excuse to create a missile threat to justify missile defense. North Korea also focused its speech at the UN General Assembly that month on denouncing missile defense and the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty as creating a new nuclear arms race.²³

Kim's Moscow trip helped the cabinet's position. Presumably, this highly unusual spike in missile defense discussions stemmed from Kim's personal instructions after his summit meetings with Putin. This incident demonstrates how Kim can get information from sources other than his own regime and act on it. Such sources of information are notable and significant but not regular. For the purposes of this study, the military's resistance to Kim's position is the most significant point. Flight tests provide the military with technical information to develop their missile systems, but they also undermine ongoing diplomatic efforts. In this case, the Russians likely opposed North Korean flight tests and convinced Kim to maintain his flight test moratorium. The cabinet did not need to convince Kim Jong Il and did not publish articles in support of the position at this time, but it tracks with their general policy preferences. Still, the party voiced opposition to Kim's policy.

The party called for a principled, independent foreign policy. The party regularly discussed issues with clear foreign policy implications, but it discusses them in an anti-imperialist context. It is rare to see the phrase "foreign relations" in a party article. The party's call for an independent foreign policy in this case, therefore, likely did not communicate a need to create policy independent of the U.S. (the imperialists), rather independent of some other country. The party likely was calling for Pyongyang to resist Russian influence to end missile launches to support Russia's anti-missile defense agenda. The party called on the government to join it in asserting a principled, independent foreign policy.²⁴ The media response suggests that institutional actors can and do cautiously oppose Kim's policy guidance. Still, neither the party nor the military took observable action against Kim's policy line other than voicing dissent cautiously.

Before clearly deciding on a policy course in response to the U.S. policy review, Kim Jong Il decided to go to China. Kim traveled much more than normal during this period. He went to China the month after his Russia trip, suggesting the leader was considering significant policy choices and personally consulting with the major states around him. One day before Kim left for China in early September 2001, North Korea agreed to resume inter-Korean talks. China had long advocated North Korea's gradual economic opening, and Kim may have made the move in anticipation of Beijing's demand.

However, Pyongyang waited too long to reply to the U.S. policy review. International events interceded to block diplomatic progress. On September 11, 2001 terrorists attacked the

²³ "The DPRK and the United States; Crisis and Prospect," KCBS, October 13, 2001. "DPRK Delegate Speaks at 56th Session of UN General Assembly," KCNA, October 24, 2001. Yi Hak-nam, "Efforts for Independence and Progression, Threat to Peace and Security," *Nodong Sinmun*, December 25, 2001, p. 6.

²⁴ "Our Republic's Firm, Independent Foreign Policy," KCBS, August 30, 2001.

United States. North Korea joined the international chorus in condemning international terrorism. Already a signatory to all the other major international conventions on terrorism, the Foreign Ministry announced in November that the state would sign the International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism and the International Convention against Taking Hostages. Washington's focus changed substantially and results of the policy review seemed to be erased as the White House recrafted its foreign policy, including policy that affected North Korea. Kim again stalled his U.S. policy, looking for Washington to focus on Northeast Asia.

Inter-Korean talks continued in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks. In September and early October, the two Koreas held two successful meetings. However, after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan on October 7, the U.S. and South Korea placed their militaries on the Korean peninsula and elsewhere on alert. The security-conscious leadership in Pyongyang consistently voiced concern about military exercises and alerts. To register its objection, North Korea insisted that all family reunions take place only at Mt. Kungang, North Korea, citing security concerns from the raised alert status.²⁵ The October set-back would seem minor. By November, inter-Korean relations hit a real snag. The Sixth Ministerial ended without agreement, marking the first time such a meeting failed to make demonstrable progress since the June 2000 Summit.²⁶ The Sunshine policy's honeymoon period ended.

The party expanded their objections to inter-Korean economic projections. They modified their normal exhortation of capitalism to include a condemnation of marketization. Previously, the party objected to "capitalism" but refrained from criticizing "market socialism" and cabinet calls for "actual profits."²⁷ Now, the party argued markets destabilize the political system, and the state must return to planning the economy. "Fully promoting the superiority of the socialist planned economy is one of the principled issues that emerge in the process of executing the party's ideas for constructing a powerful socialist state... The superiority of a socialist planned economy over a capitalist market economy lies in its ability to guarantee the maximum economic gains.... In a market economy whose production is dominated by spontaneous and anarchical aspects due to a private ownership of the production means, it is unthinkable to rationally distribute the resources across the entire society. Pursuit of profits is a physiology of the capitalist market economy, and exclusive competition is the capital's fundamental method of survival." In this period of heightened insecurity for North Korea, the party sought to reassert state control over society more firmly. Nevertheless, the prospects of inter-Korean meetings improved as South Korea removed its troops from alert status.²⁸

²⁵ "DPRK News Agency Carries CPRF Statement on Postponing Family Reunions," KCNA, October 12, 2001.

²⁶ "2 Koreas Set to Resume Reconciliation Talks," *New York Times*, September 7, 2001, p. A21. Don Kirk, "North Korea Cancels Reunions With the South," *New York Times*, October 13, 2001, p. A7. "Korea Reconciliation Talks Break Down," *Washington Post*, November 15, 2001, p. A44.

²⁷ Yi Hak-nam, "Capitalist Market Economy Gives Rise to Serious Politico-Economic Crisis," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 6, 2001, p. 6. Chang Myong-ho, "Superiority of Socialist Planned Economy," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 11, 2001, p. 2.

²⁸ "DPRK Notes ROK Group's Denunciation of Unification Ministry for Ruptured Ministerial Talks," KCBS, November 23, 2001. Hwang Jang-jin, "Seoul Lifts Security Alert, Paving Way for S-N talks," *Korea Herald*, December 22, 2001. "Seoul Ends Alert, Offers Food to North," *The Globe and Mail*, December 22, 2001. .

Regime Change Short List Concern Closes Ranks

U.S.-DPRK relations deteriorated after 9/11, and Pyongyang responded to the new environment. In a December 1 speech in Asia, President Bush warned Iraq and North Korea that they would be “held accountable” if they developed Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address grouped Iran, Iraq, and North Korea together as an “Axis of Evil.” The Foreign Ministry rejected Bush’s “slanderous remarks,” and an unattributed North Korean radio address focused on the U.S. military alert on the peninsula and repeated comments previously made by KPA officials: “We simply cannot casually overlook the violent remarks coming out of Bush’s mouth.” Pyongyang appeared to be united in opposition to the U.S. stand. Subsequent articles worried that U.S. regime change efforts would first concentrate on Iraq and move next to North Korea or Iran.

Two weeks after the State of the Union, President Bush traveled to Seoul to meet with Kim Dae Jung. Bush told reporters that he remained open to negotiations with North Korea, but Kim Jong Il had failed to call him. Bush followed up by noting, “Yet I will remind the world that America will not allow North Korea and other dangerous regimes to threaten freedom with weapons of mass destruction.”²⁹ The American president reiterated in Seoul that the U.S. had no intention of attacking North Korea and voiced support for the South’s Sunshine Policy. He also questioned the character of his North Korean counterpart and voiced concern about human rights, North Korea’s forward deployed conventional forces on the DMZ, and nuclear and missile issues. While Clinton administration’s goals narrowed, Bush’s goals vis-à-vis Pyongyang at the outset of his administration were more comprehensive. For a political establishment in Pyongyang concerned about U.S. intentions to force regime change, Bush’s more comprehensive efforts to affect all of these issues simultaneously seemed to require a change at the source of each of these problems: the North Korean regime itself.

North Korean elites of all stripes took little stock in American assurance that it had no intention of invading. KCNA cited Bush’s “slander[ing] its political system” to sharply reject the American offer to negotiate under these circumstances.³⁰ Party commentaries increasingly commented on individual foreign policy issues as the Foreign Ministry remained silent. Party commentaries cited U.S. officials’ remarks in the following weeks – including issues as diverse as NPT commitments, nuclear weapons developments, human rights and religious freedom stances, and continued missile defense cooperation with Japan – as further evidence that the U.S. planned to “suffocate” and then invade the North.³¹ The party spoke out against the Pentagon’s unveiling a new nuclear policy document that recommended developing a nuclear weapon to target North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

Despite the party’s objection, the Foreign Ministry kept its meetings two days later in New York with U.S. negotiators. The New York talks did not immediately yield a commitment

²⁹ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Bush on Way to Asia, After Repeating Demand on North Korea,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2002, p. A18.

³⁰ “N. Korea Repeats Attacks on US,” *Korea Times*, February 25, 2002. “North Korea Rejects Talks,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2002, p. A4.

³¹ “Mean Hidden Intent That Criticizes Our Nuclear Issue,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 4, 2002. “Why Is the United States Beating on the Worn-Out Drum of Human Rights Again?” KCBS, February 10, 2002. Kim Nam-hyok, “Foolish Delusion,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 13, 2002, p. 6.

for higher level negotiations, but Pyongyang agreed to continue monthly technical meetings related to building the Light Water Reactor promised under the Agreed Framework.³² However, four days later President Bush delivered another address during his five-day trip to Asia. The Foreign Ministry seized on his idea that the North Korean political system must “change” as reiterating a U.S. regime change policy and noting that the state was “single heartedly united” against this policy. Faced with a perceived threat to the regime’s very existence, the cabinet had little room to maneuver on U.S. policy and refocused its energies on inter-Korean and economic policy.³³

The North Korean bureaucracies coalesced in opposition to engaging Washington for the time being. A party commentary indicated that “The DPRK can never pardon Bush for unhesitatingly slinging mud at the supreme headquarters of the DPRK and even calling for a ‘change’ in its people-centered political system, most dignified and independent, where the leader, the party and the masses form a harmonious whole. His outbursts once again betrayed his true colors... The DPRK will not sit any longer with the Bush group keen on inventing pretexts for invasion in a bid to change the political system in the DPRK.”³⁴ Faced with a perceived threat to its existence, elites closed ranks.

More significantly, the cabinet released a rare paper severely criticizing the U.S. and calling the U.S., Japan, and Israel its own “Axis of Evil.” The cabinet paper concluded that “the strained situation this month” required a rebuke, but the time element also left open the possibility of near term reversal.³⁵ Reversing the U.S. regime change policy – namely, recognizing the DPRK’s right to exist – became a new prerequisite to resumed dialogue. The government emphasized that the DPRK was not boycotting talks, rather it blamed the U.S. for stifling genuine dialogue. “Dialogue is intended to discuss problems candidly and frankly between the two parties with equal qualifications through a meeting and to seek ways for a solution to the problem. However, in a situation that one side hurts the feelings of the other without hesitation and furthermore, one side does not recognize the other, how can dialogue be held?... We cannot concede our ideology and system being pressed by the United States nor can we renounce the revolutionary principle.”³⁶ The cabinet concluded in a call to reject the regime change policy and return to negotiations on their terms, “Dreaming a silly dream is worse than not dreaming anything, and the faster one comes out of a dream, the better.”³⁷ The cabinet took

³² Don Kirk, “North Korea Denounces U.S. Nuclear Plan, Promises 'Response',” *New York Times*, March 14, 2002, p. A7. Christopher Marquis, “U.S. and North Korea Hold High-Level Discussion,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2002, p. A7. Peter Slevin, “North Korea to Resume Nuclear Talks; Decision Suggests Pyongyang Won't Break Ties to U.S., Allies,” *Washington Post*, April 4, 2002, p. A4. “See Clearly Who the Opponent Is,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 15, 2002. “War Hysteria of U.S. and Japan Criticized,” KCNA, February 18, 2002.

³³ “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Bush’s Slanders,” KCNA, February 22, 2002.

³⁴ “KCNA on Bush’s S. Korea Visit,” KCNA, February 23, 2002. “DPRK Party Organ Decries U.S. 'Bush Clan,' Rejects Dialogue Proposal,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 27, 2002.

³⁵ “DPRK Cabinet Paper Points Out U.S., Israel, Japan as 'Axis of Evil',” *Minju Choson*, February 28, 2002, p. 4.

³⁶ One U.S. negotiator noted that the North Koreans use the “hurt feelings” construction in talks which comes across as odd to an American audience, especially when sitting across the table from representatives of a brutally repressive regime. The construction can easily be misread in a cartoonish sense when it is more of an effort to uphold the state’s dignity. Symbolic actions that some within the regime call rude or hostile are used in internal debates with some degree of effectiveness to block some engagement efforts.

³⁷ “DPRK Cabinet Organ Decries U.S. for Taking Issue With DPRK’s WMD,” *Minju Choson*, February 28, 2002, p. 4.

a tougher line with Washington than previously but did not make particularly unrealistic demands at this point like the military and party.

The U.S. responded. Vice President Dick Cheney reiterated the Axis of Evil remarks, drawing predictable criticism by party organs. The U.S. announced it had developed new tactical nuclear weapons for targeting seven countries, including North Korea and its underground military facilities. The cabinet's efforts to reengage Washington failed. The Foreign Ministry responded by announcing its own "comprehensive review" of the Agreed Framework. The institution said the review was warranted, since the new U.S. policy threatened the existence of the state. Pyongyang should study option to respond.³⁸ This effectively silenced moderates in the regime seeking a negotiated solution to outstanding differences. Kim did not need to mediate between competing interests. By 2002, the state was united in opposition to engaging the U.S. for the time being. Institutions focused their debates instead on economics and inter-Korean policy.

Linking and Delinking Issue Areas

With its foreign policy agenda stifled, the cabinet put its energies into its economic agenda. The government's quarterly economic journal argued for the need to "achieve informatization in all sectors of the people's economy" most notably in planning itself. The article called for (1) increased use of Information Technology and (2) rational information to guide decisions. The journal's emphasized a need for data that was "characteristically different" than the previous mode of purely ideological policy inputs.³⁹ The role of economic technocrats was on the rise as the role of party ideologues eroded.

Government and party organs debated whether markets were compatible with a socialist system. The government held that markets are not anti-socialist. It outlined a history of the term "market" and argued that they were essential to a socialist economy. The government document distinguished between socialist markets and capitalist markets, desperately trying to avoid the pejorative label "capitalist." The government journal argued, "properly resolving the issue of markets – a realm where products are circulated through the commodity-money relation – is an essential demand for more properly satisfying the residents' demands and for stepping up the socialist economic construction.... What has been elucidated anew in the *Juche*-oriented theory regarding the socialist domestic market for the circulation of production means is, above all, that the essential difference between the socialist domestic market and the capitalist market has been disclosed from a completely new perspective by fully clarifying the socialist market characteristics as an organized market with a unique theory concerning the characteristic of the commodity-money relation in the socialist society."⁴⁰ Through Korean uniqueness, the power of *Juche* allowed the state to incorporate markets into socialism.

The party responded by repeating its claim that markets are capitalist – period. They should be opposed by all good socialists. The party's piece repeated the phrase "capitalist

³⁸ "'Full Text' of DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Statement," KCBS, March 13, 2002.

³⁹ Me Kim Kyong-yol, "The Era of Information Industry and Informatization of Planning Work," *Kyongje Yongu*, February 10, 2002, p. 29-31.

⁴⁰ Me Yi Chang-hui, "Juche-Oriented Opinion on the Realm of Circulation of the Means of Production in Socialist Societies," *Kyongje Yongu*, February 10, 2002, p. 22-28.

market economy” 27 times and concluded that “progressive people... should entertain absolutely no kind of fantasy about the capitalist market economy,” referring to their government counterparts advocating increased marketization.⁴¹ Party commentaries also warned against the abuse of Information Technology. Markets, combined with IT, produces “casino capitalism” and dangerous financial speculation. Further, trade brings increased international communications and increased risks of drug trafficking, mafias, globalization, and the “criminal gang [which] discuss actions to be taken via e-mail or ‘on-line conferences.’” Increased information flow meant a “world without borders and guards,” here infused with a negative connotation.⁴² While the cabinet noted the benefits of marketization and increased international trade, the party focused on the possible drawbacks.

The debate extended into the education sector. After Kim Jong Il ordered economic training at universities should reflect “developing realities” instead of ideology, the party resisted, publishing a commentary that interpreted this guidance to “foster students to be revolutionaries and patriots before being intellectuals under the guidance of party organizations... [while] at the same time... strengthened the training on practical techniques and skills.”⁴³ The party downplayed the disparity between teaching ideologically-correct economics and empirically-grounded economic theories. The party continued to assert that functionaries should be subordinate to the party’s ideological guidance and opposed efforts that enhanced the training of the next generation with a less ideological bent.

By mid-April 2002, ten weeks prior to the July 1 reform measure, there were no observable signs that the economic debate was going anywhere. However, with the North Korean uproar over the latest U.S.-South Korean military exercises quelled, North-South contacts resumed. The party stressed that the resumption of North-South dialogue was in spite of, rather than because of, U.S. pressure.⁴⁴ Red Cross representatives from the two Koreas agreed to restart family reunions and announced that the two sides agreed to “fully restore inter-Korean relations.”⁴⁵ The party newspaper ran a commentary noting Kim Jong Il supported inter-Korean reconciliation through dialogue. However, the same article criticized the main conduit of South Korea’s efforts to negotiate, the Ministry of Unification, and concluded by refocusing reunification efforts through militaristic terms.⁴⁶ The party had to recognize Kim Jong Il’s decision but also resisted its implementation.

The KPA again managed to disrupt inter-Korean contacts by provoking another naval clash. Inter-Korean naval clashes are fairly regular events. By June, the KPA Navy crossed the disputed maritime border between the two Koreas ten times, mirroring a similar number the previous year. However, this time the two Koreas exchange fired and the North sank a South

⁴¹ Hwang Kyong-o, “Anti-People Traits of Capitalist Market Economy,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 20, 2002, p. 6.

⁴² Cha Ki-hwa, “Remedy-Less Incurable Disease of Modern-Day Capitalism,” *Nodong Sinmun*, May 26, 2002, p. 6.

⁴³ Kim Sun-hong, “Exerting Great Efforts Into Educating Posterity -- From Chong Chun-taek Wonsan University of Economics,” *Nodong Sinmun*, November 14, 2002, p. 1.

⁴⁴ “The Korean Peninsula Issue Must Be Correctly Regarded and Dealt With,” *Nodong Sinmun*, May 16, 2002.

⁴⁵ Don Kirk, “More Reunions Set for Families In the 2 Koreas,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2002, p. A6.

⁴⁶ Han Ung-ho, “North-South Joint Declaration Must Be Thoroughly Adhered to and Implemented,” *Nodong Sinmun*, June 5, 2002, p. 5.

Korean patrol boat, killing five South Korean sailors.⁴⁷ A Spokesman of the KPA's Naval Command stated the South Korean Navy perpetrated a "grave act of military provocation." The KPA navy blamed South Korea squarely.⁴⁸ Three days later, the North Korean media decidedly shifted blame for the incident from the South Korean military to the U.S. The unattributed television broadcast surmised that U.S. military surveillance must have detected the pending clash and aggravated the situation to undermine North-South reconciliation efforts. The KPA issued another statement, along with a party commentary, blaming both the U.S. and South Korea for the clash.⁴⁹ The military and party again sought to link the U.S. to South Korea in internal debates.

Seoul placed its military on high alert and called North Korea's actions a violation of the armistice; the North claimed South Korean patrol boats operated in North Korean waters and the South Koreans fired first. The incident roiled the South Korean political establishment, but the public largely did not take notice as the country was in the middle of hosting the World Cup. Meanwhile, Pyongyang warmly congratulated the South on its World Cup victories within days of the deadly clash, leading some to call the confluence of events perplexing while others suggested that different North Korean actors may have pursued different policy lines simultaneously.⁵⁰

South Korea hardened its rules of naval engagement and increased military surveillance with the United States. The U.S. cited the naval clash as reason to cancel the following week's scheduled bilateral talks. Three weeks later, Pyongyang sent Seoul a letter expressing rare regret for the naval incident. South Korea accepted the North Korean apology while the KPA continued to reject the validity of the NLL and threatened more clashes in the Yellow (West) Sea. The party newspaper wrote, "The North-South dialogue has been suspended and North-South relations are also headed for a dangerous situation of confrontation and war." The day before the U.S. and North Korean military representatives met, the party ran another article calling the NLL an "illegal, unjust bogus line," and that "we cannot prevent the danger of military clash in the West Sea."⁵¹

With these seemingly conflicting signals and no definitive inter-institutional resolution, Washington attempted to engage. Secretary of State Colin Powell said he was "not ruling out"

⁴⁷ "North, South Korean Naval Clash Leaves Four Dead, One Missing, 18 Injured," *Yonhap*, June 29, 2002. "S. Korean Ship Sinks After Battle with North," *The Globe and Mail*, June 29, 2002, p. A12.

⁴⁸ "South Korean Military Authorities Should Take the Blame," KCBS, July 2, 2002.

⁴⁹ "DPRK TV Blames U.S., ROK 'Conservative Elements' for Yellow Sea Naval Clash," KCTV, July 5, 2002.

"KPA Mission Spokesman Calls on ROK Military To Apprise DPRK of Ship Salvage Plan 'in Advance'," KCBS, July 8, 2002. "The Responsibility Rests on the United States," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 9, 2002.

⁵⁰ Doug Struck, "Koreans Accusatory After Boat Is Sunk; Tension Threatens Efforts to Resume U.S.-Pyongyang Talks," *New York Times*, June 30, 2002, p. A18. Doug Struck, "N. Korea Sends Contradictory Signals; After Naval Clash, Seoul Receives Harsh Words and Congratulations," *New York Times*, July 1, 2002, p. A12. Ahn, p. 49.

⁵¹ "S. Korea Says U.S. to Aid Increased Surveillance of North," *Washington Post*, July 2, 2002, p. A10. Vernon Loeb, "U.S. Shelves N. Korea Talks; Patrol Ship Clash 'Created Unacceptable Atmosphere'," *Washington Post*, July 3, 2002, p. A20. Christopher Torchia, "N. Korea Says It Regrets Clash With South, Proposes Talks," *Washington Post*, July 26, 2002, p. A21. "White Paper by the Secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland," KCBS, August 1, 2002. "Should Have a Proper Position and Stance Regarding North-South Relation," *Nodong Sinmun*, August 1, 2002. "Insisting on the Northern Limit Line is Aimed at Northward Aggression," *Nodong Sinmun*, August 5, 2002.

the possibility of meeting with North Korea's Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun at the ASEAN Regional Forum the following week after Pyongyang's "very positive statements," referring to the apology but not the following provocative comments. The 15-minute informal meeting between Powell and Paek set the stage for the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Jim Kelley, to lead a small delegation to Pyongyang in October.⁵²

Amid this activity, North Korea pursued significant economic policy change. On July 1, 2002 with hardly a mention in the North Korean press, the state implemented its most far-reaching economic reforms in the period under review. The changes rationalized the exchange rate, dramatically increased prices on basic goods and salaries, and granted more autonomy to industrial and business managers. It helped turn money into a rational instrument of exchange, wiped out the value of retirees' or black marketers' savings, and narrowed the gap between black market and official exchange rates. The moves had a decentralizing effect intended to bolster economic growth. The Premier was also at the forefront of advocating the economic changes, and the government's advocacy demonstrated a willingness to risk certain political costs associated with lessened central control in exchange for greater economic efficiency.⁵³

While the move was not immediately announced in the North Korean press, the party continued its warnings against capitalism. Capitalism in Eastern Europe brought regime downfall and pursuing profit contradicted socialist morals.⁵⁴ Markets, in their view, were roughly synonymous with capitalism. Characteristically, the cabinet was silent after policy victory. It did not relish in its win but orchestrated a series of follow-on actions that extended the reforms.

Seoul seized the momentum, proposing more inter-Korean talks and bilateral talks between U.S. and North Korea. Inter-Korean talks could not fully address the Yellow (West) Sea naval clashes. The disputed maritime border stems from the 1953 armistice signed by an American general (as the UN Command's representative) and a North Korean general. South Korea is not a signatory to the armistice. Consequently, U.S. and North Korean generals should discuss means to resolve this dispute. Pyongyang reversed its position and agreed to the South Korean proposal to meet with an American military representative. However, inter-Korean talks on rail and road connections stalled despite South Korea's unilateral pledge to increase food aid to the North. The North's statement indicated that "Both sides agreed to make a proposal to their military." South Korean negotiators indicated the North Korean negotiators in the cabinet did not have the authority to agree to road and rail connections without the KPA's approval.⁵⁵

⁵² "NK FMs ARF Move Draws Attention," *Korea Times*, July 27, 2002. "US Welcomes NK's Apology over Naval Clash," *Korea Times*, July 27, 2002. Karen DeYoung, "Powell May Hold Talks With N. Korean Foreign Minister; Welcoming Pyongyang's 'Positive Statements' and Overtures Toward South, Secretary Hints at Possible Meeting in Brunei," *Washington Post*, July 27, 2002, p. A14. Alex Spillius, "Ice thaws in N Korean Meeting with Powell," *Daily Telegraph*, August 1, 2002, p. 13.

⁵³ Andrew Ward, "Ageing officials ousted in N Korean reshuffle," *Financial Times*, September 4, 2003, p. 4. "South Korean Official Notes Possible Economic Reforms in North," *Yonhap*, September 5, 2003, BBC Monitoring International Reports.

⁵⁴ Ko Yong-hui, "What Has Return to Capitalism Brought?" *Nodong Sinmun*, July 13, 2002, p. 6.

⁵⁵ "Koreas to Hold Ministerial Talks; North to Participate in Pusan Asian Games," *Yonhap*, August 4, 2002. "Positive Moves from Pyongyang," *Japan Times*, August 3, 2002. James Brooke, "Inter-Korea Talks Offer Signs of Progress, and Frustration," *New York Times*, August 15, 2002, p. A13.

Pyongyang shifted course on economic policy, took modest steps to improve inter-Korean relations, and awaited a visit by U.S. negotiators to Pyongyang to refine its U.S. policy.

The End of the Agreed Framework and the Second Nuclear Crisis

By the end of August 2002, the U.S. agreed to send an American envoy to Pyongyang as Washington announced new sanctions against North Korea.⁵⁶ The North Korean Foreign Ministry responded in a low-key manner – by privately asking Japanese negotiators in Pyongyang for normalization talks to help convince Washington to return to the table. Meanwhile, the party publicly and strongly denounced the new sanctions as further evidence of the U.S. hostile policy.

A key driver in Washington of a more robust pressure strategy against North Korea, John Bolton, delivered a speech in Seoul, reemphasizing President Bush's Axis of Evil speech and highlighting North Korea's missile proliferation connections with states in the Middle East.⁵⁷ Pyongyang's bureaucracies again reacted according to the post-totalitarian institutionalism model. The party newspaper warned against an American "preemptive strike" on North Korea, citing OPlan 5027, while the Foreign Ministry downplayed Bolton's remarks as "bereft of reason [and] therefore, his recent outbursts do not deserve even a passing note."⁵⁸ Pyongyang acknowledged divisions within Washington's foreign policy establishment on North Korea policy, and still waited to see if the American envoy would present the Bolton pressure path or the Powell engagement path.

Pyongyang delayed any decisions on U.S. policy until after Washington's envoy traveled to Pyongyang in October, yet September was especially active for inter-Korean and DPRK-Japan relations, highlighting how these Washington's allies pursued bilateral relations with North Korea on a separate track. Inter-Korean family unions continued, and Pyongyang announced its willingness to consider family reunions in South Korea once a railroad connected the two Koreas across the DMZ. The defense ministers from the two Koreas agreed to clear enough landmines in the DMZ to connect the railroad. Cabinet Premier Hong attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the railroad, but, despite the military's critical involvement in the negotiations, KPA and party representatives did not attend the ceremony.⁵⁹ Athletes from the two Koreas competed under a single flag in the Asian Games – doubly significant as the Games were hosted in Pusan, South Korea. Also in September, North Korea pledged to open a Special Economic Zone near the Chinese border to attract foreign investment.

The same month, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Pyongyang for the first ever Japan-DPRK Summit. In the resulting Pyongyang Declaration, Kim Jong Il admitted his country abducted 13 Japanese citizens, apologized, and pledged to extend the missile

⁵⁶ Peter Slevin, "U.S. To Sanction North Korean Manufacturer; Penalty for Missile Parts Sales Comes as State Dept. Official Prepares to Visit Region," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2002, p. A20.

⁵⁷ "ROK Views Under Secretary Bolton's Calls for DPRK 'To Accept' IAEA Inspections, Dialogue With US," *Yonhap*, August 29, 2002. "Civic Groups Protest About John Bolton's Visit Here," *Yonhap*, August 28, 2002. Ken Belson, "North Korea, Help Sought on U.S. Talks," *New York Times*, August 27, 2002, p. A9. Don Kirk, "Senior U.S. Official Underscores Bush's Criticism of North Korea," *New York Times*, August 29, 2002, p. A13.

⁵⁸ "U.S. State Undersecretary's Anti-DPRK Remarks Under Fire," KCNA, August 31, 2002.

⁵⁹ "Koreas, North Holds Ceremony for Start of Work on Railway Connection," *Yonhap*, September 18, 2002, BBC Worldwide Monitoring.

moratorium beyond 2003 in exchange for Koizumi's pledge to normalize relations.⁶⁰ Pyongyang's previous long-range missile launch in 1998 rattled Japan in particular, as the missile overflowed the country. On each of these areas, the cabinet enjoyed significant policy wins. The summit with Japan was highly significant, but Pyongyang still put Washington at the center of their quest for security. The main event was the following month. In October, the U.S. envoy reached Pyongyang.

Foreign Ministry representatives hosted their American counterparts in Pyongyang. The party apparently did not approve as a "special article" in the party newspaper noted Kim Jong Il's guidance that the KPA supports peace. Uncharacteristically calling the army one that is "struggling for peace" and highlighting a particularly defensive role, the article evolved by the end to reject any "slavish peace" that accommodation with the imperialists may demand.⁶¹ This passage again reflected a pattern in bureaucratic resistance. Articles must start with Kim Jong Il's position if a decision has already been made, but it can spin an interpretation of that decision to mean something very different. Each institution's statements and commentaries are generally consistent in their final conclusions if not their originating argument. The party emphasized defense and nuclearization at the very time that American negotiators were in Pyongyang to get the state to move in exactly the opposite direction.

The Foreign Ministry's talks with their American counterparts did not go well. The U.S. delegation left Pyongyang a day early without substantial comment. The Foreign Ministry publicly called the talks unproductive. The U.S. delegation confronted North Korea on its alleged uranium enrichment program. Two weeks later, Washington announced the North Korean negotiators admitted to having a uranium enrichment program – an admission one member of the six-person delegation called perplexing. The "admission" became the centerpiece of U.S. policy, noting North Korea had admitted to cheating on the Agreed Framework and justified rolling back U.S. commitments to the Clinton-era agreement.⁶²

The Foreign Ministry announced that talks broke down as "it has become clear, through the special envoy's explanation that the U.S. Bush administration is continuing to pursue – instead of dialogue – a hardline hostile policy."⁶³ The Foreign Ministry's statement cited Leon Sigal – a rare reference to an American in the North Korean press – whose work has recognized the division between hardliners and negotiators within the North Korean system. The Foreign

⁶⁰ "The 2 Koreas Set a Site for Family Reunions," *New York Times*, September 9, 2002, p. A6. Sohn Jang-hwan, "Sports Diplomacy Can Unify Us," *Chungang Ilbo*, September 9, 2002. "North-South Accord on Key Korean Projects," *New York Times*, September 18, 2002, p. A16. Don Kirk, "2 Koreas Celebrate Decision to Reconnect a Railway," *New York Times*, September 19, 2002, p. A10. "NK Unveils Shinuiju Special Law," *Korea Times*, September 27, 2002. Michael Zielenziger, "N. Korea planning capitalist enclave," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 27, 2002, p. A17.

⁶¹ "Our Armed Forces are a Strong Fortress for Defending Socialism and Peace," *Nodong Sinmun* "special article," October 4, 2002.

⁶² There has been a great deal of debate over whether the North Koreans actually admitted to having a uranium enrichment program. See Selig S. Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?" *Foreign Affairs* 84:1 (January/February 2005). Mitchell B. Reiss and Robert L. Gallucci, "Red-handed," *Foreign Affairs* 84:2 (March/April 2005). Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

⁶³ "DPRK FM Spokesman Decries U.S. 'Hardline Hostile Policy' Conveyed By U.S. Special Envoy," KCBS, October 7, 2002.

Ministry statement said that “The United States should treat the other party based on a clear understanding of it,” suggesting the U.S. should recognize that North Korea had its own bureaucratic divisions, and the decision to pressure the North would “embolden hardliners” as Sigal warned.

The Foreign Ministry continued, “Currently, the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework is facing the serious turning point of being nullified or not... We say this once more: the lesson the United States should learn is that it will have nothing to gain from the hostile DPRK policy. Should the United States faithfully implement the pledge it made with us and head in the direction of improving DPRK-U.S. relations, it will be commensurate with the U.S. people's interests.”⁶⁴ The ambiguous “with us” can be interpreted either as an agreement with the North Korean state or with the Foreign Ministry personnel advocating engagement. The statement indicates a type of desperation that the Foreign Ministry was on the verge of losing its bureaucratic battle. As the actual negotiators, the Foreign Ministry got the first word, but the party and military stated their opposition to negotiations much more directly and forcefully.⁶⁵ Following the fall-out, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China all called on the U.S. to restart negotiations.⁶⁶

Despite the most notable set-back in U.S.-DPRK relations in almost a decade, it did not disrupt inter-Korean projects. The cabinet labeled inter-Korean cooperation “astonishing” and argued progress should be “expedited.”⁶⁷ In November the two Koreas announced a substantial industrial zone just north of the DMZ in the historic city of Kaesong. The Kaesong Industrial Project broke ground the following year and become the centerpiece of South Korea’s engagement strategy with North Korea. Meanwhile, South Korea and Japan actively pushed for continued KEDO oil shipments to North Korea as outlined in the Agreed Framework as the United States pushed to stop the oil tanker in transit to the DPRK given the recent alleged uranium enrichment admission.⁶⁸ The U.S. diverged from its Asian allies on North Korea policy, and Pyongyang reacted to each state in turn.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry announced its view of the international situation, the recent developments in the inter-Korean and economic issue areas, and how depressed U.S.-DPRK relations could get back on-track. It also clarified its stand that the United States

⁶⁴ “The United States Must Be Sincere in Implementing the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework,” KCBS, October 21, 2002.

⁶⁵ “U.S. Policy Causes KPA and DPRK People To Be More Vigilant Against U.S.,” KCNA, October 12, 2002. “Yi Hyon-to, “Pressure and Arrogance Do Not Work on Us,” *Nodong Sinmun*, October 15, 2002. Kim Chong-son, “Vigilance Against Viciousness and Wiliness of Imperialism Should Be Heightened,” *Nodong Sinmun*, October 20, 2002, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Kim Ji-ho, “Seoul, Washington View N.K. Nuclear Issue Differently,” *Korea Herald*, October 19, 2002. Hau Boon Lai, “Neighbours Say N. Korea No Nuclear Threat; Experts in Japan and China Disagree with Rumsfeld that Pyongyang has Nuclear Weapons, Saying He Offered No Evidence,” *Straits Times*, October 19, 2002. Peter S. Goodman and John Pomfret, “2 U.S. Allies Urge Engagement; S. Korea, Japan to Continue Pursuing Diplomacy With North,” *Washington Post*, October 18, 2002, p. A22.

⁶⁷ Pak In-chol, “DPRK Cabinet Details Joint Declaration Content, Urges Expedited Implementation,” *Minju Choson*, October 22, 2002, p. 5.

⁶⁸ “Firm Will,” *Choson Sinbo*, November 6, 2002. James Dao, “KEDO Begins Fuel Oil Shipment to DPRK Despite Nuclear Row,” *Yonhap*, November 6, 2002. “Oil Shipment to DPRK Goes Ahead Despite Nuke Crisis,” *Hong Kong Agence France Presse*, November 6, 2002.

interpreter did not correctly translate Pyongyang's uranium enrichment message, indicating negotiators claimed North Korea was "entitled to have nuclear weapons" rather than "had nuclear weapons" – a one-syllable difference in the original Korean, complicated by regional dialects. The Foreign Ministry statement represented its position for the following 15 months as U.S.-DPRK negotiations faltered. It is therefore worth quote as length:

"Entering the new century, new, epoch-making changes are taking place in the Korean peninsula situation and the rest of the Northeast Asian region.... Bold actions have been taken to eradicate the old leftovers of the past, including linking the North-South railways that were severed over half a century ago and liquidating the past with Japan. In line with the currently changed situation and our concrete situation, we have devised a series of new measures in economic management and back-to-back actions to boost the economy, including establishing a special economic region. All of these developments in the situation are practical contributions to peace in Asia and the rest of the world. Therefore, almost all the countries of the world, except for the United States, have supported and welcomed the developments, which greatly encouraged us. Under such circumstances, we recently received a U.S. presidential special envoy with the hope we might be able to fundamentally forsake hostile relations with the United States and solve pending issues on an equal footing. To our regret, however, we confirmed through the special envoy's visit that the Bush administration's hostile attempt to crush us by force and reverse the positive development of the situation on the Korean peninsula and in the rest of the Northeast Asian region has climaxed. Providing no concrete evidence, the U.S. special envoy asserted we were violating the DPRK-U.S. Agreed Framework by engaging in a program to enrich uranium with a view to manufacturing nuclear weapons. He said there would be no dialogue between the DPRK and the United States, and in particular, the DPRK-Japanese or North-South relations will be jeopardized unless we suspend the program. We could not help being stunned by the United States' much too unilateral and arrogant attitude.... We clearly told the U.S. presidential special envoy that we are entitled to have nuclear weapons and more powerful weapons than those to safeguard our sovereignty and right to survive.... we, with greatest magnanimity, clarified that we were ready to seek a negotiated settlement of this issue on the following three conditions: first, if the United States recognizes our sovereignty; second, if it assures us of nonaggression; and third, if the United States does not hinder our economic development. Nowadays, the United States and its followers assert that negotiations should be held after we put down our arms. This is a very abnormal logic. Then, how can we counter any attack with empty hands? Their assertion is virtually a demand that we yield. Yielding means death."

Concluding again with an ambiguous "we," the Foreign Ministry said, "There may be negotiations or the use of deterrent force to be consistent with this basis, but we want the former, as far as possible."⁶⁹

Party commentaries were less concerned with possible gains from negotiations. They railed against international aid, markets, and international accommodation.⁷⁰ Likewise, the KPA,

⁶⁹ "DPRK FM Spokesman Issues Press Statement on Nuclear Issue 25 Oct," KCBS, October 25, 2002.

⁷⁰ Yi Hak-nam, "The Predatory Nature of the Imperialists' 'Aid,'" *Nodong Sinmun*, October 26, 2002, p. 6.

citing Kim Il Sung and the Korean War experience fondly, announced that the U.S. position amounted to a “direct challenge to the great military-first politics, which is our life and dignity, and the cause of national sovereignty and reunification. . . . the United States blocks us, imposes sanctions on us, and gravely impinges on our right to exist, even forcing us to dismantle our armament. Historical experiences confirm that military-first politics is the wisest choice, based on the history of national tragedy in which the nation's sovereignty had been relentlessly abused by foreign powers. . . . in the name of the entire nation, they must strike a decisive blow on the United States' arrogant and rude maneuvers, which gravely threaten our nation's sovereignty, and more courageously wage a struggle against the U.S. imperialist forces of aggression.”⁷¹ The state faced a choice, and the party strongly advocated one option over the other.

At the same time Japan-DPRK normalization talks waned on unrelated grounds,⁷² and Japan continued to raise the nuclear issue to Pyongyang's dismay. North Korea's Foreign Ministry responded that the “relevant organs” within the DPRK were pushing for an end to the missile moratorium, forcing the state to “reconsider” the moratorium. Foreign Ministry statements tend to be much less redundant than party commentaries, only rarely reiterating points to emphasize them, but its statement concluded by reiterating and expanding upon the political process sentiment: “our related organizations and people are strongly calling on the DPRK Government to discreetly consider various issues concerning security guarantees, including the nuclear and missile issues, under the condition where Japan's words and actions regarding the DPRK-Japan Pyongyang Declaration's implementation do not match. In particular, our related sectors are even voicing the view that, should DPRK-Japan normalization talks become prolonged without making progress, like they did this time, the measure of extending the missile launch moratorium should be reconsidered.”⁷³ The Foreign Ministry again explicitly cited proponents voicing distinct views that affect policy outcomes.

By the end of November, the KPA and “other organs” used the same construction, pushing for the reevaluation of the missile moratorium: “now that Japan is zealously joining in the U.S. policy to isolate and stifle the DPRK, there is no need for the DPRK to show such magnanimity as maintaining moratorium on missile test fire any longer. . . . The right-wing bellicose forces of Japan should not act rashly, clearly mindful that the Korean people's army and organs concerned of the DPRK are increasingly assertive for the reconsideration of the moratorium.”⁷⁴ The KPA and cabinet came down on different sides of this issue, but they agreed that organs within the North Korean system advocated different policy responses regarding Japan.

Faced with failure in negotiations with both the U.S. and Japan, the North Korean Foreign Ministry took concrete steps to salvage U.S.-DPRK relations. Instead of calling the Agreed Framework dead, Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju said the agreement was “hanging by a thread” and provided a means to get it back on track. In 10 hours of talks, Kang, a political heavyweight in Kim's inner circle, told the former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Donald Gregg that the U.S. misinterpreted the Korean statement when the U.S. envoy visited Pyongyang

⁷¹ “DPRK's CPRF Spokesman Urges Defense of 'Military-First Politics of Patriotism',” KCBS, October 28, 2002.

⁷² “Missile-test warning,” *The Gazette*, November 6, 2002, p. A20.

⁷³ “DPRK 'Should Reconsider' Missile Moratorium If Japan Talks 'Prolonged',” KCNA, November 5, 2002.

⁷⁴ “DPRK KPA, Others Rethinking Missile Moratorium Based on U.S.-Japan Isolation Moves,” KCNA, November 30, 2002.

the previous month. Kang said North Korea's chief nuclear negotiator Kim Kye Kwan responded to his American counterpart's claim that North Korea was secretly enriching uranium by noting that North Korea was "entitled to" possess nuclear weapons and even stronger weapons, a common euphemism in North Korea for ideological strength. South Korea and China agreed with North Korea's account of the close translation. Once North Korea tried to clarify its position and linguists pointed out the possibility of translation error, the U.S. did not back off its position that North Korea admitted to enriching uranium in violation of the Agreed Framework.⁷⁵ The Foreign Ministry's last ditch effort to get negotiations back on track failed.

Following the October 2002 "admission," Washington told the North Koreans they must first completely and verifiably dismantle its uranium enrichment program before they could begin dialogue.⁷⁶ Washington required that Pyongyang move first. North Korea responded with a mixed message. An unattributed broadcast reflecting the previous Foreign Ministry statement announced the DPRK wanted the two adversaries to "live peacefully with one another" and Pyongyang would consider giving up its nuclear program once the two sides concluded a non-aggression pact. The broadcast reasoned that absent a security guarantee from the U.S., North Korea needed its nuclear deterrent.⁷⁷ However, the same day, the party newspaper indicated, "the U.S. escalated policy to stifle the DPRK by force of arms would only prompt the DPRK to step up its arms buildup to cope with the policy and further increase its army's combat capacity than ever before," and openly discussed once again the possibility of war.⁷⁸ Different opinion remained in Pyongyang's official circles. The Foreign Ministry could entertain giving up the North's nuclear weapons, but the party and military opposed such a measure.

The United States maintained that it had no aggressive intent towards North Korea as it encouraged KEDO to terminate fuel shipments, marking the end to the Agreed Framework. The Foreign Ministry argued the U.S. violated the only provision of the Agreed Framework that it had begun to implement – oil deliveries – and urged Washington to uphold the agreement. The KPA did not urge the resumption of the Agreed Framework. Rather, following the model's expectations, the KPA Navy issued a statement that a skirmish between the two Koreas' navies must be a part of the U.S. pressure strategy and warned South Korea of the perils of associating with the U.S.⁷⁹ The KPA still tried to link the U.S. with South Korea. The cabinet's mild advocacy failed as the Agreed Framework was scrapped.

The Foreign Ministry announced two weeks later that the state would resume construction on the plutonium reactor at Yongbyon that had been verifiably frozen for the

⁷⁵ Don Kirk, "North Korea Softens Its Tone On Nuclear Arms Agreement," *New York Times*, November 7, 2002, p. A22. Don Oberdorfer, "My Private Seat at Pyongyang's Table," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2002, p. B3. "FYI, Comparison -- DPRK *Nodong Sinmun* Version of 'Entitled to Have' Statement," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 17, 2002, p. 6. Howard W. French, "North Korea Clarifies Statement on A-Bomb," *New York Times*, November 19, 2002, p. A16.

⁷⁶ Doug Struck, "Nuclear Program Not Negotiable, U.S. Told N. Korea," *New York Times*, October 20, 2002, p. A18. Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Might Try to Salvage Part of N. Korean Accord," *Washington Post*, October 25, 2002, p. A26.

⁷⁷ "DPRK Says Pyongyang Does Not Want Aggravated Relations With U.S.," KCBS, November 20, 2002.

⁷⁸ "U.S. Bellicose Forces Urged To Stop Running Amuck," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 20, 2002.

⁷⁹ "DPRK's KPA Navy Command Issues Statement on 20 Nov ROK 'Provocation' on West Sea," KCNA, November 21, 2002.

previous eight years. Yongbyon would supply all of the nuclear material for North Korea's nuclear weapons test in 2006.⁸⁰

The United States moved towards a strategy of isolating North Korea further economically, running into most obvious contradiction with South Korea's Sunshine Policy.⁸¹ Barred constitutionally from reelecting Kim Dae Jung, South Korea elected a new liberal president, Roh Moo Hyun, who pledged to continue Kim Dae Jung's Nordpolitik.⁸² China too continued to support economic engagement with North Korea, prodding the state to roughly follow its economic reform model. Wedged between these two states, the American economic squeeze strategy faced serious difficulties.

With little meeting of the minds between Washington on one hand and Beijing and Seoul on the other, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted that the U.S. alone could defeat North Korea militarily even during a war with Iraq. Meanwhile, the U.S. continued to say it had no intention of invading North Korea. North Korea dismantled the IAEA's monitoring equipment and ordered its officials to leave the country. It began repairs on Yongbyon and cancelled inter-Korean meetings.

Following Pyongyang's actions at Yongbyon, Washington supported the IAEA's effort to refer Pyongyang to the UN Security Council, urging a Chapter Seven UN resolution that recognized North Korea's actions as a threat to international peace and security. Chapter Seven resolutions can allow military actions to respond to such threats. Unnamed senior officials announced the new U.S. strategy towards the North included seizing shipments under a new Proliferation Security Initiative and sanctioning the state.⁸³ By the end of 2002, internal debate in Pyongyang again went silent. The North Korean political establishment was at least publicly unified in its confrontational response to the United States.

By early 2003 the U.S. indicated its willingness to talk to the North Koreans while resolutely rejecting any *quid pro quo*, arguing the North Koreans must uphold their existing obligations under the defunct Agreed Framework. The Foreign Ministry did not bite, as the state labeled the American offer to talk without negotiating "insincere." Pyongyang withdrew from the Nonproliferation Treaty and threatened to resume long-range missile tests. Washington upgraded its proposal to talk by adding a willingness to consider providing economic aid and security commitments. The North Korean Foreign Ministry said it was ready to talk bilaterally if the U.S. provided a security guarantee and lifted economic sanctions, but this response would soon be overcome by events.⁸⁴ Four days later, President Bush criticized North Korea again in

⁸⁰ "DPRK Government To Immediately Resume Operation and Construction of Its Nuclear Facilities," KCNA, December 12, 2002. Jonathan Watts, "North Korea shuts door on nuclear inspectors," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2002, p. 16. "North Korea ups ante," *The Gazette*, December 15, 2002, p. A11.

⁸¹ "N Korea nuclear pledge," *Sunday Herald Sun*, October 27, 2002, p. 38. "Leaders pledge to end nuclear crisis," *The Sunday Telegraph*, October 27, 2002, p. 52.

⁸² "Roh projects himself as a Kim-like moderate," *International Herald Tribune*, December 21, 2002, p. 5. "Roh to Continue Kims Policy Toward NK, US," *Korea Times*, December 21, 2002.

⁸³ "U.S. Hindrance to Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Assailed," KCNA, December 15, 2002. Howard W. French, "U.S. Gets Warning from North Korea," *New York Times*, December 25, 2002, p. A1. "Inspectors to Quit," *Daily Star*, December 29, 2002, p. 2. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Readies Plan to Raise Pressure on North Koreans," *New York Times*, December 29, 2002, p. A1.

⁸⁴ "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on 'Multi-Party Talks'," KCNA, January 25, 2003.

his 2003 State of the Union Address and pledged that the U.S. would not be blackmailed. The Foreign Ministry denounced the Address and called for a non-aggression pact, while the party noted, "it is necessary to reinforce our own defense capabilities in every way possible."⁸⁵ The KPA announced it was ready to take preemptive military action in the next two to three days as the U.S. moved warships into the Sea of Japan and awaited the IAEA's scheduled referral of North Korea to the UN Security Council.⁸⁶

The bureaucracies reacted consistently and according to the model's expectations, but this period did not require internally contentious decision-making. By the time central authorities took bold actions on its U.S. policy, internal debate was temporarily resolved. High tensions did not provide political space for alternatives to confrontational policies. The Foreign Ministry response to U.S. offers to negotiate were pro-forma and lacked traction at home. Central authorities moved the state incrementally down the path advocated by the KPA and the party on U.S. policy.

The U.S. and North Korea ratcheted up the pressure on the other in the ensuing three months. The KPA threatened to withdraw from the 1953 Armistice agreement and fired short-range missiles during the South Korean president's inauguration, intercepted a U.S. spy plane with MIG fighter jets, and fired an anti-ship missile. The United States pressed China and its regional allies to exert political and economic pressure on the North, resumed food aid to the North at reduced levels, and imposed new sanctions. President Bush indicated that "all options were on the table" and, after sending two dozen bombers to Guam in range of North Korea and as the U.S. prepared for war in Iraq, argued that if efforts towards the North "don't work diplomatically, they'll have to work militarily."⁸⁷

With U.S.-DPRK relations in a firm downward spiral and engagement advocates silenced, China sent its Vice Premier Qian Qichen to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Jong Il to

⁸⁵ "FM Statement Denounces State of the Union Address," KCBS, January 30, 2003. Yi Hyon-to, "Own Defense Capabilities Must Be Firmly Solidified," *Nodong Sinmun*, February 2, 2003, p. 6.

⁸⁶ "DPRK Ministry of Armed Forces Vows To Wage 'Life-or-Death Battle' Against U.S.," KCTV, February 5, 2003. Steven R. Weisman, "U.S., in a Shift, Is Willing to Talk With North Korea About A-Arms," *New York Times*, January 8, 2003, p. A1. David E. Sanger and Julia Preston, "U.S. Assails Move by North Koreans to Reject Treaty," *New York Times*, January 11, 2003, p. A1. Peter S. Goodman and Philip P. Pan, "N. Korea Threatens to Resume Missile Tests," *New York Times*, January 12, 2003, p. A1. Christopher Torchia, "US Hints at Energy Deal for North Korea," *The Advertiser*, January 14, 2003, p. 13. Stephen Lunn, "US Softens on Korean Nukes," *The Australian*, January 14, 2003, p. 7. "2 Koreas to Resume Talks," *International Herald Tribune*, January 17, 2003, p. 1. Howard LaFranchi, "US Rethinks North Korea Strategy," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 16, 2003, p. 1. James Brooke, "North Koreans Still Demand Direct Talks with the U.S.," *New York Times*, January 26, 2003, p. A15. "Timeline: N Korea nuclear stand-off," BBC Timeline, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2604437.stm>, accessed July 25, 2008.

⁸⁷ O Yong-hwan, "North May Have Started Its Reactor, Officials Say," *Chungang Ilbo*, February 7, 2003. "Threat to Tear Up War Truce," *Herald Sun*, February 19, 2003, p. 42. Doug Struck, "N. Korea Fires Missile on Eve of Transition in the South," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2003, p. A1. James Dao, "U.S. to Resume Food Aid to North Korea, at a Reduced Level," *New York Times*, February 26, 2003, p. A11. "North Korea Restarts a Nuclear Reactor," *Birmingham Post*, February 27, 2003, p. 12. Michael Kilian, "Big Bombers Moved Near to N Korea," *The Advertiser*, March 6, 2003, p. 32. Shane Green, "US Sends Bombers to Deter N Korea," *The Age*, March 6, 2003, p. 9. "North Korea Fires Anti-ship Missile In Test Launch," *New York Times*, March 10, 2003, p. A14. Doug Struck, "Citing Iraq, N. Korea Signals Hard Line on Weapons Issues," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2003, p. A30. Peter Slevin, "U.S. Imposes Sanctions after Missile Sale," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2003, p. A4.

encourage him to restart negotiations with the Americans. The contact was reportedly contentious and did not immediately prompt North Korea to return to the table.⁸⁸ Pyongyang was dug in; if central authorities did not want to hear counsel on restarting negotiations from Beijing, they certainly did not want to hear it from their own subordinates. China temporarily suspended North Korea's oil shipments, officially citing a technical problem. North Korea depends heavily on Chinese energy assistance to keep its energy-inefficient industrial base moving – at a fraction of its Cold War level. It is North Korea's economic lifeline. Following the pipeline incident, North Korea's Foreign Ministry announced it would accept the U.S. offer to meet in Beijing. The announcement came shortly after the U.S. invaded Iraq and two days after North Korea's NPT withdrawal date elapsed. However, there was no indication that the state was interested in seriously negotiating with the Americans.

North Korea's lead Foreign Ministry negotiator told his American counterpart in Beijing that North Korea reprocessed its spent fuel rods and was ready to "physically demonstrate" or transfer them. The vague threat seemed to indicate the North's willingness to test a nuclear weapon and/or export nuclear material. For its part, the Americans demanded North Korea completely, verifiably, and irreversibly dismantle its nuclear program before they could discuss other issues. Both sides reiterated positions that had been established for months. The talks ended a day early without progress, but both sides agreed to meet again. The party and KPA continued to promote "physical deterrence," referring to a nuclear test.⁸⁹ Pyongyang's threat was clear: if it did not determine that the U.S. was sincerely negotiating security guarantees, North Korea would test a nuclear weapon to provide for its security.

The United States encouraged China and its regional allies to pressure North Korea into submission with little success. South Korean foreign policy officials said "coercive measures are not on the table," China actively encouraged bilateral negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang, and Japan voiced concern over the prospect of sanctions although it responded to the American request for action by reaffirming existing laws barring military-related exports to North Korea and continued missile defense cooperation with the U.S.⁹⁰ As the North Korean Foreign Ministry prepared for scheduled talks, KCNA indicated for the first time that the 1992 North-South Basic Agreement that committed to peninsular denuclearization was "nullified," citing U.S. hostility, although only the two Koreas were party to the agreement.

While in Seoul to discuss the relocation of U.S. bases in South Korea, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz announced that North Korea "is teetering on the edge of economic

⁸⁸ Carlin and Lewis, p. 14.

⁸⁹ "FM Spokesman Says DPRK 'Successfully Reprocessing' Fuel Rods in 'Final Stage'," KCNA, April 18, 2003. "U.S., China, Koreas Agree on Nuclear Talks," *Daily Yomiuri*, April 16, 2003, p. 1. David E. Sanger, "Bush Takes No-Budge Stand in Talks With North Korea," *New York Times*, April 17, 2003, p. A1. Shane Green, "North Korea Threatens to Demonstrate its Nukes," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 26, 2003, p. 1. "DPRK Radio Carries Foreign Ministry's Spokesman's Comments on Beijing Talks 25 Apr.," KCBS, April 25, 2003.

⁹⁰ David E. Sanger, "Bush Issues Directive Describing Policy on Antimissile Defenses," *New York Times*, May 21, 2003, p. A21. Bill Sammon, "Missile shield gains support across globe," *Washington Times*, May 21, 2003, p. A1. "Japan May Impose Sanctions Against North Korea if Situation Worsens," *Mainichi Shimbun*, May 21, 2003. Doug Struck, "Bush's N. Korea Efforts Stymied; Partners Reluctant To Raise Pressure," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2003, p. A22.

collapse. That, I believe, is a major point of leverage.”⁹¹ The comment again embolden those in Pyongyang who argued the U.S. only wanted to bring down the regime and could not be engaged. With a united political establishment in Pyongyang on U.S. policy, the state pursued a consistent confrontational policy towards the U.S.

Inter-Korean Relations: A Separate Track?

Seoul and North Korean cabinet officials tried to keep inter-Korean engagement on a separate path from U.S.-DPRK relations. Cabinet officials presided over the historic opening of rail connections across the DMZ and the groundbreaking ceremony for the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Party and military officials did not attend.⁹² The KPA warned that the previous year’s naval clashes risked further South Korean aggression on land. The military institution did not document how such a clash could result, since the DMZ was a firmly recognized, non-ambiguous border unlike the disputed sea border.⁹³ A month later, the two Koreas exchanged gun fire across the DMZ instead of seeing another naval clash in the Yellow (West) Sea. No one was injured.⁹⁴

After inter-Korean talks started, the KPA again demonstrated their commitment to a consistent policy line, arguing the talks should be abandoned, even though central authorities had already authorized them. The KPA noted that South Korea was conducting military exercises, portraying them as provocative and questioning the usefulness of inter-Korean dialogue. The KPA noted, the military exercises “cannot but be seen as an act of impure challenge that deeply provokes the dialogue partner, casts a dark shadow over the results of the talks, and, moreover, throws cold water on brethren's vigorous footsteps toward national reconciliation, unity, peace, and reunification.”⁹⁵

Likewise, the party again tried to link the South Koreans to the Americans, arguing the U.S. was responsible for the divided peninsula and the South Korean military was subject to U.S. control.⁹⁶ During the inter-Korean ministerial, the party newspaper ran an article describing what the cabinet’s goals should be at the talks. The talks “must yield good agreements,” defined as one that improves the state’s physical security without mention of the cabinet’s primary focus in inter-Korean projects: economic goals. By framing the goal of the talks as enhancing the state’s security, the party could erect a strawman and criticize the talks for failing to move

⁹¹ Howard W. French, “Official Says U.S. Will Reposition Its Troops in South Korea,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2003, p. A6.

⁹² Alla Startseva, “Korean Rail Link a Potential Watershed,” *Moscow Times*, June 10, 2003. “South-North Railway Linking Ceremony to Be Held Saturday,” *Korea Times*, June 10, 2003. “Ground-breaking Ceremony of Kaesong Industrial Zone Held,” KCNA, June 30, 2003. “Inter-Korean Ministerial Talks Open,” KCNA, July 10, 2003.

⁹³ “DPRK Navy Command Decries ROK, U.S. for NLL Violations,” KCBS, June 3, 2003. “DPRK Notes ROK's 'Infiltrating Combat Ships' Into DPRK Waters, Warns of 'Unpredictable Crisis',” KCBS, June 12, 2003. “‘Press Statement’ the chief of the Panmunjom Mission of the Korean People's Army issued on 1 July 2003,” KCBS, July 1, 2003.

⁹⁴ “DPRK Timeline of Recent Events,” Nautilus Timeline, <<http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKBriefingBook/dprktimeline.html>>, accessed July 25, 2008.

⁹⁵ “DPRK's CPRF Issues Bulletin Assailing ROKA Exercise in Seoul,” KCTV, July 9, 2003.

⁹⁶ “Rodong Sinmun On Anti-U.S. Independence And Reunification,” *Nodong Sinmun*, June 9, 2003.

towards this end.⁹⁷ Each bureaucracy demonstrated an ability to frame the debate to favor pre-conceived policy options.

Cabinet Senior Councilor Kim Yong Song replied by citing Kim Jong Il. Kim granted the cabinet the authority to go forward with the ministerial talks and the cabinet represented Kim's reunification policy. The cabinet moved forward as long as they had the lead. As the main negotiators in inter-Korean talks, cabinet officials expressed the economic benefits such negotiations provided, implicitly refuting their institutional critics and refocusing the expressed goals of the talks. Later in the summer, as one of his last statements as Cabinet Premier, Hong encouraged continued dialogue at the opening ceremonies of the National Rally for Peace and Reunification saying, "all anti-reunification forces must be opposed and dialogues, exchanges and cooperation encouraged."⁹⁸ The cabinet's policy line remained static, and they advanced it whenever possible. The policy was more than just one premier's policy; it was an institutional position. Hong started his tenure as Premier with similar comments, and his successor advanced the same agenda.

U.S.-DPRK confrontation continued, but it did not fundamentally threaten inter-Korean rapprochement. The U.S. organized the first meeting of ten countries that agreed to join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to interdict ships suspected of carrying illicit or missile cargoes on the high seas. Despite repeated requests, Seoul refused to join the PSI. Referring to the PSI effort, party officials threatened war if the U.S. imposed a "blockade" against North Korea. The U.S. circulated a new draft resolution on North Korea at the UN Security Council as the Administration sought congressional approval for a new bunker buster nuclear weapon that could target North Korea's buried forward deployed forces.⁹⁹ After John Bolton visited Seoul to pitch the PSI and UN Security Council referral again, the North Korean Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying it would return to the Six Party Talks while ideologues in the North returned to inflammatory personal attacks against Bolton. The repetitive pattern continued.

Six Party Talks resumed in August with much the same result: North Korea again threatened to test a nuclear weapon, citing U.S. demands that North Korea first shut down its nuclear facilities before discussing other issues. The North Korean Foreign Ministry called the talks "not beneficial" as party commentaries unrelentingly criticized the United States. The National Defense Commission's highest ranking official called for reinforcing the state's "nuclear deterrent" by testing a nuclear weapon.¹⁰⁰ The North Koreans attended the Six Party Talks, possibly to appease their Chinese backers and Six Party hosts, but did not come prepared to softened their position first.

⁹⁷ Ho Yong-kil, "Proper Proposal Suitable for Set Situation," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 12, 2003, p. 5.

⁹⁸ "North Korean Premier Delivers Reunification Speech on National Day," KCBS, August 15, 2003, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, August 16, 2003.

⁹⁹ O Yong-hwan and Chong Yong-su, "Possibility of Five-Party Talks is Slim; Is North Korea's Nuclear Issue Subject to UN Sanctions?," *Chungang Ilbo*, June 19, 2003. Doug Struck, "U.S. Focuses On N. Korea's Hidden Arms; Nuclear 'Bunker-Busters' Could Damage Deterrence, Some Say," *Washington Post*, June 23, 2003, p. A16.

¹⁰⁰ DPRK Foreign Ministry on Six-way Talks," KCNA, August 30, 2003. Park Chan-kyong, "Seoul Gives Upbeat Assessment to Six-Way Talks on Nuclear Crisis," *Hong Kong Agence France Presse*, August 30, 2003.. John Pomfret and Anthony Faiola, "U.S. Flexibility Sought on N. Korea," *Washington Post*, September 4, 2003, p. A16. Cho Myong-nok, "NDC First Vice Chairman, DPRK To 'Maintain', 'Continuously Reinforce Nuclear 'Deterrent'," KCBS, September 5, 2003.

As the Six Party Talks flailed, the two Koreas participated as a single team in the international Summer Universiade collegiate athletic competition. The North Korea rubber stamp parliament elected Pak Pong Ju the new cabinet Premier. As Hong's successor, Pak Pong Ju took up the same institutional position and developed a reputation as a key economic reformer. Immediately after being named Premier, KCBS summarized Pak's comments to the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA): "The new premier said... North Korea's production power would be increased by improving economic management, and vowed to work towards the reunification of the two Koreas under the banner of the 15 June Joint Declaration."¹⁰¹ Pak prioritized the same two issues as his predecessor, using the same construction to denote greater marketization in economic policy and more robust inter-Korean negotiations.

The following month, U.S. Forces Korea announced an \$11 billion military build-up on the peninsula as U.S. spy satellites reportedly detected that Yongbyon was shut down; North Korea announced it was uninterested in resuming talks until the U.S. offered a security guarantee. The Foreign Ministry announced the following day that North Korea had shut down Yongbyon to remove 8000 fuel rods from the reactor – a move required for building a nuclear bomb.¹⁰² Inter-Korean ministerial talks continued as President Bush said the U.S. would offer a written security guarantee below the treaty level. The party newspaper immediately rejected the offer as "laughable" and emphasized the state should pursue its "nuclear deterrent," although the Foreign Ministry indicated "we are ready to consider Bush's remarks on the written assurances."¹⁰³ North Korea's provocative move forced Washington to react and reopened Pyongyang's bureaucratic debate on U.S. policy.

The Chinese again stepped in. China's third highest ranking politician, Wu Bangguo, traveled to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Jong Il and Cabinet Premier Pak Pong Ju. Wu delivered Chinese grants and a message that the state wanted to see Six Party Talks resume. Before Wu left Pyongyang, North Korea announced its willingness to restart talks.¹⁰⁴ Talks resumed with some prospect of movement given the Foreign Ministry's apparent willingness to consider the written assurances pledge, but the talks ultimately broke down. The Foreign Ministry may have had too little too late to overcome the party and military's inertia.

Three months later in mid-January 2004, an unofficial delegation of former senior U.S. government officials and academics returned from North Korea and said the North Koreans showed them the 8000 fuel rods were no longer in storage, noting the North Koreans claimed they had been reprocessed.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the U.S. started its planned move of U.S. troops away

¹⁰¹ "North Korea's New Premier Speaks at Supreme People's Assembly Session," KCBS, September 3, 2003, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, September 4, 2003.

¹⁰² "US Says N. Korea Plutonium Reprocessing has Stopped," *Canberra Times*, September 13, 2003, p. A20.

"North Korean radio report confirms 8,000 spent fuel rods reprocessed," KCBS, October 2, 2003.

¹⁰³ "DPRK Radio Carries FM Spokesman's Comments Stressing 'Principle of Simultaneous Actions'," KCBS, October 25, 2003. Julie Chao, "Bush offers North Korea guarantee," *National Post*, October 20, 2003, p. A8. James Brooke and David E. Sanger, "North Korea *Nodong Sinmun*, In Shift, to Mull Security Offer," *New York Times*, October 26, 2003, p. A1.

¹⁰⁴ "Decree' on DPRK-PRC Discussions, DPRK Will Attend Future 'Six-party Talks'," KCBS, October 30, 2003.

"Kim Jong Il Receives Chinese State Delegation," KCNA, October 30, 2003. BBC Timeline.

¹⁰⁵ Rupert Cornwell and Raymond Whitaker, "N Korea: U.S. Team Saw Our Nuclear Arms," *Independent on Sunday*, January 11, 2004, p. 16. Jack Pritchard, "What I Saw in North Korea," *New York Times*, January 21, 2004, p. A27.

from the DMZ to a base further south and moved six B-52 bombers to Guam, within striking range of North Korea.¹⁰⁶ The Foreign Ministry did not observably advocate for renewed talks in the contemporary political climate.

North Korea and the U.S. talked again in February to little avail as the U.S. continued to demand North Korea dismantle its nuclear program as a prerequisite to further talks, and North Korea continued to insist the reactors were for peaceful energy purposes.¹⁰⁷ The talks ended with agreement to form lower level working groups, although Pyongyang took its time forming them. The Foreign Ministry called the talks “disappointing” and merely an effort for the U.S. to stall for time as it tried to “suffocate” North Korea.¹⁰⁸ North Korea remained outwardly united in opposition to further negotiations with the U.S.

Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing’s subsequent trip to Pyongyang in March 2004 and meetings with Kim Jong Il did not change the dynamics. When Kim Jong Il personally traveled to Beijing to meet with Chinese President Hu Jintao in April, Kim reportedly sought more Chinese aid to return to negotiations. No specific *quid pro quo* was ever revealed, although North Korea agreed to participate in the working group meetings after the trip. Still, the North Korean media remained overwhelmingly negative about the prospect for the working group meetings. The Foreign Ministry issued a single statement, defining the meeting’s agenda as one to advance a proposal of “reward for freeze” and empathetically ruling out any “talking about ‘irreversible’ or something like that.” In essence, the Foreign Ministry required a complete capitulation on the American side to continue “sit[ting] at the table.”¹⁰⁹ Both financial rewards and a temporary or partial nuclear freeze were anathema to the Bush Administration’s as Clintonesque ideas.¹¹⁰ Pyongyang – and certainly the Foreign Ministry – knew this. The move was likely tactical. No one in the North Korean system was observably pushing for negotiations in this environment, but showing up gained Chinese support.

Cabinet officials meanwhile concentrated their energies on inter-Korean projects and economic changes. On Kim’s return to Pyongyang from China, a massive explosion rocked the Ryongchon train station. Kim’s train traveled through the station only hours previously, leading to speculation that the explosion may have been a failed assassination attempt.¹¹¹ The explosion

¹⁰⁶ “U.S. Troops To Pull Out Of Seoul,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2004, p. A19. “USFK Relocation Will Not Weaken Defense Posture: Ambassador to U.S.” *Yonhap*, February 4, 2004.

¹⁰⁷ “Destroy Nuclear Program, U.S. to Tell N. Korea,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 2004, p. A17. “S. Korea to Propose Detailed Conditions for Freeze of DPRK Nuclear Program in Next Round Talks,” *Xinhua*, February 20, 2004. Anthony Faiola, “Seoul Urges U.S. ‘Flexibility’ in Nuclear Talks with North,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 2004, p. A13. “N. Korea Denounces U.S. Hard-line Stance,” *Yonhap*, February 29, 2004. “N. Korea Voices Disappointment at U.S. Stance in 6-Way Talks,” *Kyodo*, February 29, 2004.

¹⁰⁸ “DPRK Radio Carries First Official Remarks on Six-Party Talks; Processing Plans,” KCBS, February 29, 2004.

¹⁰⁹ “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Meeting of Working Group of Six-Way Talks,” KCNA, April 29, 2004.

¹¹⁰ “N. Korean Leader, Chinese Aide Discuss Arms,” *Washington Post*, March 25, 2004, p. A20. “North Korea Rejects Complete Disarmament,” *Korea Herald*, March 29, 2004. Edward Cody and Anthony Faiola, “N. Korea’s Kim Reportedly in China for Talks; Meetings With Leaders Said To Focus on Nuclear Standoff,” *Washington Post*, April 20, 2004, p. A13. Jim Yardley, “North Korean Leader Tells China He’s Committed to Nuclear Talks,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2004, p. A7. Anthony Faiola and Edward Cody, “North Koreans Agree To Mid-Level Talks,” *Washington Post*, April 30, 2004, p. A14.

¹¹¹ “Japan Mulling Aid To N. Korea After Train Blast,” *Jiji Press*, April 24, 2004. “Russian Envoys Visit Site of North Korean Train Disaster,” *Interfax*, April 24, 2004. “North Korean Train Station ‘Obliterated’ by Blast, Aid

created a tense international environment as the North cracked down on Sino-North Korean trade and communications. The KPA and party cited the explosion as a risk of increased opening. The state must reassert control. In this tense environment, it is noteworthy that the Cabinet Premier still hosted a South Korean trade delegation only two weeks later. The South Koreans reported a cordial atmosphere.¹¹²

Moreover, the cabinet defended its role in economic affairs and advocacy of greater opening against other bureaucratic interests. Cabinet Premier Pak addressed his detractors, contrasting the ideological approach with a realistic approach, and integrated a vague promise to pursue science and technology into the cabinet's platform.¹¹³ The same month, Kim Jong Il purged his brother-in-law and possible successor, Chang Song Taek, and his supporters amid concerns that he may be developing his own power base and taking on too much of an economic role.¹¹⁴ The rest of the bureaucracy went silent on this politically-sensitive subject for the time being, potentially out of fear of being purged themselves. On April 9 the DPRK Trade Minister Ri Kwang Keun was replaced with a younger economic technocrat, Rim Kyong Man, and the socialist Public Distribution System was suspended in exchange for an increased emphasis on markets. U.S. policy did not seem to directly affect the state's economic policy decisions. Pyongyang could accept some of the risks of lessened control that accompanied economic opening and inter-Korean economic projects even after a major explosion that some within the regime may have portrayed as an assassination attempt.

In May 2004, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi returned to Pyongyang for a second summit with Kim Jong Il.¹¹⁵ Within two weeks, the two Koreas agreed to open road links and end loudspeaker broadcasts across the DMZ. They established a hotline in case of future naval clashes, and South Korea promised rice aid to the North.¹¹⁶ The cabinet spearheaded only some of these inter-Korean efforts with even KPA representatives noting some improvement in North-South military relations.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, the U.S. announced it would cut one third of the 37,000 U.S. forces stationed in Korea. The party called this a victory and an American "retreat."¹¹⁸

Washington offered Pyongyang a new incentive that Libya had recently accepted – immediate aid and eventual removal of sanctions as soon as Pyongyang pledged to verifiably dismantle its plutonium and uranium programs. North Korea's Foreign Ministry called the idea

Workers Say," *Hong Kong Agence France Presse*, April 24, 2004. "S. Korea Receives Aid Request From N. Korea," *Yonhap*, April 24, 2004.

¹¹² "North Korean Prime Minister Thanks South for Help," *Yonhap*, May 1, 2004, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political.

¹¹³ "North Korean Premier Delivers Report at Supreme People's Assembly Second Session," KCBS, March 25, 2004, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, March 28, 2004.

¹¹⁴ Nautilus Timeline.

¹¹⁵ "Abductees' Kin Arrive in Japan," *The Daily Yomiuri*, May 23, 2004, p. 1. Kanako Takahara, "Koizumi Gets Four Abductees' Kids," *Japan Times*, May 23, 2004. Anthony Faiola, "New Capitalist Symbol Rises in N. Korea's Dust; Industrial Park to Broach Free Market," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2004, p. A1.

¹¹⁶ "Korean Neighbours to Open Road Links," *The Independent*, June 7, 2004, p. 21. James Brooke, "Koreas Agree to Open a Cross-Border Road and Rail Links," *New York Times*, June 6, 2004, p. A6.

¹¹⁷ "DPRK TV Carries Gist of Chief Delegate's Keynote Speech at Inter-Korean Talks 5 May," KCTV, May 5, 2004. "DPRK Radio Report on 26 May N-S Military Talks Highlights 'Reconciliation'," KCBS, May 26, 2004.

¹¹⁸ Anthony Faiola and Bradley Graham, "U.S. Plans Major Cut of Forces in Korea; 12,500 Troops To Be Relocated By End of 2005," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2004, p. A1.

“constructive” and said it would be studied in Pyongyang.¹¹⁹ That study period in Pyongyang included military officials opposing the proposal. Speaking on the tenth anniversary of Kim Il Sung's death, Minister of People's Armed Forces Kim Il Chol voiced deep skepticism of the Six Party Talks and emphasized military preparations instead of dialogue. The argument seemed to take some hold among central authorities, presumably up to Kim himself. The Foreign Ministry reversed its initial characterization of the idea, announcing the U.S. offer was a “sham” and renewed calls for U.S. compensation. With President Bush's reelection in question and his Democratic opponent offering direct talks with the North Koreans, the rest of the year saw little advancement in nuclear deliberations.¹²⁰

Nuclear Declarations

South Korea announced in September that it had enriched uranium and extracted plutonium under both the military dictatorship and democratic regimes. IAEA inspectors indicated Seoul tried to hide the event for six years as it claimed the two small experiments were only on an academic research scale and did not constitute a weapons program.¹²¹ As the IAEA investigated, North Korea's media highlighted what it saw as international hypocrisy and double standards applied to the two Koreas. The Foreign Ministry had the first word, downplaying the revelation as an American fabrication, and urging continued inter-Korean contacts.¹²²

KCNA called the news an “open secret” and noted South Korea could never make a nuclear weapon without U.S. help. The article blamed the U.S. and the IAEA for creating a “double standard” for the two Koreas but largely refrained from criticizing Seoul. The North's only criticism of Seoul came from the *Tongil Sinbo* website – one of the least authoritative means for the regime to communicate messages. The website is officially independent of the regime, run out of Shenyang, China, and claims to be the voice of an overseas Korean expatriate group committed to reunification on the North's terms. It indicated the South Korean nuclear experiments provided further reason to be cautious of the United States and boycott the Six Party Talks.¹²³

The KPA and party had a good talking point. Uncharacteristically, they did not capitalize on it. For months, they had attempted to link North-South relations with declining U.S.-DPRK

¹¹⁹ Joseph Kahn and Susan Chira, “Chinese Official Challenges U.S. Stance on North Korea,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2004, p. A12. David E. Sanger, “U.S. to Offer North Korea Incentives in Nuclear Talks,” *New York Times*, June 23, 2004, p. A3. Aya Igarashi and Satoshi Saeki, “N. Korea Nuke Freeze Eyed,” *The Daily Yomiuri*, June 27, 2004, p. 1. Philip P. Pan, “N. Korea Says It Can 'Show Flexibility'; Possible Dismantling of Nuclear Arms Programs Tied to Broader Aid Package,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 2004, p. A19.

¹²⁰ James Brooke, “North Korea to Wait Out Election In U.S., Then Talk, Diplomat Says,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2004, p. A6.

¹²¹ “Japan, ROK, U.S. Agree To Avoid Fallout of ROK Experiments,” *Jiji Press*, September 10, 2004. “Rumsfeld, Powell Back S Korean Position on Seoul's Nuke Issue,” *Yonhap*, September 10, 2004. Anthony Faiola and Dafna Linzer, “S. Korea Admits Extracting Plutonium; Acknowledgment of '82 Test Follows Disclosure on Uranium,” *Washington Post*, September 10, 2004, p. A1. “ROK Official Says Seoul 'Fully Cooperating' With IAEA,” *Choson Ilbo*, September 11, 2004.

¹²² “DPRK TV Carries FM Spokesman's Comments on ROK Uranium Enrichment; ROK 'Under U.S. 'Nuclear Umbrella,’” KCTV, September 11, 2004.

¹²³ Kim O-song, “What Do the Nuclear-Related Experiments Show?” *Tongil Sinbo* (<http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>), September 18, 2004.

relations. Here was an excellent opportunity to not only bash the South but to link Seoul and Washington together by alleging nuclear cooperation between the two allies and IAEA hypocrisy. The North Koreans are not beyond stretching the truth considerably, but the official reaction was particularly muted. The party and military did not downplay the event actively like the Foreign Ministry, but it did refrain from speaking out. Inter-Korean relations were improving, and a higher authority may have squelched their dissent.

Pyongyang moved towards its own more developed and well-publicized nuclear declaration. In January 2005, prior to President Bush's second inauguration, KCNA announced that North Korea was prepared to try talks again and "treat it [the U.S.] as a friend," expressing hope that the second Bush Administration may change its policy towards the North. The North often uses anonymous offers to test politically sensitive messages. In this case, they used an official DPRK publication, more authoritative than an affiliated expatriate organization, but not a formal diplomatic offer. They soon backed off this idea.

Pyongyang probably increasingly viewed Bush's second term as following a similar North Korea policy as the first term. In Secretary of State-designate Condoleezza Rice's confirmation hearings in January 2005, she called North Korea one of the "outposts of tyranny." Two weeks later, President Bush delivered the State of the Union Address. In the paragraph following the only discussion of the Proliferation Security Initiative and naming North Korea as the only state outside of the broader Middle East as a country of concern, the president said, "And we've declared our own intention: America will stand with the allies of freedom to support democratic movements in the Middle East and beyond, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

The North Koreans put these two statements together in official press reports. Washington considered Pyongyang a tyrannical regime, and it was committed to ending those regimes completely. Two days after the State of the Union, a Foreign Ministry statement, citing Rice's "outpost of tyranny" and Bush's "ending tyranny" remarks, argued North Korea was still high on the American list for regime change even in the second term. Consequently, it announced North Korea had "manufactured nuclear weapons" to deter military intervention. The statement also suspended indefinitely North Korea's participation in the Six Party Talks and reaffirmed its military-first politics.

Debate continued in Pyongyang but the North Korean readings of events changed the conversation to not if, but how, the state should announce its nuclearization intent. An American scholar met with several North Korean officials in Pyongyang and reported that the incongruity in the North Korean approach reflected bureaucratic divisions within the regime: "In the February [2005] showdown, I was told by several of those involved, the dealers argued in favor of preserving ambiguity concerning the extent of North Korean nuclear capabilities as part of a continued effort to get economic quid pro quos in return for step-by-step denuclearization. The hard-liners countered that it would be naive to continue hoping for a beneficial deal with the Bush administration, which in their view is seeking regime change and wants to use the six-party talks in Beijing to drive Pyongyang into a corner. It is demeaning for North Korea to let the United States keep it on the defensive in the six-party talks, they contended, even though Washington has 7,400 operational nuclear weapons of its own. The only self-respecting course for North Korea, they said, would be to rule out any discussion of dismantlement for now and to

declare unambiguously that North Korea is already a ‘nuclear weapons state’ in order to make Washington think twice about any military adventure.”¹²⁴

This account is a helpful single window into regime dynamics but still tends to conflate the military and party representatives together as a singular hardliner. Though the more general grouping has a certain utility, this idea can be refined to the two separate set of arguments the scholar notes were used to advance the nuclear declaration. “Hardliners” objected to Six Party Talks on both militarily pragmatic grounds (that they fail to provide for the state’s security and limit more tangible defensive actions) and on ideological grounds (talking with the imperialists is an affront to the state’s dignity). Despite these distinct arguments, these two hardline groups had the same goal. Their argument seemed to win out as engagement skeptics in North Korea increasingly defined the state’s policy towards the U.S.

Diplomatic Impasse; Mutual Pressure

Pyongyang returned to its earlier demand of bilateral negotiations. Washington refused, noting its long-standing view that the issue was multilateral in nature, not simply a responsibility of the United States. China called on North Korea to return to the multilateral talks as U.S. plans to intensify its Illicit Activities Initiative to reduce Pyongyang’s access to the international financial system leaked to the press.¹²⁵ After the Head of the China's Central Committee's International Department met with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang, North Korea announced it would participate in the six-party format in principle but did not change its substantive demands. The pattern continued. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called her Chinese counterpart in March to get China to pressure the North Koreans. China refused and offered North Korea “substantial” new “loans” when Cabinet Premier Pak Pong Ju and Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju visited Beijing in April. North Korea does not repay the Chinese and South Korean “loans” that are better understood as aid. Beijing reportedly may have increased North Korea’s aid by up to 40 percent, reflecting Beijing’s stated primary interest in peninsular stability.

The following month, some media outlets in Pyongyang suggested the state may test a nuclear weapon – traditionally seen as a Chinese red line – while others called such allegations American propaganda. The state indicated its willingness to return to the Six Party Talks while others rejected negotiations. New York Times columnist David Sanger reported that the U.S. intelligence community was divided in its interpretation of North Korea’s actions, relying on satellite imagery of possible preparations for a nuclear test while seeing diplomatic overtures

¹²⁴ Selig S. Harrison, “Getting Around Pyongyang's Hard-Liners,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2005, p. A23.

¹²⁵ The U.S. used third-party sanction threats, targeting WMD and missile proliferation, to pressure the regime. The actions would have much broader economic consequences for North Korea as some U.S. officials cautioned foreign interlocutors and businesses to avoid business relationships with *any* North Korean business. “North Korea Reports It’s Ready to Resume Nuclear Arms Talks,” *New York Times*, January 15, 2005, p. A2. David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, “U.S. Asking China to Increase Pressure on North Korea to End Its Nuclear Program,” *New York Times*, February 9, 2005, p. A8. James Brooke and David E. Sanger, “North Koreans Say They Hold Nuclear Arms,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2005, p. A1. Glenn Kessler and Philip P. Pan, “White House Dismisses Idea Of Direct Talks With North Korea,” *Washington Post*, February 12, 2005, p. A15. Keith Bradsher and James Brooke, “China Calls on North Korea To Return to Regional Talks,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2005, p. A20. David E. Sanger, “U.S. Is Shaping Plan to Pressure North Koreans,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2005, p. A1. Joel Brinkley, “U.S. and Japan Declare Concern Over North Korea,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2005, p. A10.

towards resuming talks.¹²⁶ Based on these empirical observations, North Korea seemed to be moving in two different directions simultaneously – a position puzzling for those analysts who viewed North Korea as a singular monolith. Personalizing this disparity led some to call the state a two-faced, though monolithic, entity that fundamentally could not be trusted enough to be engaged.

Similar skepticism about negotiations came from the Chief of the KPA General Staff who said in another major anniversary address that negotiations are fruitless and only delay meaningful progress towards the North's "nuclear deterrent." His advocacy seemed to have a receptive ear among central authorities. By May, the Foreign Ministry announced the state had completed its reprocessing the 8,000 fuel rods from the Yongbyon reactor. At the same time, though, the U.S. and North Korea met "secretly" two days later in New York. The Foreign Ministry announced its desire to keep the backchannel open while rejecting U.S. "punitive measures." The divergent institutional stands again cannot be explained by monolithic theories of the North Korean state. If policy was solely defined at the top, one should not be able to point to such divergences.

South Korea offered to sweeten the negotiated settlement pot for North Korea to denuclearize with its "important proposal." Pyongyang agreed to an inter-Korean ministerial meeting where South Korea added 200,000 tons of fertilizer to the North's aid package but the North still refused to return to Six Party Talks. In mid-June 2005, 40 South Korean officials and 295 non-official citizens celebrated in Pyongyang the fifth anniversary of the inter-Korean summit. 100,000 North Koreans attended the opening ceremony at Kimilsung Stadium, and the Cabinet Premier's speech "welcome[d] the South Korean delegation with my brotherly love." Meanwhile, the Pentagon suspended searches with the KPA for remains of soldiers killed in the Korean War and ordered Nighthawk stealth fighter planes to South Korea as the U.S. publicly considered pushing for another UN Security Council action against North Korea.¹²⁷ Seoul and Washington's approaches were not in step.

The party again focused on poor relations with the U.S. instead of advances in inter-Korean relations. The Party Central Committee Secretary, Choe Thae-bok, said in a speech commemorating the anniversary of Kim Jong Il's work at the Party's Central Committee that North Korea, "is responding to the imperialists' hardline policies with an ultra-hardline.... Our army and people are sharply watching the United States and its servile followers' foolish acts of

¹²⁶ Jim Yardley, "North Korean Said to Be Willing to Resume Talks," *New York Times*, February 22, 2005, p. A6. Chris Buckley, "'China Calls for Restarting Six-Party Talks at An Early Date'," *Xinhua*, February 23, 2005. Joel Brinkley, "China Balks at Pressing the North Koreans," *New York Times*, March 22, 2005, p. A10. Joel Brinkley, "North Korea Said to Reject China's Bid on Nuclear Talks," *New York Times*, April 9, 2005, p. A14. "State Dept Spokesman Says U.S. Following Situation in DPRK Closely," *Xinhua*, May 6, 2005. Glenn Kessler, "China Rejected U.S. Suggestion to Cut off Oil to Pressure North Korea," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2005, p. A11. Anthony Faiola and Sachiko Sakamaki, "N. Korea Suggests It Will Hold Atomic Test; Country Also Hints at Return To 6-party Talks," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2005, p. A12. David E. Sanger, "What Are Koreans Up To? U.S. Agencies Can't Agree," *New York Times*, May 12, 2005, p. A14.

¹²⁷ "Seoul Woos N. Korea with Economic Aid," *Korea Times*, May 17, 2005. Lee Tee Jong, "Seoul Offers Pyongyang 'Substantial Proposal'," *Straits Times*, May 17, 2005. "U.S. Halts Search for Its War Dead in North Korea," *New York Times*, May 26, 2005, p. A11. "North Korea and U.S. Swap Insults," *The Independent*, June 3, 2005. David E. Sanger, "North Korea Said to Offer To Rejoin Nuclear Talks," *New York Times*, June 8, 2005, p. A6.

recklessness and hostile attempts, and are fully ready to smash any crushing offensive and military attack by the enemies in a single stroke... [W]e will mercilessly annihilate and sweep away the aggressors by fully putting in motion our political and military might.”¹²⁸ By the end of the month, the party had more bureaucratic ammunition to cite. President Bush issued Executive Order 13382 as part of WMD Commission recommendations. The Order barred U.S. persons from doing business with eight foreign entities based in North Korea, Iran, and Syria suspected of transferring WMD- or ballistic missile-related technology. The party called the move a new sanction.

“The Atmosphere Has Improved” – For a Day

In mid-June 2005 China sent a delegation representing President Hu to Pyongyang to again convince Pyongyang to return to Six Party Talks. This time Kim Jong Il provided a more substantial guarantee. He said peninsular denuclearization was his revered father’s “dying wish.” The statement was especially significant as it was difficult for party or military leaders to resist this authoritative claim. Within a week, North Korea’s Foreign Ministry said replacing the armistice with a “peace mechanism” would end the U.S. hostile policy towards the DPRK and eliminate North Korea’s need for a nuclear deterrent. South Korea revealed the details of its “important proposal,”¹²⁹ and Washington named an accomplished diplomat, Chris Hill, as its new lead negotiator.¹³⁰ Absent a new stumbling block, it seemed that all parties were getting on the same page and willing to move forward. This turn of events reexposed bureaucratic differences in Pyongyang.

The new American negotiator reportedly enjoyed more leeway than his predecessor as he announced the U.S. would pursue a “words for words and actions for actions” strategy towards disarmament. Pyongyang previously called for “simultaneous” actions to bridge the lack of trust between parties. In his opening statements at the July Six Party Talks session, Hill reportedly recognized North Korea’s sovereignty and repeated the U.S. line that it had no intention of attacking the North. Hill presented U.S. evidence that North Korea enriched uranium, reportedly drawing on A.Q. Khan’s confession. Despite North Korea’s reluctance to accept the U.S. information, the six parties worked on drafting a set of principles to guide the Talks.¹³¹ The Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that “the atmosphere has improved.”

¹²⁹ South Korea’s electricity proposal offered to supply North Korea with 2,000 kilowatts of electricity transmitted across new power lines crossing the DMZ. The project would cost \$1.4 billion in infrastructure developments and \$1 billion annually to supply the energy

¹³⁰ Norimitsu Onishi, “North Korea’s Leader Says He’s Ready To Resume Talks to End Nuclear Standoff,” *New York Times*, June 18, 2005, p. A5. Joel Brinkley, “Rice Has No Plans to Improve Offer to North Korea in Arms Talks,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2005, p. A3. Nicholas Krlev, “N. Korea Agrees to Nuke Talks,” *Washington Times*, July 10, 2005, p. A1. Choe Sang-hun, “Goal is Peace Treaty with U.S., North Korea Says,” *International Herald Tribune*, July 23, 2005, p. 1. Anthony Faiola, “South Koreans Weigh Burden of Massive Assistance for North; Electricity Project Seen as Payment Toward Unification,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 2005, p. A12.

¹³¹ Jim Yardley and David E. Sanger, “U.S. Tries a New Approach in Talks With North Korea,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2005, p. A10. David E. Sanger and Jim Yardley, “U.S. Offers North Korea Evidence That Nuclear Secrets Came From Pakistani’s Network,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2005, p. A10. Tschang Chi-chu, “Joint Statement to be Drafted at N-Talks,” *Straits Times*, July 30, 2005. “6-Way Talks Recess for 3 Weeks,” *Korea Times*, August 8,

Talks stalled over North Korea's Light Water Reactor (LWR) demand.¹³² The 1994 Agreed Framework pledged to build a LWR and the international consortium charged with the project had broken ground by the time the framework agreement fell apart in 2002. Pyongyang claimed the state needed the reactor to harness the scientific and medical benefits of nuclear power, support its focus on science and technology to transform its economy, and produce badly needed energy. However, the move would also be an important means for Pyongyang to save face and placate internal opponents to negotiations. For Washington, the LWR was politically unpalatable as a centerpiece of the Clinton-era agreement.¹³³

China proposed a compromise where the six parties agreed in principle to North Korea's right to develop nuclear energy while delaying the question on building a LWR until an "appropriate time." In exchange, North Korea agreed to return to the NPT. All sides eventually agreed to this September 19 joint statement.¹³⁴ Within three months of switching the U.S. negotiating team and granting it more flexibility, Pyongyang reacted. The North Korean Foreign Ministry had news they could bring back to Pyongyang. Six Party Talks now gave them something to cite as a benefit of the diplomatic track when presenting their case internally. However, this would not last long. The first significant agreement in years was quickly undermined in both Washington and Pyongyang.

LWR Demands and Banco Delta Asia

As the six parties met in Beijing, the U.S. Treasury Department designated a Macao bank, Banco Delta Asia (BDA), as an entity of "primary money laundering concern" under Section 311 of the Patriot Act due to its ties with North Korean entities allegedly involved in illicit activities and missile sales. The move, formally published in the Federal Register the day after the conclusion of the September 19 agreement, had the effect of cutting North Korea off from the international financial system over an allegation of \$27 million worth of laundered funds.¹³⁵

2005. Jim Yardley, "U.S. and North Korea Blame Each Other for Stalemate in Talks," *New York Times*, August 8, 2005, p. A4.

¹³² "NK Demand for Reactor Is Nonstarter," *Korea Times*, September 16, 2005. Edward Cody, "Talks Deadlock Over N. Korea's Demand for Reactor; U.S. Could Seek Sanctions at U.N.," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2005, p. A26. "US May Freeze N Korean Assets," *Irish Times*, September 17, 2005, p. 11.

¹³³ For a sophisticated view on the often elusive concept of face, see David Yau-fai Ho, "On the Concept of Face," *American Journal of Sociology* 81:4 (1976), pp. 867-84.

¹³⁴ "China Presents 'New Plan' at North Korea Talks," *Kyodo*, September 18, 2005. Edward Cody, "U.S. Raises Objections to China Proposal in Talks," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2005, p. A25. "Six-Party Talks Reach Agreement," *Korea Herald*, September 20, 2005. Jane Macartney, "North Korea Vows to End Nuclear Plans in Return for Aid and Oil," *The Times*, September 20, 2005, p. 38.

¹³⁵ The 311 action froze what was contemporaneously reported as approximately \$27 million, although this figure would be modified to about \$25 million by the time the action was reversed. More importantly, the action cut the Macao bank and related entities off from the U.S. financial sector. The Macao bank, with over US\$5 billion in assets, failed over the dispute of approximately one half of one percent of its business. (Delta Asia 2004 Annual Report, <http://www.delta-asia.com/eng/files/2004annualreport.pdf>, accessed July 25, 2008.) The *Wall Street Journal* published the story on its front page, and the message to the international financial community was clear. The threat of cutting off a bank's access to the U.S. financial sector was far too great to accept any business dealings with a North Korean business, person, or government entity. North Korean individuals and institutions found themselves isolated from any international banks. The Patriot Act provision requires consultation with the Secretary of State,

Also on September 20, Pyongyang announced that the critical sticking point of the LWR had to be resolved before the state began to denuclearize. Pyongyang interpreted the “appropriate time” for providing an LWR was now. North Korea’s powerful Vice Foreign Minister repeated the LWR demand in his speech at the UN General Assembly five days later. The Foreign Ministry objected to U.S. claims of illicit activities, but the party newspaper first labeled the 311 action a “sanction” incompatible with continued negotiations.

Chinese President Hu again visited Pyongyang, and Pyongyang returned to Talks in November. Hu toured the Chinese-funded major glass factory and reportedly pledged more aid. Six Party Talks resumed without progress as the North Korean negotiators took up the party’s position. North Korea’s chief negotiator told reporters that progress could not be made without the U.S. removal of the new sanctions; the LWR demand fell from prominence for the time being. Pyongyang boycotted the Six Party Talks over the BDA issue for the next 14 months.

Cross-border Cooperation: The Only Game in Town

As the U.S. and North Korea reached an impasse over the BDA issue, South Korea agreed to more than double its aid that year to the North by pledging \$2.6 billion. The South Korean annual figure was worth approximately 100 times more than the one-time amount in dispute with the U.S. South Korea opened its first liaison office in Pyongyang, agreed to finance a multi-year \$10 billion joint textile project, and planned to double the size of the Kaesong Industrial Complex. The two Koreas also agreed to field a joint Korean team for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

With South Korean and Chinese aid and good weather, Pyongyang enjoyed a bumper harvest in 2006. Inter-Korean relations reached a new height, and North Korea’s food situation improved markedly for the year. However, the improved food situation allowed central authorities to heed party demands to crackdown on market mechanisms to distribution food. The state reinstated the socialist Public Distribution System and expelled UN World Food Program (WFP) staff involved in humanitarian assistance. While WFP food aid requires inspections to guarantee food reaches its intended recipients, South Korean and Chinese aid largely lacked these oversight provisions. Pyongyang preferred its neighbors’ less intrusive food aid. The expulsion reflects longstanding arguments by the military that intrusive food inspections undermined the state’s information security. International aid workers channeled information to hostile governments, exposed North Korea’s citizens to more outside influences, and decreased central authorities’ control over distributing food as it saw fit, including prioritizing feeding the military, as opposed to aid agencies’ insistence on reaching vulnerable populations.

Reintroducing the PDS also addressed growing inequities and corruption that accompanied the markets. Markets provided farmers an incentive to produce over their quota

and North Korea would come to call this a pressure tactic; the U.S. would hold that the diplomatic and legal tracks were separate. (Anthony Faiola, "N. Korea Gains Aid Despite Arms Standoff," *Washington Post*, November 16, 2005, p. A15. James Brooke, "North Korea Says Bumper Crop Justifies Limits on Aid," *New York Times*, October 6, 2005, p. A3. Donald Kirk, "Two Koreas' Dream: One Olympic Team," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 3, 2005, p. 5.) The day after the September 19 agreement, the U.S. Treasury Department published its “311 action” in the Federal Register, laying out the allegation that North Korean drug trafficking and counterfeiting profits were channeled through the Macao bank.

amounts, because they could sell their surplus. However, unintended side effects from the partially marketized food distribution system emerged, creating arbitrage opportunities and depriving certain at-risk populations from accessing food, including the unemployed, disabled, and elderly. Market incentives created an unsavory side effect of rewarding those who violated the law and put vulnerable populations that relied on the state in greater risk of starvation. Notably, it also smelled of capitalism to party officials long opposed to this type of incentive. With food secured (this year), the state rolled back market reforms and reintroduced the PDS. The state closed more markets, seized more food production, and tried to distribute it through state channels. The move shows competing demands on North Korean decision-making. Central authorities do not seem to prefer market mechanisms and have not undertaken a top-down reform economic reform project, but cabinet officials argue they should tolerate some market mechanisms to address critical problems that the state cannot efficiently resolve.¹³⁶

Despite three Premiers' documented role in advocating marketization, Premier Pak had to announce the significant change in national economic policy. With Kim Jong Il in rare attendance at the Supreme People's Assembly, Premier Pak carefully spoke on the reintroduction of the PDS. He proposed an administrative solution to food distribution and labeled it the party's position: "By all means, we must reach this year's grain production targets by thoroughly implementing the party's policy of agricultural revolution by fully concentrating and mobilizing the entire country's efforts into the agricultural front."

Yet the speech was significant in that the Cabinet Premier held out other roles for continued marketization. Following the party's construction of first presenting the required position and then undermining it by the end of the speech or article, Pak said, "[W]e will present the renovation of plants and enterprises with modern communication facilities within the next few years as one of the significant economic strategies." This possibly meant the legalization of cell phones, already pouring in over the Chinese border, and the more widespread use of international phone lines. Both were necessary to grease the wheels of international business but were opposed by the security camp fearful of information outflows.

Pak continued, "While actively conducting external economic activities in line with the changed environment, we should raise the level of the secondary and tertiary goods that are great in demand to the world level so as to actively develop the overseas market, and effectively carry out economic cooperation with other countries in a way that helps to introduce advanced science and technology." He interjected the role of supplying foreign markets with exportable goods while also supporting the party's position on advancing science and technology. Pak presented the benefits of his institution's advocated policy and included minimal party demands that did not fundamentally contradict his own platform like state-led science and technology development.

¹³⁶ During the famine, people starved waiting for the government to supply rations. Others bought food on black markets. Authorities began to turn a blind eye towards the black markets and occasionally cracked down on them, but crackdowns further disrupted the food supply. Consequently, the black markets became gray as authorities allowed private exchange of food and other consumer goods from China. See Haggard and Noland 2007. The reintroduction of the PDS removed major market incentives for agricultural production, raising the serious specter of shortages the following year as farmers lost their economic incentive to produce surplus foodstuffs.

Still, the most interesting compromise in the speech came when Pak tried to balance ideological requirements with market principles: “All economic guidance functionaries... should organize and conduct the activities of production and management by strictly adhering to the principle of socialism and the principle of guaranteeing actual profits.”¹³⁷ This framed the debate by cloaking the cabinet’s profit policy in socialist garb. North Korea would roll back its market efforts in the politically sensitive and economically significant agricultural sector, but the move did not seep into other sectors as the regime continued to use market incentives in business-to-business transactions, decentralize administrative responsibilities to the regions, and deemphasize the plan in industrial policy. It also continued to expand the Special Economic Zones and cross-border trade with South Korea and China.

Bureaucratic Cracks on “Sanctions” and Missile Tests

In early January 2006 Kim Jong Il made a secret ten-day trip to China as the chief American negotiator visited Beijing to meet with his North Korean counterpart. Negotiations were at a stalemate as North Korea required the U.S. remove what it termed new “financial sanctions” before they would negotiate further. The U.S. maintained the “defensive measures” were a law enforcement issue unrelated to negotiations.¹³⁸ Party commentaries opposed negotiations in characteristic rhetorical flourishes, lambasting the U.S. imperialists. The Foreign Ministry took a more pragmatic approach. They agreed with the party and KPA that U.S. “financial sanctions” aimed to pressure North Korea, yet the Foreign Ministry claimed the pressure move was intended to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, not change the regime. Pyongyang too sought a fully denuclearized Korean peninsula where all parties could enjoy security. Therefore, both sides should resume negotiations towards this common goal in the most productive manner – through the Six Party Talks.¹³⁹

The Foreign Ministry’s nuanced pitch failed to produce movement, and Pyongyang continued to refuse to talk, since the financial measures hampered its economic activity and threatened its pride. Beijing dispatched its Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei to Pyongyang for a five-day visit in mid-February 2006. Again, the Chinese sought to break the impasse as all three bureaucratic organs opposed the U.S. “sanctions.”¹⁴⁰ In March, the U.S. and North Korea held bilateral meetings in New York. The U.S. termed the meeting a “briefing” and sent Treasury Department technical experts while the North Korean delegation called it a “negotiation” and sent Foreign Ministry personnel. Failure was predictable as the U.S. technical experts came prepared only to describe U.S. actions, while North Korea officials sought to roll them back.

¹³⁷ “North Korea PM says farming, increased electricity, coal production key in 2005” KCBS, April 11, 2005, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, April 13, 2005.

¹³⁸ Tim Johnson, “N. Korea's Kim reportedly slips into China,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 12, 2006, p. A13. Andrew Salmon, “China Seen Unlikely to Press Nuke Issue,” *Washington Times*, January 12, 2006, p. A11. Philip P. Pan, “In China, Kim Vows Commitment to Talks,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2006, p. A14.

¹³⁹ Choe Hak-chol, “The Basic Factor That Breaks up the Talks Should Be Removed First,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 3, 2006. “DPRK Foreign Ministry’s Spokesman Urges U.S. to Lift Financial Sanctions against DPRK,” KCNA, January 9, 2006.

¹⁴⁰ Ryu Yong-su, “Unchanging Manifestation of Attempt for Nuclear Pre-emptive Strike,” *Minju Choson*, February 15, 2006, p. 2. “DPRK Cabinet Paper Decries U.S. ‘Defense Review’ as Attempt at ‘World Hegemony,’” KCNA, February 15, 2006. “Rodong Sinmun on Main Obstacle to Peaceful Reunification,” KCNA, February 21, 2006. DPRK FM Spokesman Says U.S. ‘Forced’ ROK To Agree to U.S.FK ‘Strategic Flexibility,’” KCBS, February 21, 2006. “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Urges U.S. To Lift Financial Sanctions,” KCNA, February 28, 2006.

With the New York failure, North Korea's bureaucracies again united on U.S. policy. The KPA spokesman denounced the financial sanctions, noting they must be related to U.S.-South Korean military exercises as a pretext to invasion. The Foreign Ministry announced the U.S. does not have a "monopoly" on preemptive military strikes. Negotiators from the six parties attended a conference in April in "unofficial" capacities. South Korea and China tried unsuccessfully to convince the American delegation to meet informally with the North Koreans. During the conference, North Korea's Ministry of the People's Armed Forces highlighted the U.S. unwillingness to negotiate further demonstrated the American's resolve to invade. Pyongyang continued to boycott Six Party Talks.

The U.S. issued new Foreign Asset Control Regulation targeting DPRK-flagged vessels in May and urged KEDO to finally scrap the LWR project. The U.S. State Department issued new, controversial allegations in its Trafficking in Persons report criticizing the low wages paid to North Korean workers at the Kaesong Industrial Complex.¹⁴¹ By June, the North Korean Foreign Ministry issued a statement inviting Chris Hill to Pyongyang for bilateral negotiations. The White House rejected the offer, citing American policy to only negotiate with the North Koreans in the six-party format.¹⁴²

As North Korea's Foreign Ministry offered this invitation, the KPA readied a long-range missile launch. Neither the invitation to Hill nor the long-range missile launch likely could have gone forward without central authorization, showing how Kim can utilize his distinct institutions to create a range of opportunities. Long a backchannel for negotiations, North Korea's second highest ranking official at its office at the UN in New York, Han Song Ryol, offered to discuss the pending flight test with the Americans but the White House refused. Meanwhile, the KPA Air Force warned the U.S. to stop flying reconnaissance flights over its territory or risk getting shot down. High-level administration officials rejected former Clinton administration officials' calls to strike the missile on the launch pad as too provocative; instead, they moved sea-based missile defense assets into the region, potentially to take a shot at the rocket in flight if given the opportunity.

Rejecting the Foreign Ministry's invitation and New York channel overtures made it easier for Kim to authorize the KPA's launch. North Korea prepared its longest range rocket for its first flight test – the three-stage Taepo Dong 2, suspected of being able to reach the continental United States. North Korea ended its self-imposed six-year moratorium on missile launches on the fourth of July (U.S. time). The missile only flew for a few seconds before failing, according to declassified sea logs of the U.S. Aegis cruisers tracking the launch. The U.S. pushed for a new round of six-party negotiations as the UN Security Council again condemned the North. Washington and Tokyo began deploying sensors for missile defense. South Korea cut off food aid although they would resume it the following month when floods in the North risked mass starvation. South Korea's president also demanded wartime operational control from Washington as South Korea's generals worried openly about the military utility of

¹⁴¹ The overall U.S. strategy remained controversial even within the President's own party. Republican Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar, had legislation prepared that would force the White House to open a liaison office in North Korea, pending progress on the nuclear issue, according to a press leak.

¹⁴² Nicholas Kralev, "U.S. Rules Out Visit by Hill to Capital; But State Keeps Possibility Alive," *Washington Times*, June 2, 2006, p. A15.

the political move. With divergent strategic interests and threat perceptions, the U.S.-South Korean military alliance loosened.¹⁴³

Though the Foreign Ministry issued a statement rejecting the latest UN Security Council Resolution, the Minister of the People's Armed Forces, Kim Il Chol, went one step further, saying that North Korea must provide its own self-defense "in every way... without being hindered by anything." The launch did not prompt a resumption of bilateral talks or U.S. lifting its "financial sanctions." A senior U.S. Treasury official called the line between North Korea licit and illicit finance "nearly invisible" and openly urged countries to cut off all business contacts with any North Korean citizen or entity in contradiction to the Administration's previous argument that the BDA action was a targeted legal action rather than a general political "sanctions." The North Korean Foreign Ministry rebuffed this "expanding financial sanctions" and vaguely pledged to "seek after all the necessary countermeasures." The state, moderately divided before the launch, united as the Foreign Ministry did not see any opening to make advances with the Americans. Pyongyang would quickly move to another, even more serious provocation.

Hitting Rock Bottom: The Nuclear Test

Marshal and Defense Minister Kim Il Chol used the anniversary of the Korean War "victory" to lay out the KPA's strategic vision towards the U.S. The position was not new. The KPA is openly skeptical of negotiating with an enemy it considers untrustworthy and calls tension reduction measures as impediments to reunification. Putting the nuclear program on hold for phantom gains only delays the North's nuclear deterrent. And reducing the military's actual budget share for economic projects – especially those without military uses outside the heavy industry sector – reduces the KPA's role in domestic and foreign policy:

"Under the aggressive ambition of overturning our socialist system and dominating all of Korea, the United States is blatantly translating into practice its evil scheme for a second Korean war... the United States is increasing its large scale state-of-the-art military equipment and modern homicidal weapons in South Korea and in its surrounding areas and is waging one war exercise commotion after another, such as the 'RIMPAC' [Rim of Pacific] joint military exercise... the United States picked a fight over the missile launch our military carried out and... had the UN Security Council adopt a so-called 'resolution,' which took serious note of the exercise of our self-defensive right."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Glenn Kessler, "N. Korea Warned On Testing Missile; Act Would Spur Penalties, Rice Says," *Washington Post*, June 20, 2006, p. A11. Dana Priest and Anthony Faiola, "North Korea Tests Long-Range Missile; Controversial Rocket Fails as Other Types Are Fired; U.N. Session Set After U.S., Japan Condemn Action," *Washington Post*, July 5, 2006, p. A1. Norimitsu Onishi, "U.S. Wants North Korea to Return to Talks," *New York Times*, July 10, 2006, p. A6. Anthony Faiola, "S. Korea Suspends Food Aid to North; Push for Renewal of Nuclear Talks Brings Meeting to Bitter End," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2006, p. A18. Colum Lynch, "Security Council Rebukes N. Korea; Nations Agree To Demand End Of Missile Program," *Washington Post*, July 16, 2006, p. A13. Anthony Faiola, "U.S., Japan to Start Deploying Missile Interceptors," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2006, p. A14. "Floods Claim Huge Toll in North Korea, Group Says," *New York Times*, August 17, 2006, p. A6. Anthony Faiola, "Seoul's Push to Regain Wartime Control From U.S. Divides South Koreans," *Washington Post*, August 29, 2006, p. A10.

¹⁴⁴ "Text of North Defence Minister's Korean War 'Victory' Anniversary Address," Uriminjokkkiri website, Pyongyang, July 26, 2006, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, July 29, 2006.

The position was not merely one for public consumption. Another high-level KPA official made the same argument in private conversations with his Russian counterparts. Chief of the KPA General Staff Kim Yong-joon noted the importance of investing in a “powerful deterrence force” against the U.S., according to a Russian media leak.¹⁴⁵ The missile launch was an abysmal military failure that the state misrepresented to its population as successful. However, officials knew their foreign counterparts were keenly aware of the failure. In this context, Pyongyang decided to push forward with another major provocation.

Only three months after the failed Taepo Dong 2 launch, the Foreign Ministry announced the state would test a nuclear weapon since it considered previous agreements abrogated and sanctions remained in place.¹⁴⁶ North Korea pursued the test despite strong international objections, including Beijing’s temporarily suspending critical oil supplies to North Korea. On October 9, 2006, North Korea tested its first nuclear bomb. The bomb’s plutonium came from the Yongbyon nuclear reactor that it unfroze after the 2002 scrapping of the Agreed Framework. The test “marks an historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the KPA and people that have wished to have powerful self-reliant defense capability.”¹⁴⁷ The party newspaper ran an epic poem in grand jubilation over the successful test.¹⁴⁸

International outcry condemned the test, but few real punishments were forthcoming. Pentagon officials privately told reporters that the U.S. could not sustain another war effort in Korea due to commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq and questioned the effectiveness of a naval blockade attempt. U.S. efforts in the UN Security Council moved further as China proved less reluctant to sanction Pyongyang in wake of crossing this assumed Chinese red line. The UN resolution cited Article VII explicitly, noting North Korea’s actions threatened international peace and security. The UN Article generally allows for militarized responses to such threats; a similar resolution allowed the creation of the UN Command in 1950 and internationalized the Korean War. Still, South Korea and China refused to abandon their engagement strategies. South Korea indicated it would not stop its investment in Kaesong, and China said it would not stop trading with North Korea. They remained firmly opposed to any military action against North Korea.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ “Pyongyang Taking it to the Brink?” *Japan Times*, September 2, 2006.

¹⁴⁶ “DPRK FM Statement Reveals New Measures for War Deterrent; Warns of ‘Nuclear Test,’” KCBS, October 3, 2006.

¹⁴⁷ “DPRK Successfully Conducts Underground Nuclear Test,” KCNA, October 9, 2006.

¹⁴⁸ “Become Talents of the Fatherland,” *Nodong Sinmun*, October 13, 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Glenn Kessler, “N. Korean Move Comes Amid Bid for Talks; With Plan to Conduct Nuclear Test, Pyongyang Again Dismisses U.S. Peace Feelers,” *Washington Post*, October 4, 2006, p. A20. Anthony Faiola, Glenn Kessler and Dafna Linzer, “Washington Post,” October 9, 2006, p. A1. “Text of North Korea Announcement,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2006, p. A6. Simon Saradzhyan, “N. Korean Test Will Have Global Fallout,” *Moscow Times*, October 10, 2006. Ewen MacAskill, “North Korea: United Nations: Punitive measures on the agenda,” *The Guardian*, October 10, 2006, p. 5. Anthony Faiola, “N. Korea’s No. 2 Official Warns of Further Tests,” *Washington Post*, October 12, 2006, p. A22. Thom Shanker and Martin Fackler, “South Korea Tells Rice It Won’t Abandon Industrial and Tourist Ventures With North,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2006, p. A14. Jim Yardley, “Sanctions Don’t Dent North Korea-China Trade,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2006, p. A1. Joseph Kahn, “China May Be Using Oil to Press North Korea,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2006, p. A12.

Two days after the test, North Korea's Foreign Ministry called on the U.S. to return to negotiations.¹⁵⁰ President Bush responded two days after that by signing the North Korea Nonproliferation Act of 2006 that allowed the U.S. to sanction entities that transfer missile- or WMD-related components to North Korea and the next day the UN Security Council sanctioned North Korea. The Foreign Ministry called the Security Council action a "declaration of war" as North Korea's highest constitutional official, Kim Yong Nam, warned of a second nuclear test. He also boasted that North Korea's economy had improved despite previous UN sanctions, highlighting the important role of South Korean and Chinese aid and investments. The cabinet officials seemed to argue that Washington could try as it may, but it lacked the power to pressure Pyongyang into submission.

The series of events demonstrated again the conclusion of the Perry policy review completed years earlier. The U.S. had few sticks to employ against North Korea, especially given diverging South Korean and Chinese interests, short of direct military action. A second Korean War would be very costly in treasure and blood. The policy review estimated such a scenario would kill hundreds of thousands and create over a million refugees – not including the possibility of nuclear escalation or Chinese involvement. North Korea had an aged, but effective, military deterrent. It would likely lose a peninsular war if fought to a military conclusion without Chinese aid, but the costs would be so high that it would dissuade Washington or Seoul from pursuing this policy. Once North Korea went nuclear, the United States modified its strategy towards the North.

Conclusion

This period shows the reactive nature of North Korea's U.S. policy and its ability to segment the three policy issue areas under consideration. Pyongyang viewed Washington's policy as fundamentally hostile and committed to regime change. As these ideas became increasingly impervious in Pyongyang, internal debate on U.S. policy went silent. External events effectively silenced cabinet advocacy on U.S. policy. Short-term gains in diplomacy had little prospect for success and did not have long-lasting impact during this time. Though not responsible for North Korea's sovereign choices, Washington has tremendous power over North Korea. It can shape Pyongyang's internal debates about missile and nuclear policy that critically shape its response and it has the capability to eradicate the regime if it is willing to accept the attending high costs of such a decision.

Pyongyang responds to both symbols and substance. When U.S. officials criticize Kim, for example, it provides ideologues in Pyongyang another talking point to demonstrate in internal debates that the regime must hold onto its missile and nuclear forces. Those not carefully evaluating the North Korean system may scoff at such a claim that a brutal regime would seriously react to international name-calling, but verbal attacks threaten the prestige and pride of the regime's top leader and institutional leaders have to come to his defense, making advancing negotiations in such an atmosphere difficult internally. Understanding the North's internal mechanisms can help inform the cost-benefit calculation of such a decision.

¹⁵⁰ "DPRK FM Statement, DPRK Says Ready for 'Dialogue', 'Confrontation' With U.S.," KCNA, October 11, 2006.

Likewise, efforts to enact sanctions, regardless of economic impact, prompt much the same reaction from North Korea. Ironically, many proponents of sanctions against North Korea have cited Pyongyang's loud reaction against them as evidence of their effectiveness, miscategorizing Pyongyang's complaints about a poisoned atmosphere for bilateral negotiations with genuine economic pressure being applied. Most prominently during this period, some argued that freezing roughly \$25 million of North Korean accounts that resulted in cutting the country's entities off from the international financial system prompted it to make certain strategic decisions out of an economic pressure. North Korea lost 80-90 percent of its industrial capacity in the 1990s and its severe economic contraction prevented it from feeding its own population, yet it still maintained the core elements of its system as this study has continually noted. Additional economic sanctions have a truly marginal impact economically and understanding the regime's internal functions helps understand how these moves simply antagonize the regime more than making any strategic advance.

This understanding of the North's internal dynamics leads to an uncomfortable conclusion that moderate carrot and stick approaches to the North are difficult to sustain. One institution will inevitably present the stick, no matter how small or ineffective, as an affront to the leader and regime's dignity, requiring an even larger inducement than otherwise would be required to shape regime responses. More focused and sustained strategies that try to embolden the cabinet's agenda internally or eradicate the regime outright are likely to be the only means to address concerns about North Korea's long-term actions, the latter strategy with particular high opportunity costs.

Despite repeated efforts by party and military officials to link inter-Korean relations and marketization efforts to souring U.S.-DPRK relations, cabinet officials successfully managed to keep this policy on a separate track. This development disputes the idea that the regime is strategically committed to creating a wedge between Seoul and Washington, rather institutions use linkage strategies tactically to bolster their predetermined advocacy. It was the cabinet – not the party or military – during this period that tried to distance Washington and Seoul to prevent the soured U.S.-DPRK relations from undermining its efforts on inter-Korean economic projects. This did not prevent the military and party from objecting to decided inter-Korean policy. The military demonstrated bureaucratic resistance and its semi-autonomous capabilities by provoking a naval skirmish in the Yellow (West) Sea. Both the party and military used the event to argue for a policy change on inter-Korean projects.

Economic policy was also subject to inter-institutional debate. The regime tended to tolerate additional forms of market mechanisms to address its inability to provide for its citizens' basic needs. However, when economic conditions improved enough that such coping mechanisms were not deemed absolutely necessary, the regime reintroduced administrative control over the economy. Pyongyang seemed to try to fashion its economic policy in response to the economic situation rather than linking these decisions to the external environment. Seoul's hope that engagement would drive North Korean economic policy decisions was not directly met as other variables proved more important. Perhaps counterintuitively, the extent that Seoul's efforts actually improved North Korean food security, one could argue that this contributed to Pyongyang's 2005 decision to crackdown on markets and reimpose greater regime control over the economy.

U.S. policy, inter-Korean relations, and economic policy are inherently linked at some level in North Korea's decision-making. One institution has always used conditions in one of these issue areas as a debating point for its policy agenda in other issue areas. Nonetheless, the state has demonstrated an ability to segment policy areas when it deems it appropriate. This segmentation allows more nuanced policy decisions but also contributes to impressions that North Korea is simply "muddling through" – that the state lacks an overarching agenda to bring it out of the current depressed situation. Top leadership has not shown a consistent commitment to economic reform and international opening that could transform the state into a more sustainable polity, nor has it consistently retrenched in policies of the late 1950s and 1960s where a planned economy supported socialist ideals and a strong defense sector hoped to prepare for the right time to launch a reunification drive by force. A reunified Korea on the North's terms provides a logically consistent alternative to transforming North Korea as reformers advocate. The state is not of one mind on these fundamental questions. Different ideas about the future of the state come through in the bureaucratic jostling on specific agenda items.

After the nuclear test, these issues remained unresolved, and Pyongyang's response to Seoul and Washington flipped. Seoul started to back off the unconditional engagement policy and turned substantially towards a harder line with the election of a conservative president in December 2007. As Seoul moved towards a tougher line, Washington started to increasingly accommodate the North. Divergence between Washington and Seoul's policies remained but on reversed footing. Pyongyang's institutional debates again reflected these changes.

Chapter 7: Policy Reversals, 2006-2008

Introduction

Fall 2006 proved another watershed in North Korea's U.S. policy and inter-Korean policy, though economic policy remained on a different track. The external environment changed in Fall 2006, prompting the regime's bureaucracies to cite different data in their institutional debates. The changes raised the cabinet's role on U.S. policy at the expense of the party and military while having the reverse effect on inter-Korean projects. Economic policy remained static. North Korea tested a nuclear weapon in October 2006 and Democrats in the United States won substantial gains in November congressional elections. Washington increasingly changed its policy towards North Korea, and Pyongyang's institutions reacted.

The October nuclear test, however, had the opposite effect in Seoul. Seoul's embattled president became an increasingly lame duck largely on grounds unrelated to North Korea policy. However, the nuclear test affected South Korean public opinion on its government's North Korean policy. Increasingly, conservative demands for greater short-term reciprocity in inter-Korean relations took hold over liberal argument that unconditional engagement could gradually change the North Korean economy, society, and politics. A year later, South Korea elected a new president based primarily on economic grounds but committed to a tougher North Korea policy. Pyongyang eventually responded to the new inter-Korean policy with greater hostility, favoring party and military positions.

Return to Six Party Talks

A month after the nuclear test, Congressional Democrats took over both houses of the U.S. Congress in November 2006 and demanded changes in policy towards North Korea. Key members of the Administration pushing the pressure strategy resigned,¹ and the new Congress required that the Administration appoint a single coordinator of North Korea policy. The White House tapped lead negotiator Chris Hill. The U.S. offered aid in response for North Korea's nuclear dismantlement and, critically, offered to discuss North Korea's outstanding concern about the frozen assets at Banco Delta Asia.² Washington cautiously pursued a more flexible approach, and the U.S. and North Korea met bilaterally in Berlin in late January 2007.

¹ The most notable pressure advocate who resigned was UN Ambassador and former Undersecretary of State for International Security John Bolton. He resigned after Democrats refused to approve his recess appointment. Two days after Bolton's resignation, American negotiators put forward a new proposal at the Six Party Talks offering aid. In January, another key official pushing confrontation with North Korea, Bob Joseph, who served as John Bolton's replacement as Undersecretary of State for International Security after a position as a senior staffer at the National Security Council focused on the same issues, also resigned. For an extensive review of the internal disagreements within the U.S. government on North Korea policy, see Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown* (2007).

² Glenn Kessler, "N. Korea Agrees to Return To Talks; A Surprise Reversal In Nuclear Dispute," *Washington Post*, November 1, 2006, p. A1. Norimitsu Onishi, "South Korea Won't Intercept Cargo Ships From the North," *New York Times*, November 14, 2006, p. A9. Glenn Kessler, "Democrats Blast Bush Policy on N. Korea," *Washington Post*, November 16, 2006, p. A21. Helene Cooper and David E. Sanger, "U.S. Offers North Korea Aid for Dropping Nuclear Plans," *New York Times*, December 6, 2006, p. A14.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry announced the two states reached an agreement.³ In a short and direct statement, the Foreign Ministry simply noted that “The talks took place from Jan. 16 to 18 in a positive and sincere atmosphere and a certain agreement was reached there.”⁴ They did not elaborate. The Foreign Ministry had been pushing for bilateral talks with the U.S. for years, and they were finally bearing fruit. Nevertheless, the party newspaper ran a commentary the same day, vaguely indicating that “the United States is viciously pursuing the policy hostile to Korea,” although lacking recent evidence. The follow-up commentary in the party newspaper the next day focused on the four-month old news that the U.S. moved a squadron of Stealth fighters to South Korea and was “hastening preparations for a war of northward aggression behind the curtains of six-party talks.”⁵ The party was grasping at straws to oppose renewed momentum in the U.S.-DPRK diplomatic track. Central authorities would rule against them.

The following day, North Korean state policy became clear. A senior party representative reversed course and uncharacteristically supported the cabinet’s foreign policy advocacy: “Kim Ki-nam, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, in a statement on January 20 fully supported and approved the joint statement released by the political parties, government and organizations of the DPRK, recognizing that the statement is the most just and patriotic appeal indicating the path of a sacred struggle to achieve earlier the national reunification, the supreme task facing the nation at present.”⁶ The party tends to utilize rhetorical flourishes, yet this statement was subdued and direct. The party supported the long-held position of the government, representing a bureaucratic defeat. The subdued statement suggests Kim Ki-nam was unenthusiastic about the move but was directed to issue it. The party had to publicly back off its opposition to negotiations. Kim Jong Il likely personally weighed in on this watershed change in the North’s policy. Stated institutional positions from each of the bureaucracies supporting negotiations with the Americans signaled that the state was ready to deal.

Six Party Talks resumed on February 8. In the two weeks between Kim Ki-nam’s statement and the resumption of talks, the party managed to express restrained doubt in the outcome of the negotiating session. A party commentary note, “Whenever the opportunity presents itself, the United States says that it will resolve the Korean peninsula issue through ‘dialogue.’ As reality shows, however, the United States is acting diametrically contrary to its words.”⁷ The party’s criticism was more reserved than previously statements and did not affect diplomatic progress.

After five days of negotiations, the Six Party Talks adjourned. North Korea pledged in the joint document to seal and dismantle the Yongbyon nuclear facility and provide a list of

³ “N. Korea Reports Progress In Talks With U.S. Envoy,” *Washington Post*, January 20, 2007, p. A17. “U.S. Envoy Upbeat About New Korea Talks,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2007, p. A10.

⁴ “Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry on Results of DPRK-U.S. Talks,” KCNA, January 19, 2007.

⁵ Ri Sok-chol, “Timely Appeal for Reunification and Patriotism,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 19, 2007. “Revelation of the Attempt Aimed at Carrying Out Preemptive Nuclear Strike for Northward Aggression,” *Nodong Sinmun*, January 20, 2007, p. 5.

⁶ “Secretary of WPK C.C. Supports Joint Statement of DPRK Political Parties, Government And Organizations,” KCNA, January 21, 2007.

⁷ Paek Mun-kyu, “Dangerous Maneuvers that Run Counter to Dialogue,” *Nodong Sinmun*, February 13, 2007.

nuclear facilities. Japan and North Korea also promised to restart normalization talks and "the Parties agreed to cooperate in economic, energy and humanitarian assistance to the DPRK" starting with heavy fuel oil shipments.⁸ The DPRK media did not carry the joint document's text. Instead, the Foreign Ministry announced the deliverables it had secured, prompting external observers to conclude there must have been some internal debate in Pyongyang on the joint document itself.⁹

By the following month, U.S.-DPRK talks were underway, and Cabinet Premier Pak Pong Ju emerged from a five-month public hiatus around the nuclear test to host South Korea's Unification Minister Lee Jae-joung for four days in Pyongyang. In these first post-test inter-Korean talks, Pak requested the resumption of rice and fertilizer aid, economic projects, and a peace treaty to end the Korean War saying, "Now is the time for the two Koreas to step on a springboard planted on firmer ground."¹⁰ North Korea's cabinet sought to maintain Seoul's conciliatory northern policy. KCNA paraphrased Chief Councilor of the Cabinet Kwon Ho Ung's keynote address: "Recalling that the North-South relations witnessed repeated suspension and resumption, he held that this abnormal situation should not be allowed to repeat itself any longer. To this end, it is necessary to refrain from sacrificing the interests of the nation for the sake of the relations with the outsiders under any circumstances."¹¹ The South Korean administration agreed that inter-Korean engagement should be permanent and sustainable as this sentiment became the first thought expressed almost verbatim in the joint press statement at the meeting's conclusion.¹² Government-to-government inter-Korean relations continued to improve even as the South Korean public grew more wary of dealing with the North after the nuclear test.

Meanwhile, the IAEA sent a delegation to North Korea for the first time since 1992 to discuss implementing the February 13 Six Party agreement. Slightly lower level working groups of the six parties met in Beijing to discuss energy and economic assistance. Washington also dispatched a Treasury Department official to Macao to finalize the removal of the U.S. financial measures against North Korea. Before the month was over, the Six Party Talks resumed again. The political stage was set for more progress, but, citing a technical problem in transferring funds, the North Korean money still could not be unfrozen. The talks ended four days later without progress as the North Korean delegation refused to negotiate until the BDA funds were actually unfrozen.¹³

⁸ Jim Yardley and David E. Sanger, "In Shift, a Deal is Being Weighed by North Korea," *New York Times*, February 13, 2007, p. A1.

⁹ Carlin and Lewis 2008, p. 50. "DPRK Radio Reports on 6-Party Talks, Agreement on Provision of Energy Aid to DPRK 13 Feb," KCBS, February 13, 2007.

¹⁰ "North Korea calls on South to resume humanitarian projects," Yonhap, February 28, 2007, BBC MAP-P. Andrew Salmon, "U.S., N. Korea to normalize ties," *Washington Times*, February 28, 2007, p. A1.

¹¹ "North-South Ministerial Talks Open," KCNA, February 28, 2007.

¹² "20th North-south Ministerial Talks Close," KCNA, March 2, 2007.

¹³ Despite diplomatic breakthrough, private banks were reluctant to process the North Korean funds given the state of U.S. law and the grave risks still legally associated with transferring North Korean funds. Three months would pass before the funds were returned to North Korea. Glenn Kessler and Edward Cody, "U.S. Ends Bank Probe; Possible Step Toward N. Korean Reactor Closure," *Washington Post*, March 15, 2007, p. A16.

KPA officials took the delay in six-party negotiations to reiterate opposition to accommodation. Another general repeated the KPA's position that it stood ready to defeat the Americans. The KPA's end game is clear: defeating the Americans by getting them to leave Korea paves the way for reunifying the nation. "Should the U.S. imperialists infringe even a bit upon the sovereignty of the DPRK and its right to existence, the KPA will wipe them out at a single stroke and accomplish the historic cause of national reunification, the cherished desire of the nation, without fail."¹⁴ The call seemed particularly hollow in a general atmosphere of negotiating progress, much like previous cabinet and Foreign Ministry statements holding out the prospect for continued negotiations as other bureaucratic actors' policy preferences won out.

Cabinet Economic Reformer Replaced... with Economic Reformer

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Il replaced the Cabinet Premier. Cabinet Premier Pak Pong Ju had a difficult balancing act, continually advocating new economic reforms couched in socialist language. With military and party opposition to the cabinet's accommodating foreign policy with the Americans and its economic opening platform, Kim Jong Il removed Pak from power. However, unlike previous economic reformers who were executed, Pak was moved to manage a chemical factory.¹⁵ The regime did not distance itself far from Pak, replacing him with his former subordinate, Transportation Minister Kim Yong Il.

A week after Kim Yong Il replaced Pak, the new Premier held a major meeting on the state budget. His first public comments in his new position articulated the same institutional goals as Pak in the government's newspaper: "The meeting noted the need for all of the economic guidance functionaries to strictly guarantee actual profits in industrial management and to attain their units' state budgetary payment plans without fail every month and every quarter... [while] resolutely maintain[ing] the principle of socialism."¹⁶ Kim Yong Il was the third consecutive cabinet premier since the 1998 constitutional revision that upgraded the institution's formal powers, and all three premiers articulated the same vision in contradiction to their party and military colleagues.

Premier Kim's first major speech took place a few months later on the anniversary of the state's founding. It largely reinforced state ideology, but on the economy, the premier carefully balanced demands for heavy industry with consumer goods, light industry, and agriculture: "We will firmly adhere to the socialist economic construction line of the military-first era and while developing the national defense industry first, we will vigorously ignite the flames of the agricultural revolution and the light industry revolution, thus the food problem and the issue of the people's consumer goods should be smoothly resolved."¹⁷ The new premier is not as outspoken and effective as his predecessor, but he still presents the same institutional policy line.

¹⁴ "North Korean agency reports on army day 'grand military parade,'" KCBS, April 25, 2007, in BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political,

¹⁵ Yi Kyo-kwan, "DPRK Vice Trade Minister Kim Mun-song executed by shooting," *Choson Ilbo*, January 8, 2002, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, January 8, 2002. "Report, N. Korea Wants to Join International Fund Groups," *Korea Times*, January 21, 2000.

¹⁶ "Let Us Even More Thoroughly Implement the Party's Economic Policy With the Taechon Spirit -- Cabinet Enlarged Plenary Meeting Was Held," *Minju Choson*, April 18, 2007, <DPRKmedia.com>.

¹⁷ "DPRK Premier Kim Yong Il Delivers Report Marking DPRK's 59th Founding Anniversary," KCBS, September 8, 2007.

Party leaders also continued to argue that the state should favor heavy industrialization and communal agricultural production and distribution. They cite the need for administrative, not market, solutions to economic problems. By working harder and applying science and technology, the state can remedy underproduction.¹⁸ It is unclear whether Pak's dismissal actually placated military and party hardliners who suffered major policy losses on both domestic and foreign policy, since the replacement meant another individual advocating the same positions, albeit with some reduced personal clout and effectiveness.

Chris Hill in Pyongyang

In late June 2007, Chris Hill traveled to Pyongyang for bilateral meetings with his North Korean counterparts – marking the highest-ranking official to visit Pyongyang since Hill's predecessor led a delegation in 2002 when North Korea allegedly admitted to having a uranium enrichment program.¹⁹ The Foreign Ministry labeled the discussions “comprehensive and productive,” detailing that “both sides shared the view that they would start implementing the agreement on the premise that the issue of the remittance of the funds is finally settled and had an in-depth exchange of views on the actions to be taken by each side in the next phase.”²⁰

On June 25, the anniversary of the start of the Korean War, the North Korean Foreign Ministry confirmed the \$27 million of Banco Delta Asia accounts had been returned and the state would begin dismantling its nuclear complex at Yongbyon.²¹ The following day, IAEA Deputy Director Olli Heinonen led a delegation to North Korea's nuclear facilities. The Foreign Ministry announced it would start shutting down Yongbyon as soon as the first delivery, or ten percent of the pledged heavy fuel oil shipments, arrived rather than waiting for the entirety of the pledged oil.²² Within a week, South Korea made the first delivery. Pyongyang began to follow through on its pledge by shutting down and sealing Yongbyon as party and military personnel had little new evidence to cite to stall the dismantlement move.

Lacking new evidence, the military attempted to cite historical reasons to scuttle this agreement. In a long article detailing a selected history of U.S.-DPRK confrontation from the 1950s to the present and noting the fundamental untrustworthiness of the Americans on nuclear policy, the KPA attacked the agreement. “The KPA cannot but clarify its stance on the persistent maneuver of the anti-Republic fanatics of the United States... nobody can dare to deny that confrontation between the DPRK and the United States becomes a life and death confrontation of who beats whom. As the other side to the engagement, we have the undeniable and legitimate right to prepare all the self-defensive means necessary to defend one's right to existence from the threat and blackmail of the United States.” The KPA statement threatened that if the regular

¹⁸ “North Korean radio reports on assembly session,” KCBS, April 11, 2006, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, April 12, 2006.

¹⁹ Norimitsu Onishi, “In Surprise Move, U.S. Envoy Visits North Korea,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2007, p. A8.

²⁰ “Foreign Ministry Spokesman On DPRK Visit By U.S. Assistant Secretary of State,” KCNA, June 23, 2007.

²¹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesman Emphasizes We, Too, Will Enter Into 13 February Agreement Implementation Under Condition Where the Frozen Funds Issue Has Been Resolved,” KCNA, June 25, 2007. Edward Cody, “N. Korea Says Funds Issue Is Resolved,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2007, p. A15. Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea Receives Funds and Says It Will Shut Down Its Main Nuclear Reactor,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2007, p. A10.

²² “DPRK FM Spokesman, DPRK Ready to Implement 13 Feb Agreement 'Earlier Than Promised Time, Order',” KCNA, July 6, 2007.

U.S.-South Korean military exercises continued, “the implementation of the 13 February agreement or the six-party talks will evaporate” and called on the U.S. to negotiate a permanent peace regime to end the U.S. presence in Korea.²³

The Army’s objection was a desperate effort and did not produce results, mirroring cabinet efforts in the previous time period to forestall a confrontational policy. U.S.-DPRK relations had improved, and the cabinet had the policy lead. The Foreign Ministry announced the suspension of activities at Yongbyon, and the IAEA inspectors confirmed the reactor was shut down.²⁴ Again, the details of senior leadership’s decision-making remains obscured from view, but two days later, Six Party Talks resumed. The North Korean negotiating team called for a LWR in exchange for dismantling Yongbyon and providing a full declaration of its nuclear inventory to the IAEA. The Foreign Ministry called for more talks as the round yielded no new agreement.²⁵ Meanwhile, the two Koreas held another summit. Kim Jong Il and an unpopular South Korean President Roh Moon Hyun met in Pyongyang. With only three months left in office, Roh promised Pyongyang that Seoul would expand multi-year, multi-billion dollar economic projects.²⁶ Even at the time, however, it was questionable whether any future South Korean administration would honor this late term presidential pledge.

U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks proved more effective. In early September the U.S. and North Korea reached agreement –in Geneva, the site of the signing of the 1994 Agreed Framework. North Korea pledged to declare and disable all of its nuclear facilities by the end of the year in exchange for the U.S. removing North Korea from the terrorism list and ending Trading with the Enemy Act sanctions.²⁷ The Foreign Ministry expressed it was “grateful” for “sincere” international aid, naming the U.S. as one of the donors of food in response to recent flooding in its mass media.²⁸ Party commentaries warned about U.S. and IAEA inspections of Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion and pointed to regular military exercises as further evidence of Washington’s untrustworthiness,²⁹ but the party’s efforts were futile as the U.S. and North Korea were firmly on the engagement path. In October a U.S. technical team traveled to North Korea to verify the disabling and announced North Korea had made a “good start.” Chris Hill again visited North Korea in December and said dismantlement was “going well.”

Presidential Turnover in South Korea

In December 2007, South Korea elected its first conservative president in a decade, Lee Myung-bak. The Korean Workers Party had long published articles severely criticizing the

²³ “DPRK KPA Panmunjom’s Mission Chief Proposes DPRK-U.S. Military Talks,” KCBS, July 13, 2007.

²⁴ “DPRK FM Spokesman on Suspension of Yongbyon Operation, Six-Party 'Obligations',” KCNA, July 15, 2007. Choe Sang-Hun, “U.N. Inspectors Confirm Shutdown of North Korean Reactor,” *New York Times*, July 17, 2007, p. A3.

²⁵ “DPRK-U.S. Talks and Meeting of Heads of Delegations to Six-Party Talks Held,” KCNA, July 20, 2007.

²⁶ Norimitsu Onishi, “Leaders of 2 Koreas Will Meet in the North,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2007, p. A3. Choe Sang-Hun, “South Korean Visits North, Offering Aid For Arms Cuts,” *New York Times*, October 3, 2007, p. A15.

²⁷ “DPRK FM Spokesman Responds to Question on 1-2 Sep DPRK-U.S. Talks in Geneva,” KCNA, September 3, 2007. “North Korea and U.S. Discuss Steps to End Nuclear Program,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2007, p. A7.

²⁸ “DPRK Radio Carries FM Spokesman's 'Grateful' Remarks on International Aid 5 Sep,” KCNA, September 5, 2007.

²⁹ “U.S. And S. Korean Bellicose Forces' War Exercises Against DPRK Assailed,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 3, 2007. “Lesson of History,” *Nodong Sinmun*, September 6, 2007.

conservative Grand National Party (GNP), but Cabinet Premier Pak's institutional successor, Kim Yong Il, carried on inter-Korean dialogue despite the South electing a president from the GNP. Pyongyang preferred the liberal candidate, but the cabinet prior to the election pledged to work with the conservative administration too. North Korean Premier met with his South Korean counterpart, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, in November 2007 and argued the North's ideology supported negotiations with the South:

“The experience and lesson over the past seven years following 15 June show that North-South relations can successfully develop when we are faithful to the idea of By Our Nation. Though our fellow countrymen are divided into the North and South, we have the power to safeguard the national dignity and interests and infinite potential that can achieve the nation's shared prosperity and development.”³⁰

The report continued to document concrete efforts to expand inter-Korean cooperation, stating the Cabinet Premier “emphasized the importance of sincerely implementing the economic and cooperative issues pointed out in the declaration and said that the North-South cooperation projects are not simple economic dealings but are lofty projects that contribute to the nation's reconciliation, reunification, and prosperity.”³¹ The talks sought to head off conflicts in the Yellow (West) Sea that the KPA had routinely used to aggravate inter-Korean contacts and accommodation with the Americans. The two premiers discussed turning the disputed area in the West Sea around the Northern Limit Line into a “peace and cooperation zone.” They also made concrete progress towards expanding rail and road links across the DMZ and expanding joint economic projects worth an additional \$11-15 billion.³² By the end of the year, the two Koreas opened regular freight train service across the DMZ.³³ The cabinet continued to work for continued progress in inter-Korean relations.

President Lee took office in February 2008 and upheld his pledge to substantially modify his two predecessors' engagement policy. Candidate Lee presented a harder line than his two predecessors but President Lee moved further to the right than his campaign pledges. He attempted to abolish South Korea's Unification Ministry, the institutional lead on Seoul's previous Nordpolitik, but settled for marginalizing it politically. Lee insisted his policy advocated engaging North Korea but increasingly conditioned economic aid on North Korea's denuclearization. The new administration declared its policy “pragmatic” by rejecting previous administrations' more unconditional engagement as ideologically driven and focused on short-term results.

Pyongyang's reaction for the first several months was notably restrained. When the North Koreans sought to register displeasure with a U.S.-South Korean alliance move, they put

³⁰ “North Korean Radio Reports on First Round of Inter-Korean Premiers' Talks,” KCBS, November 14, 2007, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, November 15, 2007.

³¹ “DPRK Radio Details First Round of N-S Premier Talks in Seoul on 14 Nov,” Korean Central Satellite Television, FBIS, November 14, 2007.

³² Choe Sang-Hun, “Inter-Korean Talks Focus on Expanding Economic Cooperation,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2007, p. A13. Choe Sang-Hun, “2 Koreas Agree on Aid to North and Trains Across Border,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2007, p. A8.

³³ Choe Sang-Hun, “Regular Freight Rail Service Starts Between the Koreas,” December 12, 2007, p. A5. Norimitsu Onishi, “Conservative Wins Presidential Election in South Korea,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2007, p. A8.

the blame squarely on Washington. Though Pyongyang still had a strong interest in maintaining momentum with the Americans, their still seemed to be a fairly uniform requirement for the North Korean bureaucracies not to speak out too harshly against the new government in the South. In the Security Consultative Meetings where Washington and Seoul discussed alliance wartime operational control, the party newspaper blamed the Americans for providing military support to South Korea but Seoul is not blamed for accepting it.³⁴ Normally, the party would label the South “puppets” of the Americans and culpable for this decision. After a U.S., Japan, South Korea summit that the party newspaper called "triangular pressure cooperation," the article blamed Japan and the “United States, the master of Japan,” but not South Korea.³⁵

Pyongyang grew impatient with discussions in Washington on the future of its diplomatic engagement. The party used a U.S.-South Korean military exercise to argue negotiations should end. “It has already been publicly recognized that the war exercise the U.S. warmongers are about to conduct is a war exercise of northward aggression. Conducting a war exercise against a party to dialogue now, when the DPRK and the United States are in the process of dialogue, proves that the position of [the United States] is that it does not want to settle the issue through dialogue.”³⁶ The party let loose some of its previous restraint against the U.S., but even more importantly, it noted these joint U.S.-South Korean exercises were the “full responsibility” of the United States.³⁷ The next day, however, another unattributed radio broadcast blamed the U.S. and South Korea together without any indication of one being an innocent or even junior partner.³⁸

The party showed an early willingness to open criticism of the new Lee government. First unattributed, then party, and finally all bureaucracies increased their criticism of South Korea. The official press starts cautiously blaming the new South Korean administration in late February, growing substantially more pointed by April when the gloves came off. The North’s Secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland blamed “the hard-line U.S. conservative forces and their followers -- the belligerent South Korean forces” for “expanding the current South Korea-US Combined Marine Forces Command.” Though it does not mention the South Korean president and leaves blame on a segment of the South Korean military, this demonstrated Pyongyang’s willingness to make low-level jabs at the South.³⁹

By mid-March, Pyongyang demonstrated a greater willingness to criticize the new government in Seoul. A party commentary led the way after the unattributed talks. “The pro-US conservative forces in South Korea are now clinging more impatiently to a racket of confrontation against their fellow country with the backing of outside forces.”⁴⁰ The party followed-up another direct criticism of Seoul, criticizing it for missile defense cooperation with

³⁴ Ri Hyo-chin, "What Is the Promise for 'Nuclear Umbrella Provision' Aimed at," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 19, 2008.

³⁵ Choe Song-kuk, "Political Dwarf's Silly Talk," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 21, 2008.

³⁶ Paek Mun-kyu, "Reckless Acts That Bring About Fire Clouds of War," *Nodong Sinmun*, February 23, 2008.

³⁷ Cho Tong-chol, "Dangerous Military Commotion Suggestive of the Eve of War," KCBS, March 1, 2008.

³⁸ "War Maniacs Stirring up Fiery Cloud of War," KCBS, March 2, 2008.

³⁹ "DPRK CPRF Decries ROK, U.S. for Signing MOU on Establishing New Marine Forces Command," KCBS, February 26, 2008.

⁴⁰ "Repeated Babble About 'Alliance' Which Calls for the Era of Confrontation," *Nodong Sinmun*, March 17, 2008.

only a passing mention of the United States.⁴¹ Previously, Pyongyang focused on Washington's role in this type of military cooperation.

Though earlier party commentaries blamed the U.S. solely for military exercises, by late March, a cabinet article joined in, placing blame squarely on the shoulders of both Washington and Seoul: "the culprits that increase the threat of a new war, a nuclear war, by damaging peace and stability on the Korean peninsula today, are the United States and the following pro-US conservative forces of South Korea."⁴² This shift, coming from the cabinet, suggests a real downturn in inter-Korean relations. Each of the bureaucratic players started to voice opposition to Seoul. Lacking opposition to increased confrontation with the South, the model expects that the state will take a more aggressive stand towards its southern neighbor. This would not be a tactical move but register a strategic turn that would require a significantly changed situation to reverse.

Relations deteriorated quickly. Only two days later, the technically independent *Tongil Sinbo* webpage took issue with the South Korean Unification Minister's comments that Seoul would condition Kaesong development assistance on nuclear progress. The article concluded, "The conservative ruling forces in South Korea -- who seek nothing but confrontation in homage to outside forces bent on harming their fellow countrymen and pay no attention to the reconciliation, unity, and reunification of the nation -- will be made to pay for their sins without fail."⁴³ The same day, the head of North Korea's general-level military talks with the South criticized the "violent remarks on a preemptive strike against us made by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the South Korean forces." The military representative noted "Our army will counter even a slight move for a preemptive strike attempted by the South side with a more rapid and more powerful advanced preemptive strike." He demanded an apology, threatened to suspend all North-South dialogue, and prevent all South Korean officials from traveling to the North.⁴⁴

On April 1, the North launched its most scathing attack on the South, severely criticizing the new South Korean president by name in a party commentary. The article was run repeatedly as well on North Korean television and radio; it ushered in a period of unrestrained criticism of their southern neighbor.⁴⁵ Within days, party commentaries linked the Lee government with the Japanese imperialist period,⁴⁶ an unofficial North Korean webpage satirized Lee in poetry⁴⁷ and openly criticized him in prose⁴⁸; and each institution severely denounced the South Korean

⁴¹ Ri Hyo-chin, "Product of Following Outside Forces -- Maneuver To Establish Interceptor Missile System," *Nodong Sinmun*, March 25, 2008.

⁴² Pak In-chol, "Shameless Act of a Thief Holding up a Whip of Punishment," *Minju Joson*, March 27, 2008.

⁴³ Kwon Kum-ryong, "Ridiculous Assertion," *Tongil Sinbo*, March 29, 2008.

⁴⁴ "DPRK Military Official Responds to ROK JCS Chairman's Remarks on 'Preemptive Strike'," KCBS, March 29, 2008.

⁴⁵ "Ruin Is the Only Thing That the South Korean Authorities Will Gain Through Their Anti-North Confrontation," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 1, 2008, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Sim Chol-yong, "We Can Never Bury Past Crimes Against Humanity," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 2, 2008.

⁴⁷ Sin Hung-kuk, "Bulldozer of Pragmatism," April 3, 2008, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>.

⁴⁸ Chong Son-myong, "Anti-North Confrontation Is the Road To Destruction," April 4, 2008, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>.

government.⁴⁹ Several months after Lee's inauguration, Pyongyang's prodding to convince Seoul to maintain the position of Lee's two predecessors took a decidedly different turn. The North Korean bureaucracy was united in its opposition to the new government in Seoul.

After the April turn against the Lee government, North Korea's three bureaucracies largely solidified their confrontational position towards the South. South Korea received most of the North's blame for US-South Korean alliance cooperation now where Washington previously took this heat. Not only the party and military, but also the cabinet joined in criticizing South Korea for a variety of offenses, ranging from accepting U.S. beef imports to education changes to military exercises to Seoul's summits with Washington and Tokyo.⁵⁰

Though the Lee government reiterated that it was pursuing an engagement policy and even offered the North economic aid, compared to the previous two governments, Seoul offered Pyongyang very little. In the coming months, Seoul offered Pyongyang corn aid, instead of the preferred rice, and discussed providing \$7 million worth of humanitarian assistance when Lee's predecessor just a few months earlier discussed economic projects worth upwards of \$11 billion. Pyongyang refused South Korean offers, exerting greater pressure on the South Korean government to revert to the liberal engagement policies of Lee's two predecessors. In effect, Pyongyang gambled the \$7 million in the hopes of hitting the \$11 billion. This is not a bad gamble by casino standards but a different issue when considering the regime turned down food aid when its citizens still suffered chronic food shortfalls.

North Korea demonstrated an ability to adapt to a changed environment in inter-Korean relations. It can change suddenly as seen in previous episodes or gradually as in this one. First unattributed and then party commentaries increasingly called on Seoul to shape an engagement

⁴⁹ "Lee Myung Bak And His Gentries' Treacherous Outbursts Under Fire In S. Korea," KCNA, April 2, 2008. Pak Chol-chun, "Establishing a True National View Is a Primary Demand in Developing North-South Relations," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 5, 2008. Pak In-chol, "Why Act Irrationally?" *Minju Choson*, April 6, 2008. Kim Chong-ok, "Traitorous Gang Ushering in a Nuclear Disaster," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 7, 2008.

⁵⁰ Pak In-chol, "Will the Shallow-Minded Trickery Work?" *Minju Choson*, April 8, 2008. Song Yong-sok, "A Reckless Acts of a Crook Who Does Not Know Where To Draw the Line," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 9, 2008. Ri Kyong-chol, "Should Not Recklessly Behave," *Minju Choson*, April 27, 2008. Choe Chol-sun, "Expression of Consciousness of Pro-US Flunkeyism and Following Outside Forces," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 16, 2008. "The Ringleader Who Pushes North-South Relations to Ruin," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 30, 2008. "Lee Myung Bak's Junket to Japan Branded as Treacherous," KCNA, May 5, 2008. "Un Chong-chol, 'Harping On About the Ludicrous 'Successful Diplomacy,'" *Nodong Sinmun*, May 3, 2008. "Pak In-chol, "'Pragmatic Government' Gone Mad With Mad Cow-Infected Beef," *Minju Choson*, May 7, 2008. "Villainous Splittist Maniac," *Minju Choson*, May 10, 2008. "DPRK Radio Decries ROK's Plan To Purchase Additional F-15K, Cruise Missiles," KCBS, May 10, 2008. "DPRK Party Organ Notes ROK Efforts to Stop 'Rumors' on ROK Administration," *Nodong Sinmun*, May 12, 2008. "DPRK Organization's White Paper Recounts Lee Myung-bak's 100 Days in Power," KCNA, June 1, 2008. Ri Kyong-chol, "Plunging 'Approval Ratings,' Increasing Sense of Distrust," *Minju Choson*, June 1, 2008. Kim Chong-son entitled, "Must Heighten Vigilance Against Imperialists' Tactics for Internal Collapse," *Nodong Sinmun* Special Article, May 31, 2008. "Condemn South Korean Authorities' Anti-National 'Pragmatism,'" *Nodong Sinmun*, May 30, 2008. Song Yong-sok, "Military Confrontation Racket Is a Grave Obstacle to Implementation of the 4 October Declaration," *Nodong Sinmun* Special Article, May 27, 2008. "DPRK's CPRF Issues Bulletin on Seoul's 'Anti-Reunification' Education Guidelines," KCNA, May 24, 2008. Pak In-chol, "Crafty Stratagem Aimed at Having Fellow Countrymen Fight Among Themselves," *Minju Choson*, May 24, 2008. "DPRK Group on ROK President's 'Confrontational Moves' Affecting North-South Ties," KCBS, June 30, 2008. "Lee Myung Bak's 'Policy Speech' Under Fire," KCNA, July 13, 2008. Choe Kwang-hyok, "Anti-Unification 'Explanatory Document' in Pursuit of Confrontation and War," *Tongil Sinbo*, August 9, 2008.

policy on the North's terms. Each bureaucracy joined in the anti-Seoul chorus after the April 1 denunciation. Inter-Korean relations continued to deteriorate throughout 2008. In an apparent accident, a North Korean soldier shot and killed a South Korean tourist who entered a restricted area a North Korean tourist area in July, reenergizing South Korean public opposition to unconditional engagement with the North when Pyongyang refused to allow an investigation. Though making some minor concessions to the North, Seoul maintained its firm position, and Pyongyang continued to stonewall, calling on the conservative government to return to the liberal engagement policy.⁵¹ After Kim Jong Il reportedly started to recover from a mid-August stroke, the North gradually ratcheted up pressure on the South by threatening to cut off and then taking sequential actions to sever all official inter-Korean contact. Even the Sunshine policy's flagship project, the Kaesong Industrial Complex, came under attack from Pyongyang.

Just as the cabinet had previously concentrated its energies on inter-Korean issues when tensions with the U.S. were at a high point, the organization shifted to the exact opposite. The cabinet defended its progress with the Americans despite periodic setbacks from the rest of the year. Resolving inter-Korean tensions seemed to be a bridge too far, presumably due to a high level decision and few signals of a substantial change in Lee's principled stand.

Refocusing on the United States

Everything was not coming up roses in U.S.-DPRK relations in 2008, but fragile progress moved forward. In January, the Foreign Ministry noted that North Korea's actions in disablement started in November and urged the U.S. to uphold its part of the most recent agreement, including removing North Korea from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list and completing fuel deliveries. "Now that other participating nations delay the fulfillment of their commitments, the DPRK is compelled to adjust the tempo of the disablement of some nuclear facilities on the principle of 'action for action.' The DPRK still hopes that the October 3 agreement can be smoothly implemented should all the participating nations make concerted sincere efforts on the principle of simultaneous action."⁵² The cabinet newspaper rejected calls for the North to give up its nuclear weapons before the U.S. takes action.⁵³

⁵¹ "'Ministry of Unification' Which Turned into 'Ministry of Division'," *Minju Choson*, August 19, 2008. Cho Nam-su, "Anti-Reunification Confrontation Theory Driving North-South Relations to Ruin," *Nodong Sinmun*, August 20, 2008. Ri Hyo-chin, "Military Warmongers Crazy About Confrontation With the Republic," *Nodong Sinmun*, September 29, 2008. Kim Chong-ok, "Strengthening 'Alliance' With Outside Forces Is the Anachronistic Act of Treason," *Nodong Sinmun*, October 7, 2008. "[We] Will Fight to the End and Settle With Those Who Are Seeking To Realize a Foolish Fantasy," *Nodong Sinmun*, October 16, 2008. Chong Son-myong, "Blatant Declaration of Confrontation Against the Fellow Countrymen," October 18, 2008, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>. "Anti-DPRK Psychological Campaign Under Fire," KCNA, October 21, 2008. Choe Chol-sun, "The Lame Excuse of Those Who Are Destroying the North-South Relations," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 17, 2008. Song Yong-sok, "Political Provocation Inciting Aggravation of Situation," *Nodong Sinmun*, November 18, 2008. "KPA Notifies S. Korean Puppet Authorities Of Crucial Measure To Be Enforced By It," KCNA, November 24, 2008. "DPRK State Security Spokesman on ROK's 'Sabotage' Against DPRK," KCBS, December 18, 2008. "Koreans Called Upon To Meet Anti-Reunification Forces' Challenge," KCNA, December 23, 2008.

⁵² "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Issue of Implementation of October 3 Agreement," KCNA, January 4, 2008.

⁵³ Nam Chon-ung, "Taking the Position of Resolving the Issue?" *Minju Choson*, January 4, 2008.

The party took a more aggressive stand in accordance with its wider policy agenda. Citing a White House announcement that the U.S. planned to reduce its nuclear arsenal to one quarter of the Cold War levels, party commentary noted, "The United States' announcement of its plan to reduce nuclear weapons-related facilities is nothing but a petty trick to deceive the world's public opinion."⁵⁴ The party spun news to portray the U.S. in the worst possible light. Another party commentary lashed out at the news that a U.S. division would soon serve on a rotational assignment to South Korea. For the party, this "clearly laid bare the aggressive and criminal plan of the United States that is trying to indefinitely occupy South Korea as a bridgehead for nuclear war and thereby realize the wild ambition for northward aggression and the strategy for the domination of the world at any cost."⁵⁵ It spoke out against F-16s stationed in South Korea, and U.S. efforts to engage South Korea in the Proliferation Security Initiative that it labeled a blockade.⁵⁶

The Foreign Ministry, stressing repeatedly its "sincerity," said the U.S. should uphold its commitments in the Six Party Talks.⁵⁷ It hosted a U.S. Track II delegation of senior current and former government officials in February; military officials turned down the delegation's meeting requests.⁵⁸ Senior Congressional Staffer Keith Luse asked and answered in a trip report: "Is the North Korean military resisting MFA efforts to substantively engage with the U.S. and the other five countries? Chairman Kim's best efforts to orchestrate a balance among competing interests within the North, may be a 'stretch too far' for North Korean military hardliners. Declaring and discarding the jewel of their arsenal will be difficult for those viewing it as the ultimate deterrent."⁵⁹ Former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Siegfried Hecker, made a similar conclusion. He reported that cooperation between the North Korean nuclear specialists and Americans monitoring the disablement was "excellent," but the Foreign Ministry hosts explained in Hecker's words that the "DPRK military and industrial officials were extremely unhappy with the access the Americans were granted and with the fact that they were given samples of the aluminum tubes in question" that provided evidence of enriched uranium in North Korea.⁶⁰ The Foreign Ministry again demonstrated a willingness to deal with the Americans in official and non-official realms but the military and party resisted.

Indeed, the party actively undermined the Foreign Ministry's statement that the Americans should uphold their commitments sincerely, concluding that the United States could not sincerely engage Pyongyang. Washington would always find some pretext to scuttle paper agreements. "The national sovereignty is a prerequisite for peace and prosperity, and the nation's dignity and happiness depend on sovereignty. That is why our party eloquently made an appeal

⁵⁴ Ri Hyon-to, "Petty Tricks By Nuclear War Fanatics," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 4, 2008.

⁵⁵ Sim Chol-yong, "Absurd Remark on 'Permanent Presence,' Which Lays Bare Wicked Intention," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 25, 2008.

⁵⁶ Un Chong-chol, "Extremely Dangerous Fighter Build-up Commotion," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 26, 2008. Kim Chong-son, "Nonsensical, Self-Righteous Speculation," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 28, 2008.

⁵⁷ "DPRK FM Spokesman 'Press Statement' of 28 March on 6-Party Talks 'Stalemate,'" KCNA, March 28, 2008.

⁵⁸ Keith Luse, "North Korea Trip Report," Memo to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Members, March 6, 2008, <http://www.ncnk.org/resolveuid/3f18cbcaf6c9e3ebd90b870012ae24f8>.

⁵⁹ Keith Luse, "North Korea Trip Report," Memo to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Members, March 6, 2008, <http://www.ncnk.org/resolveuid/3f18cbcaf6c9e3ebd90b870012ae24f8>.

⁶⁰ Siegfried Hecker, "Report of Visit to the DPRK," March 14, 2008, http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/HeckerDPRKreport.pdf/file_view.

again in the joint editorial to firmly maintain the position of the national independence.... The United States is continuously raising the level of pressure against our Republic, persistently finding fault with us by fabricating the 'nuclear issue' and 'human rights issue,' and so on.... Peace, which is a prerequisite for development and prosperity, should be seized by struggles. Self-defensive national defense capabilities are the guarantee of defending peace.... Our party's position on peace and prosperity is firm."⁶¹ The party questioned American sincerity based on ideological convictions of the aggressive nature of the imperialists, but it did not call for a scrapping of Six Party Talks outright. The party registered its objection and pledged to struggle on.

Talks stalled in April when the Bush Administration briefed Congress on its evidence of North Korean nuclear assistance to Syria. The briefing came eight months after Israeli air strikes destroyed the facility, raising ire that the Administration was trying to sidetrack the legislative branch to maintain diplomatic momentum. Some Members of Congress argued against continued negotiations with the North Koreans.⁶² In this context, the Foreign Ministry remained fairly quiet. It made a single pro-forma objection to a U.S. democracy report, and an unattributed radio broadcast mildly rebuked President Bush for supporting missile defense in Europe.⁶³ Party commentaries noted that "hardline elements" in Washington sought to undermine diplomatic progress and disguise their true hostile intent with "cunning" diplomatic overtures.⁶⁴

However, largely conservative opposition in Congress to a conservative White House's foreign policy did not derail the Administration's new focus. In mid-June the Foreign Ministry announced that U.S.-DPRK negotiations in Pyongyang "proved successful," as Pyongyang moved to supply a nuclear declaration and Washington started efforts to remove North Korea from the terrorism list.⁶⁵ The military and party made some effort to turn the tide in U.S.-DPRK negotiations. Party commentaries rejected the U.S. Defense Secretary's comments that nuclear weapons could help deter states like Russia and Iran. Though the speech did not mention Korea, the party portrayed increased American nuclearization as North Korea took steps away from this.⁶⁶ They continued to note the U.S. was the "root cause of war" on the peninsula.⁶⁷ Still, they

⁶¹ Kim Chong-ok, "Peace and Prosperity Are the Nation's Aspiration and Intention," *Nodong Sinmun*, March 29, 2008.

⁶² Robin Wright, "U.S. Details Reactor in Syria; Americans Push Damascus, N. Korea To Admit Collusion," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2008, p. A12.

⁶³ "Disgraceful Conduct in the Manner of the Thief Raising the Whip," KCBS, April 28, 2008. "Foreign Ministry Spokesman Denounces the United States for Taking Issue With and Slandering Our-Style Socialist System," KCNA, May 31, 2008.

⁶⁴ Paek Mun-kyu, "Provocative Act of Putting a Wet Blanket Over Improvement in DPRK-US Relations," *Nodong Sinmun*, June 4, 2008. "KCNA Denounces U.S. Conservative Hardliners for Their Reckless Remarks," KCNA, June 7, 2008. Kim Chong-son, "We Should Raise Vigilance Against Imperialists' Cunning Art of Disguise," *Nodong Sinmun*, June 18, 2008. Cho Taek-pom, "Must Smash the Imperialists' Vicious Psychological Smear Campaign," *Nodong Sinmun*, June 21, 2008.

⁶⁵ "DPRK Foreign Ministry's Spokesman on DPRK-U.S. Experts Negotiations," KCNA, June 12, 2008. "DPRK FM Spokesman's Response to U.S. Lifting Major Economic Sanctions Against DPRK," KCNA, June 27, 2008. "DPRK FM Spokesman on Removal from U.S. Terror Sponsor List, Nuclear Declaration," KCBS, June 27, 2008.

⁶⁶ Kim Hye-song, "Ringleader of Nuclear Threats and Arms Race," *Nodong Sinmun*, June 24, 2008.

⁶⁷ Cho Nam-su, "Eliminating the Root Cause of War Is the Basic Way of Guaranteeing Peace," *Nodong Sinmun* Special Article, June 30, 2008.

refrained from the most outlandish calls to reject the diplomatic track altogether and rely on military means as they had done in previous periods. The military weighed in against American and South Korean criticisms of North Korea's human rights record; the KPA linked the U.S. and South Korea and argued the allies wanted to see North Korea collapse and integrated into South Korean society. Yet, the article focused mainly on Seoul's speaking out on North Korean human rights, not Washington's, reflecting a 180-degree turn in its inclination to blame South Korea over the U.S. from the prior South Korean administration.⁶⁸

By mid-July U.S.-DPRK diplomatic option was on-track. North Korea destroyed the Yongbyon reactor's cooling tower, a largely symbolic move that signaled the state's decision to dismantle the nuclear site. The U.S. began the process of delisting and delivered its first shipment of the 500,000 tons of pledged food aid. The World Food Program's Asia Director commented that his organization delivering most of the American food aid enjoyed "the best monitoring conditions the WFP has ever had in North Korea."⁶⁹

However, when Washington did not remove North Korea from the terrorism list when Pyongyang expected, U.S.-DPRK relations dipped. Washington noted the nuclear declaration required verification, citing its lack of several key nuclear installations, before removing North Korea from the terrorism list. The Foreign Ministry called on the United States to uphold the letter of the published agreement that did not provide for the document's verification prior to delisting. The party took a different view, running articles saying Washington's actions demonstrated the true intent of the imperialists.⁷⁰ With great fanfare, Pyongyang had already demolished Yongbyon's cooling tower. Though it could be rebuilt with relative ease, the highly publicized demolition would embarrass the country if Washington did not follow through on delisting the North.

Party and military criticisms of the United States spiked. The party objected to the comments of the U.S. Forces Korea commander comparing North Korea and Iraq, resurfaced the criticism of new U.S. nuclear weapons, objected to U.S. naval assets moving into Korea for military exercises, and stressed the strength of socialist ideology to defeat imperialists – all within two days.⁷¹ They linked U.S. policy to economic policy, arguing opening was dangerous and impractical with terrorism list sanctions remaining in place.⁷²

⁶⁸ "South Korean Puppet Military's 'Human Rights' Racket Which Cannot Escape the Gun Barrel's Grave Judgment," *Nodong Sinmun* Military Commentator Article, June 28, 2008, p. 5. "S Korean Puppet Military's Anti-DPRK 'Human Rights' Racket Blasted," KCNA, June 27, 2008.

⁶⁹ Blaine Harden, "U.S. Wheat Begins New Aid to N. Korea; U.N. Agreement Aims to Feed Millions More, With Unprecedented Monitoring," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2008, p. A7.

⁷⁰ "Press Statement by a Spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry," KCNA, July 4, 2008. "Intentional Act Aimed at Rupturing Realization of Denuclearization," KCNA, July 10, 2008. Paek Mun-kyu: "Aggression and War, the Imperialist Ways of Survival," *Nodong Sinmun* Special Article, July 12, 2008.

⁷¹ Kim Hye-song, "Provocative Reckless Act Against Dialogue Partner," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 16, 2008. Ri Hyon-to, "Arms Buildup Policy is the Source of Fostering Arms Race and Nuclear Threat," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 17, 2008. "DPRK Radio Reports U.S. Deploys Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carrier Group in ROK," KCBS, July 17, 2008. Hong Pyong-u, "Today's General Onward March Is General Onward March of Ideology," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 18, 2008, p. 2. "US and S Korean Warmongers' Projected War Exercises Assailed," KCNA, July 18, 2008.

⁷² Kim Chong-son, "Imperialists' Economic Infiltration Is a Means of Aggression and Plunder," *Nodong Sinmun*, July 20, 2008.

As the model predicts, the cabinet continued to take a more moderate view. It openly urged American delisting, condemning the delay as tactical and not a strategic move away from removing the North from the terrorism list or engagement. The cabinet held that the U.S. was trying to extract more concessions at the negotiating table, not threaten the state's basic existence. Nevertheless, the cabinet warned that the delisting delay jeopardized recent diplomatic gains: "The question is why the United States is continuously committing such acts of military provocation that irritate us – its dialogue partner – at a crucial time when diplomatic efforts are underway to resolve the pending issues between the DPRK and the United States and thereby to put an end to hostile relations which have persisted between our Republic and the United States for many decades.... Since the situation has entered an important crossroads where the DPRK-US relations of deep-rooted hostility should be brought to an end, and peace and stability on the Korean peninsula should be achieved through the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, now is the time for the United States and other relevant countries to act with discretion."⁷³ The cabinet did not explicitly leave an ultimatum, but it warned that not delisting would have significant, long-term, strategic consequences.

With the delisting delay ongoing, even the government's newspaper began running more critical pieces of the U.S.⁷⁴ The party newspaper critiqued "U.S. imperialism" and American nuclear policy,⁷⁵ and the Foreign Ministry took issue with renewed U.S.-South Korean military exercises.⁷⁶ By September, the Foreign Ministry announced that the state would begin efforts to restart Yongbyon "as a countermeasure against the action taken by the United States to indefinitely put on hold the effectuation of the measure on removing our country from the state sponsors of terrorism list. This was a natural, logical result in accordance with the principle of action for action." As "a natural, logical result" no bureaucracy voiced support or condemnation of the decision. The regime published the story in the mass media as well, but buried it near the end of both the television and radio broadcasts.⁷⁷ Pyongyang was playing hard ball to secure delisting but also indicated its willingness to verifiably dismantle Yongbyon in exchange.

North Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Pak Kil-yon repeated the same sentiment the following week in the country's address to the UN General Assembly and other Foreign Ministry statements bolstered the point.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, party commentaries called for a strategic shift: provide security through nuclear weapons, not negotiations, and secure the state's sovereignty

⁷³ Nam Chon-ung, "How Can One Try To Shake Hands, While Holding a Dagger?" *Minju Choson*, July 22, 2008.

⁷⁴ Nam Chon-ung, "Why Do [They] Distort the Situation?" *Minju Choson*, July 29, 2008.

⁷⁵ "Imperialism Bound To Go To Decline and Ruin," KCNA, August 11, 2008. Ser Myo-ja, "North Breaks Its Silence, Decries U.S. Blacklist Delay," *JoongAng Ilbo*, August 18, 2008. "Who Is the Provoker," *Nodong Sinmun*, August 29, 2008.

⁷⁶ "DPRK FM Spokesman on On-Going US-ROK Ulchi Freedom Guardian Military Exercise," KCNA, August 20, 2008.

⁷⁷ "DPRK FM Spokesman on Nuclear Facilities Restoration, Removal from U.S. Terrorism Sponsor List," KCBS, September 19, 2008.

⁷⁸ "The Republic's Government Will Make Every Possible Effort for Permanent Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula," *Minju Choson*, September 30, 2008. "Foreign Ministry Spokesman on DPRK's Will to Cooperate in Verification of Objects of Nuclear Disablement," KCNA, October 12, 2008. "DPRK FM Spokesman on 'Forces' Blaming DPRK for Delay in Implementation of Agreement," KCNA, November 12, 2008.

and dignity.⁷⁹ The internal controversy over the terrorism list was resolved in mid-October when the United States removed North Korea from the list.

With a new president slated for the White House, the U.S. and North Korea continued their tenuous engagement in the Six Party venue. Though Pyongyang said they would treat Japan as if it was not present at Six Party Talks due to a bilateral dispute, the negotiating structure remained in place through the end of the year. Washington remained highly skeptical of the North's supposedly complete nuclear declaration, raising real concerns that the agreement had narrowed to one where North Korea was only giving up the aging Yongbyon reactor, not its full nuclear program. Concerns about the North's uranium enrichment program had long sat in the background in nuclear negotiations due to differences over whether Pyongyang admitted to having such a program in 2002 and the more substantial question of verifying dismantlement of this more easily hidden program. U.S.-DPRK relations were anything but friendly but Pyongyang seemed to be angling for more concessions from the incoming Obama Administration by backing off its verbal commitments to verification.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, by the end of the Bush Administration, U.S.-DPRK relations had made a dramatic comeback. Whether those improved relations would allow a negotiated solution to the long list of outstanding issues between the countries, however, remained to be seen.

Continuity Amid Change: The North Korean Economy

North Korea's third strategic issue area, the economy, saw a great deal of changes over the decade under analysis in this study. Yet during these last two years when North Korea's relations with the United States and South Korea flipped, Pyongyang maintained much of the same in the economic realm. The party's advocacy for retreat from the 2002 economic reforms continued to carry the day, and souring relations with South Korea and China after the nuclear test – the main backers of the North's economic changes – did not aid the cabinet's argument. The party had the lead on economic matters, and tried to reinforce this institutional reality through regular pronouncements to that effect.

The party argued that the rest of the government should follow it in this ideological position, rejecting alternative institutional views. "If a country wants to develop and be strong, it should be politically stable and its society should be united.... Unity is a root of socialism, and the power of ideology eventually comes out of the power of unity that firmly solidifies all the people as one under the column of the Party and the leader."⁸¹ Party unity means squelching unwanted dissent within the state. More directly, the party demanded that cabinet functionaries follow party guidance in all cases: "All functionaries should display all the more higher the revolutionary trait of unconditionally implementing the party policy to the end.... The party line and policy are filled with fighting tasks and methods and strategy and tactics for embodying the

⁷⁹ Ri Hyon-to, "Belligerent Forces That Unchangingly Pursue a Nuclear War," *Nodong Sinmun*, October 15, 2008. Ri Hyon-to, "Our Republic's Ideology on Foreign Policy Is Firm and Unwavering," *Nodong Sinmun*, October 18, 2008.

⁸⁰ Glenn Kessler, "N. Korea Doesn't Agree To Written Nuclear Pact; Earlier Assurances Contradicted, U.S. Says," *Washington Post*, December 12, 2008, p. A22.

⁸¹ Kim Un-chu, "The First National Power of Military-First DPRK," *Nodong Sinmun*, January 12, 2008.

Juche idea and the military-first idea in all areas of revolution and construction.”⁸² The party’s guidance was comprehensive. The rest of the system should get on-board for not only U.S. policy but economic construction and all other areas.

The party enjoyed authority granted in the 2008 New Year’s Joint Editorial and continually cited it throughout the year. The important planning document reiterated that the cabinet must adhere to party economic guidance: “Leading functionaries of economic establishments at all levels, including the cabinet, should strictly adhere to the socialist principle and the collectivist principle in conducting economic management, regarding the party’s economic ideas, theories, and policies as unbreakable guidelines for the construction of an economically powerful state.”⁸³ The emphasis on unity over divergent policy options indicated the cabinet should not attempt to chip away the party’s economic position, prioritizing defense and “guaranteeing the planned and balanced development of the national economy.”⁸⁴

The party repeated this authority and emphasis on planning over markets several times throughout the year. The party’s commitment to socialist economics was in line with the *Juche* ideology and must be adhered to.⁸⁵ Cabinet functionaries should implement the party’s economic planning guidance: “The socialist economy is a planned economy, which can be rapidly developed only when its superiority is adhered to and unreservedly displayed. For this reason, this year’s joint editorial importantly stressed the issue of strengthening the planned discipline in all sectors and all units of people’s economy. In order to brilliantly realize the grand goal of building an economically powerful state presented by the party, all functionaries and working people must cherish the superiority of socialist planned economy as their firm faith and put great strength into displaying it highly.”⁸⁶

Furthermore, communal ownership and abandoning markets allows the state “to fully secure the true freedom and rights for the people masses and provide them with prosperous and happy lives,”⁸⁷ while “economic reform maneuvers of the Lee Myung-bak gang for ‘opening up the North’ are an attempt to degenerate our system and to ‘absorb’ our Republic into their ‘liberal democratic system’ and thus will unfailingly bring nothing but North-South confrontation and war.”⁸⁸ The party comprehensively rejected all cabinet efforts to reform the North’s economy as contrary to Kim’s NYJE guidance, socialist orthodoxy, party direction, and even upholding the country’s basic national interests.

⁸² "Let Functionaries Become Persistent Doers Who Implement the Party Policy to the End," *Nodong Sinmun*, February 20, 2008.

⁸³ "Full Text of DPRK's 2008 New Year's Joint Editorial," KCBS, January 1, 2008.

⁸⁴ M.A. Pak Sang-chol, "Immortal Revolutionary Accomplishments That Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il Has Achieved in the Construction of an Economically Powerful Socialist State," *Kyongje Yongu*, January 10, 2008. Writing in the government newspaper, the party makes sure to identify itself as the institution calling for the defense-led socialist economic line. Hwang Chol-u, "The Leading Sectors and the Basic Industrial Sectors of the National Economy Are the Lifeline of Economic Construction," *Minju Choson*, January 27, 2008.

⁸⁵ "Adhering to the Chuch'e Character and National Character Is an Essential Demand in Carrying Out the Socialist Cause," KCBS, May 10, 2008.

⁸⁶ Cho Yong-nam, "Superiority of the Socialist Planned Economy," *Nodong Sinmun*, March 5, 2008.

⁸⁷ Chang Chol-san, "Adhering to and Developing Socialist Ownership Is the Fundamental Principle of Socialism," April 26, 2008, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>.

⁸⁸ Choe Chol-sun, "The Talk About 'Opening Up' is [an] Insult to and Provocation Against Us," *Nodong Sinmun*, April 8, 2008.

As the post-totalitarian institutionalism model suggests, however, the cabinet would likely try to resist. Indeed, the cabinet continued to cautiously present the benefits of marketization, even expounding upon conceptions such as a price index on the same day that inter-Korean relations took a substantial and sustained downturn.⁸⁹ The cabinet also positively appraised that “The DPRK government is consistently pursuing the policy of encouraging joint venture with various countries over the world.” This means expanding the number of foreign companies willing to investment in the state, “transcending differences in ideology, ideal and social system.”⁹⁰ The cabinet held that North Korea should expand international economic cooperation at least with the most friendly states that may establish joint ventures with the regime and develop the tools for rational macroeconomic policy, including basic economic data.

The party refuted these cabinet arguments with a special article in *Nodong Sinmun* noting the party’s role in guiding a “collectivist” economic policy and imploring cabinet functionaries once again to simply carry out the party’s orders. In short, the party told the cabinet to stop debating; they had already lost. Efforts to “convert the socialist planned economy to a market economy” were “imperialist maneuvers” that should be avoided at all cost.⁹¹ The party also noted its institutional role in upholding the planned economy in the government newspaper. The party often uses this vehicle when it seeks to speak directly to a government audience: “It is the proud fruit of the planned socialist economy that our economy – which has broken through harsh trials under the wise leadership of the party – is achieving active orbit, vigorously displaying its might.”⁹² Though marketization was far from dead, it suffered continued setbacks as the timeframe under analysis closed. The cabinet continued to mildly assert the benefits of markets and greater openness but poor relations with Seoul and Beijing created an unfavorable external environment for this stance. The cabinet had little contemporary evidence to cite and the economic situation, while still dire, not as bad as previous years, allowing the party’s economic advocacy to remain on top.

Conclusion

Since its October 2006 nuclear test, North Korea has demonstrated an ability to gradually reverse course on its policy positions. Though each of its three main political institutions kept their same basic platforms, the state moved significantly. Ten years of active inter-Korean relations collapsed in a matter of months, and six years of highly hostile dealings with the Americans moderated significantly. Pyongyang’s economic policy remained constant amid this change as economic issues largely receded from the headlines within the state. North Korea’s three bureaucracies reacted in predictable form but external events largely drove its policy. As a small, reactionary state, Pyongyang again showed how external actors can largely shape its internal debates that ultimately affect national political outcomes.

With new congressional leadership in Washington and a growing sense that the 2001-2006 policy did not prevent Pyongyang’s nuclear test, Washington’s shift to engage the North

⁸⁹ "Price Index," *Minju Joson*, April 1, 2008.

⁹⁰ “The DPRK Government is Consistently Pursuing the Policy of Encouraging Joint Venture,” *Foreign Trade of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, August 5, 2008.

⁹¹ Kim Pyong-chin, "Thorough Embodiment of Collectivist Principles and Methods in Economy Management," *Nodong Sinmun* Special Article, August 7, 2008.

⁹² "Superiority of Planned Socialist Economy," *Minju Choson*, August 17, 2008.

started to bear fruit. Though it remains unclear if the negotiators will convince North Korea to give up all of its nuclear programs and weapons, diplomatic efforts to date have achieved the initial dismantling of Yongbyon. The nuclear reactor that provided all of the plutonium for Pyongyang's nuclear test and unknown number of nuclear weapons⁹³ was verifiably shut down and being taken apart. This is a dramatic shift from the North's decision in 2002 to unfreeze and restart that same reactor that had been shut down for eight years at that time.

Pyongyang's ability to change its strategic position in inter-Korean cooperation is likewise notable. While ten years of engagement by the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations yielded the establishment and expansion of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, Mt Kumgang Tourist Site, family reunions, and other economic projects and government-to-government efforts, Pyongyang managed to freeze or significantly limit activity in each of these inter-Korean areas of cooperation and at the time of writing made the risk of inter-Korean conflict higher than anytime since the Kim Young Sam administration in the 1990s. The state's bureaucracies came together in opposition to the new Lee Myung-bak Administration, mirroring an earlier period when these institutions united to oppose American policies.

Amid this change, economic policy remained somewhat separated from this international politics. Each bureaucracy kept its position on the economy, but the party and military won out over the cabinet. Pyongyang did not announce any new efforts to reintroduce significant marketization as the government sector in areas like food distribution grew at the expense of markets. Though the regime did not reverse all changes that came with the markets over the years, including bottom-up changes that produced a slowly revising social structure, it did show how the North's economic policy can be explained by the post-totalitarian institutionalism model.

⁹³ Though North Korean officials told Sig Harrison in January 2009 that the regime had "weaponized" some of its fissile material, this claim is ultimately not verifiable. The "unknown number of nuclear weapons" includes zero as a distinct possibility.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

North Korea's Post-totalitarian Institutionalism

North Korea more closely resembles the post-totalitarian institutionalism model than previously presented theories of non-democratic rule. The single, most important person in North Korean politics is unquestionably Kim Jong Il. His role should not be minimized, but Kim is not the state. To more fully understand North Korean politics and explain variant policy outcomes, one must evaluate the second-order institutions that Kim seeks to command. Authority remains centralized, but power is more diffuse than the relatively monolithic typologies of totalitarian, corporatist, and personalist rule predict.

North Korea's bureaucracies have sufficient autonomy, corporate identity, and conflicting objectives that their advocacy and actions help explain variant North Korean policy outcomes. The cabinet, party, and military interact by applying three distinct but individually coherent, institutional policy platforms to specific policy debates. These general policy outlooks are stable across leaders of each institution, further indicating these groups do not fundamentally waver with the personal position of the institution's leader. Though the institutions are formally stovepiped, they express conflicting ideas and spin facts and events in the official press. Institutional actors resist decided policy and take actions in contradiction to the state's overall policy to shape the agenda according to these preconceived platforms. They operate under the ultimate authority of the supreme decision-maker, but their operations have a meaningful and systematic impact on national policy.

Institutions have power in North Korea. They impact policy decision-making by framing the agenda and effectively defining the universe of policy alternatives. Policy innovation comes from below, and central authorities generally select between these presented alternatives. Institutions frame decisions by contextualizing specific contemporary events in a particular historical or ideological context or present recent empirical data to bolster their advocacy. Though leaders make decisions and can reject advice, this advice in the aggregate is important. In a post-totalitarian institutional state like North Korea, inner circle advisers have an incentive to avoid getting out of line with mainstream thinking lest they jeopardize their personal and professional survival. Impersonal institutions have more room to innovate – a characteristic not generally associated with bureaucracies in a democratic context. Put differently, inner circle groupthink and innovation-discouraging incentives make this body more static and variance by institution better explains divergent national policy decisions than hidden inner circle deliberations.

Institutions also influence implementation, modifying central decisions when they can. Central authorities make every effort to control bureaucratic action, but a single individual has limitations on his ability to do so. This is not to suggest Kim Jong Il's rule is in doubt or fragile. It is to suggest that his power is not as thorough as the totalitarian and personalistic ideal types otherwise suggest. Kim and other leaders of states that fit the post-totalitarian institutionalism model must contend with institutional opposition and freelancing. Kim relies on peer institutions and a divided security apparatus to do so.

Kim must manage these bureaucracies through the divide-and-conquer arrangement that he molded. North Korea no longer has a single, monolithic party that guides strategic decision-making under the power of a single man nor is the command economy or ideological correctness sacrosanct today as under Kim Il Sung. North Korea has moved away from but not totally abandoned these core elements of totalitarianism. Institutional interaction has replaced party monolithism, markets have etched cracks in the command economy, and ideological arguments compete with rational ones in policy debates. The party competes with the military and cabinet in advocating national policy. The party's efforts to reassert their dominant, comprehensive institutional position after the 1998 constitutional revision have failed. Post-totalitarian institutionalism is not simply an interim state but a regime type more robust and sustainable than many other typologies of non-democratic rule with relatively short lives.

An Evolved Polity

While totalitarianism comes closer to explaining an earlier period in North Korean politics under Kim Il Sung, the younger Kim's government is still highly centralized but not as much as its predecessor. Due to the exogenous shocks to the system in the 1990s, North Korea's political system changed. Kim Jong Il did not have the personal gravitas to dominate a united polity. The younger Kim accepted the inefficiencies of a divided government to aid his effort to maintain control over the state. Pitting one institution against another allowed Kim to restrain one large modern bureaucracy with another. Placing greater emphasis on rational results even when in competition with ideological imperatives allowed the state to stave off collapse amid serious challenges to regime survival. Kim did not choose to move away from his father's totalitarian state and likely would have preferred the stronger, totalitarian state, but the natural progression of totalitarian states and particular accelerating dynamics in the 1990s forced his hand.

It is important to recognize that post-totalitarian institutionalism is an outgrowth of a totalitarian state. In this sense, it is a subset of the generic post-totalitarian umbrella type. Kim maintained much of the old system and changed only what he thought he must in order to address the changing internal and external situation and avert collapse. Kim implemented changes to the political and economic structure over time based on particular needs that in the aggregate created a political system different than his father's.

Consequently, the post-totalitarian institutional state retains some key legacy elements of totalitarianism. In North Korea's case, the state still uses arbitrary terror and regular purges to instill fear and anxiety in elites and masses alike. Despite extensive elite privilege, the system holds long range goals beyond simply enriching the leadership, including broad national goals like reunification, macro-economic improvements, and anti-imperialism. Pyongyang monopolizes the media and does not allow civil society or dissent to develop. North Korea's state institutions carefully provide distinct views in the controlled press, but that press should not be misunderstood as free.

North Korea also lacks a comprehensive opposition within the country. The population does not have a clear alternative to the status quo and no semi-organized means to pursue it due to continual purges and extensive repression. There are not significant non-governmental groups that can resist state power as the Solidarity movement and Catholic Church did in communist

Poland. Forces of moderation and reform are firmly within the authority of, and indeed sanctioned and employed by, the state. Of course, this does not suggest that an opposition could not develop, especially given continued material hardship, ideological decline, and regime ineptitude, but it does not describe the current reality. Removing this role of a domestic opposition, the regime has greater opportunity to gradually modify its roles. Facing increased impotence in these core areas, Pyongyang could alter its mode of operations to recapture its ability to provide basic services to the population and maintain a mantle of legitimacy as protector against imperialist forces and/or as champion of a reunified Korea.

North Korea's specific post-totalitarianism also involved addressing ideological change. Ideology and tradition are still critical inputs into policy decisions in all issue areas under consideration. *Juche*, military-first politics, and the Kims' personality cults are important parts of regime stability. Kim does not want to be measured only on the rational outputs of his governance, because this raises the specter that another individual could do the job more effectively. Kim references his bloodline to bolster his legitimacy and the regime continues to expend great energy to uphold its integrated ideological justifications of its rule. At the same time, ideological erosion is common to totalitarian regimes. As the promised utopia is not realized, regime calls for extreme sacrifice for a better future ring hollow. Propaganda pays diminishing returns.

The state increasingly must focus on rational results to augment this decline in ideological furor while not discounting the importance of ideology. At a basic level, it must provide for the subsistence of its citizens. The declining material condition of the state where it cannot prevent chronic food and heating shortages makes ever delayed promises of a better future more difficult to accept. The state uses repression as a check on ideological decline to keep its grip on power, but it has not shifted to a simple, personalistic rule where repression is the cornerstone of regime maintenance. Such a shift away from ideology would represent an important change in North Korea's post-totalitarian institutionalism, greatly weakening its tools to maintain social control and political stability. North Korea's broad and deep institutional arrangements also continue to distinguish it from the less stable personalistic state.

North Korea has developed meaningful groups that influence policy decision-making and implementation. Though these groups operate within the state, this group identity and shared purpose breaks down the individual atomization that the totalitarian regime type encourages. Elites can engage in group politics in this restricted way. More directly, the state is not as monolithic as totalitarianism suggests. These groups advocate distinct policy purposes, conflict with and undermine one another at times, and even resist central decisions. This disunity and structural conflict is the most significant difference between the post-totalitarian institutional model and totalitarianism and corporatism that predict relative intra-governmental harmony.

Decision-making

Over this ten-year period, there are discernable periods of time where one institution's preferences prevailed over another's. With very rare exception, no single institution could claim victory on all three issue areas at once nor did any institution sustain these victories indefinitely. North Korea's evolution is not simply the rise of the military and/or the cabinet at the expense of the party. There is no easily identifiable linear progression that accompanies the relative

Table 8.1: Decision-making Outcomes, 1998-2009

Date	Issue Area	Policy Issue	Lead Institution
Sept 1998	U.S. Policy/Inter-Korean	Taepo Dong 1 Launch Credit	No Resolution
Oct 1998-May 1999	U.S. Policy	Kumchang-ri Suspected Nuclear Facility	Cabinet
Nov 1998	U.S. Policy	OPlan 5027	No Resolution
Jan 1999	Economy	Second Chollima March	Party
Jan 1999	All	Party claims institutional supremacy	Military/Cabinet
June 1999	Inter-Korean	Northern Limit Line Naval Clash	Military
July 1999	Inter-Korean	Ministerial Negotiations	Cabinet
July 1999	U.S. Policy	Renewed Contacts	Cabinet
September 1999	U.S. Policy/Inter-Korean	Taepo Dong 2 Launch preparations	Cabinet
June 2000	Inter-Korean	First North-South Summit	Cabinet
June 2000	U.S. Policy	Missile Moratorium	Cabinet
October 2000	U.S. Policy	High-level visits to Pyongyang and Washington	Cabinet
January 2001	Economy	Kim's Tour of Southern China	Cabinet
March 2001	Inter-Korean	Letter exchanges and North Korean delegation to Seoul	Cabinet
May 2001	U.S. Policy / Inter-Korean	Missile Moratorium	Cabinet
May 2001	U.S. Policy	Kim's "wait and see" comment	Neutral
June 2001	Inter-Korean	Naval Clash	Military
July 2001	U.S. Policy	Policy Review concludes, offers to negotiate	No immediate response
August 2001	U.S. Policy	Missile launches	Cabinet
Nov 2001	Inter-Korean	Ministerial Meetings Stall	Military
Dec 2001 – Feb 2002	U.S. Policy	High-level U.S. comments urging comprehensive change in North Korea	Party/Military
June 2002	Inter-Korean / U.S. Policy	Naval Clash	Military
June 2002	Inter-Korean	World Cup congratulations	Cabinet
July 2002	Economy	Wage and price reforms	Cabinet
Aug 2002	U.S. Policy	Quiet engagement on new sanctions	Cabinet

(Table 8.1 continued)

Sept 2002	Inter-Korean	Road/rail links, family reunions, unified sports team	Cabinet
Oct 2002	U.S. Policy	US visit to Pyongyang	Party/Military
Nov 2002	Economy	Economics education	Cabinet
Nov 2002	Inter-Korean	Kaesong Groundbreaking	Cabinet
March 2003	Inter-Korean	Economic projects continue amid challenges over rail explosion	Cabinet
May 2005	U.S. Policy	Announces reprocessed fuel rods	Party/Military
June 2005	Inter-Korean	Celebrate anniversary of inter-Korean summit	Cabinet
June 2005	U.S. Policy	Dying wish comment	Cabinet
Sept 2005	U.S. Policy	Agreement on Guiding Principles	Cabinet
Sept 2005	U.S. Policy	LWR demand and reaction to BDA	Party/Military
Nov 2005	Economy	Reintroduction of the PDS	Party/Military
July 2006	U.S. Policy	TD-2 flight test	Military/Party
Oct 2006	U.S. Policy	Nuclear test	Military/Party
Jan 2007	U.S. Policy	Berlin agreement	Cabinet
Feb 2007	U.S. Policy	Six Party agreement on denuclearization	Cabinet
Feb 2007	Inter-Korean	Contacts resume	Cabinet
Apr 2007	Economy	Cabinet Premier Pak replaced with less influential technocrat	Party/Military
June 2007	U.S. Policy	US official in Pyongyang; BDA resolved; begin denuclearization	Cabinet
Sept 2007	U.S. Policy	Lifting some sanctions for disablement deal	Cabinet
Nov 2007	Inter-Korean	Commit to economic projects with South	Cabinet
Feb 2008	Inter-Korean	North's negative reaction to new ROK president begins	Military/Party
July 2008	U.S. Policy	NK destroys cooling tower; U.S. starts food aid deliveries	Cabinet
July 2008	U.S. Policy	Delay in terrorist list removal	Party/Military
Oct 2008	U.S. Policy	Terrorist list removal	Cabinet
Jan 2009	U.S. Policy	NK tries to recast the terms of ongoing talks with new U.S. Administration	Party/Military

rationalization of the system. Table 8.1 documents the institutions that wrestled agenda control on all three issue areas. Though all debates do not have a clear winner and loser, are of equal importance, or have the same lasting effect, this summary table demonstrates that no single institution has won out over the others in a sustained fashion.

North Korea's polity has grown relatively more rational than in the past, but this does not suggest that the cabinet is the new preeminent institution in North Korean politics or that one should expect it to take on this role. Quite the contrary, the most recent evidence points to a reversal of many of the cabinet's early gains in economic and inter-Korean policy. North Korea's current system is stable because institutions check one another and blend rational policy justifications with ideological ones. Policy decisions oscillate between favoring the party, military, and cabinet's agendas. Each institution has won and lost bureaucratic battles, but the war has no end in sight. Institutional conflict, not cooperation, contributes to the regime's stability.

The table also shows that simplifying these three institutions to "hardliners" and "pragmatists" by collapsing the party and military into one "hardliner" category has only limited usefulness. This conclusion overlooks the decades of well-entrenched bitter divides between the party and military. The "Party/Military" label, for example, should not be read as a joint policy win. These institutions argued separately – with distinct justifications – for a similar outcome. The military institution, for example, is actually quite pragmatic but also hard-line. It does not reject accommodation strategies with enemies because they are imperialists but because in their estimation doing so undermines state security. Furthermore, defining elites as "pragmatists" and "hard-liners" without reference to institution creates artificial, amorphous groups that are not coherent political actors within the state. These "groups" are not discernible clusters of regime elites influencing decisions or modifying policy implementation in any organized fashion. The nature of the table's effort to summarize outcomes hides the more complex picture of inter-bureaucratic struggle. However, it is important to note that there are no permanent coalitions between institutions and no observed evidence of explicit and sustained collusion. Indeed, Figure 8.1 shows much the same story with an emphasis on the timeline. In short, Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1 do not clearly show a systematic pattern in North Korean politics. No single institution is on top of the others.

If this table and figure do not show a discernable pattern influencing North Korean decisionmaking, the natural question remains: what does? Figures 8.3-8.5 help bring out some of the core conclusions of this study not found in the table. The picture is much clearer if one breaks down agenda control by issue area. These figures show the most general of sketches of agenda control over the decade under consideration in this study. I smooth out the trend lines to bring to the fore strategic and long-lasting shifts in North Korean institutional agenda control. The empirical reality is much messier than this trend, of course, and documented in detail in chapters five through seven, but the big picture should not be lost in the weeds and is fairly straightforward, especially on inter-Korean and economic policy.

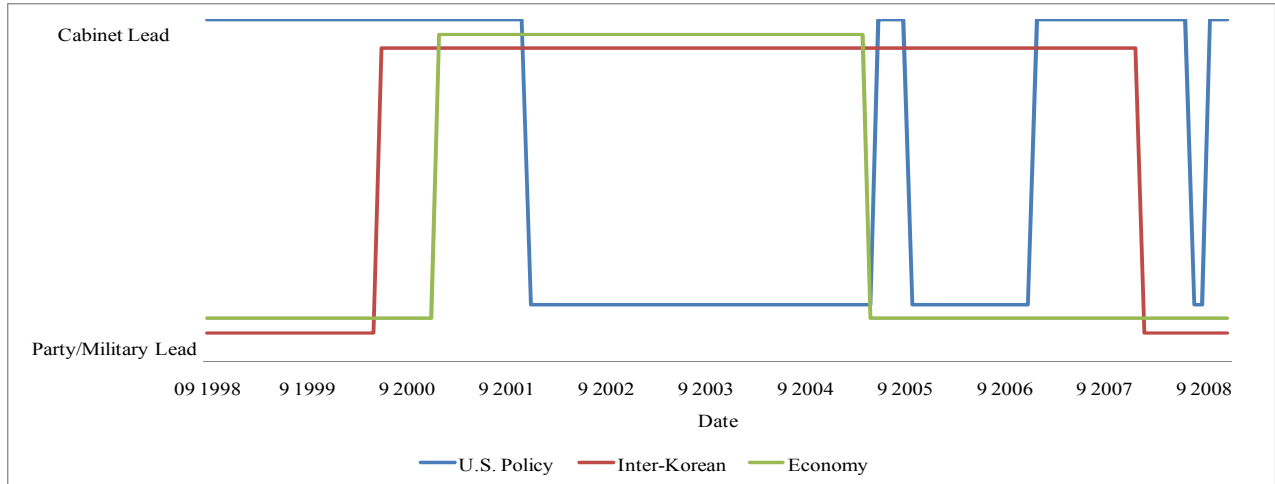


Figure 8.1: Institutional Lead by Issue Area, 1998-2009

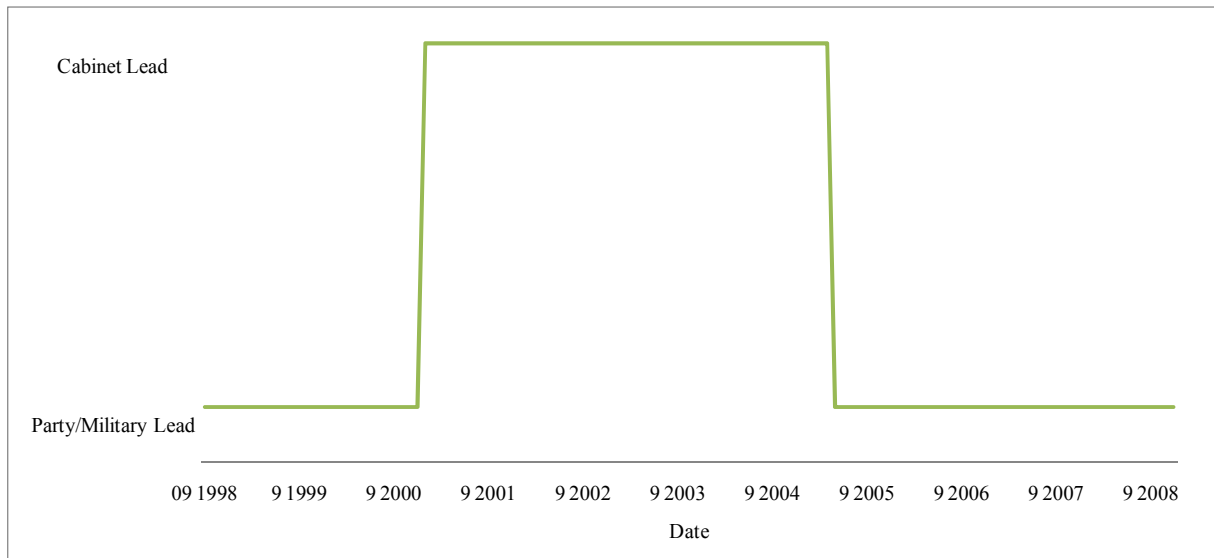


Figure 8.2: Institutional Lead on Economic Policy, 1998-2009

Kim Dae Jung’s Sunshine Policy ushered in a new period in inter-Korean relations that lasted throughout his and his successor’s administrations. Delays and difficulties abounded in inter-Korean relations, but the cabinet’s agenda won out internally in North Korea as the primary strategic orientation towards the South. However, with a new administration in Seoul in early 2008 and its tougher line towards the North, the cabinet lost its control over inter-Korean relations as the party and military’s advocacy gained increased resonance in Pyongyang.

Control over economic policy likewise had two major inflection points during this time. Kim empowered the cabinet to take over economic policy after his tour of Southern China’s financial centers and special economic zones in 2001. For four years, the cabinet implemented various economic reforms, emphasizing greater reliance on markets and localized management

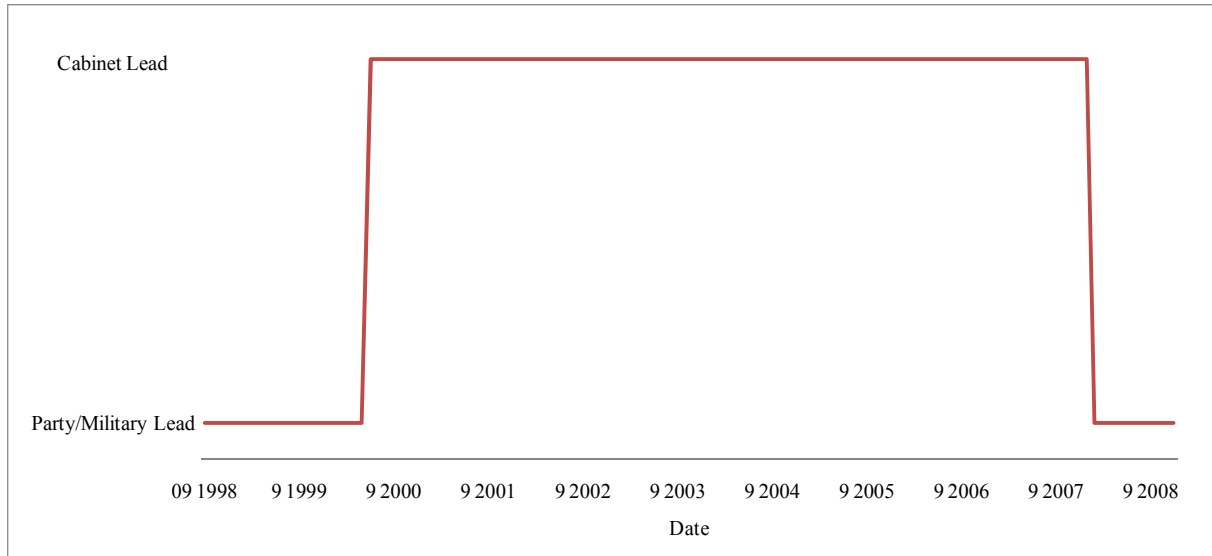


Figure 8.3: Institutional Lead on Inter-Korean Policy, 1998-2009

to distribute goods and provide workers incentives to produce. However, when the party's observations that this created social irregularities, including creating a new wealthy class of businessmen that the regime may have a harder time controlling and left vulnerable populations so destitute that the stark contrast further eroded the regime's claim to protect socialism, Pyongyang eventually shifted. Once food security could be reasonably assured for the year, Kim gave the power over strategic economic questions back to the party which reversed several of the cabinet's liberalizing endeavors.

The regime's approach to U.S. policy has been more complicated. Figure 8.3 shows considerably more variance than the two-inflection point figures on inter-Korean and economic policy. However, the trend here can be simplified further as well. Cabinet organizations, particularly the Foreign Ministry, led on U.S. policy until shortly after terrorists struck the United States on September 11, 2001. The Foreign Ministry engaged both the Clinton and Bush Administrations primarily on the North's long-range missile programs. When repeated comments by senior Administration officials in late 2001 and early 2002 convinced Pyongyang of the party and military's arguments that Washington could not be trusted and sought to eradicate the North Korean regime, the cabinet lost its lead over U.S. policy. Party and military outlets emphasized armaments over paper agreements as U.S.-DPRK confrontation intensified over the coming years. The cabinet ultimately failed to wrestle back agenda control over U.S. policy until after the North's nuclear test in 2006.

The cabinet briefly regained agenda control in late summer 2005 when Washington appointed a new lead negotiator with seemingly greater authority to deal, but this quickly fell apart after the six parties agreed to the guiding principles of future negotiations. The party and military pointed to Washington's new financial sanctions on Banco Delta Asia that cut the North off from the international financial system and were labeled internally as part of Washington's "suffocation"

strategy that revealed the “imperialists” efforts to promote regime change through other means. The argument carried the day in Pyongyang as the cabinet lost its newly-acquired leeway.

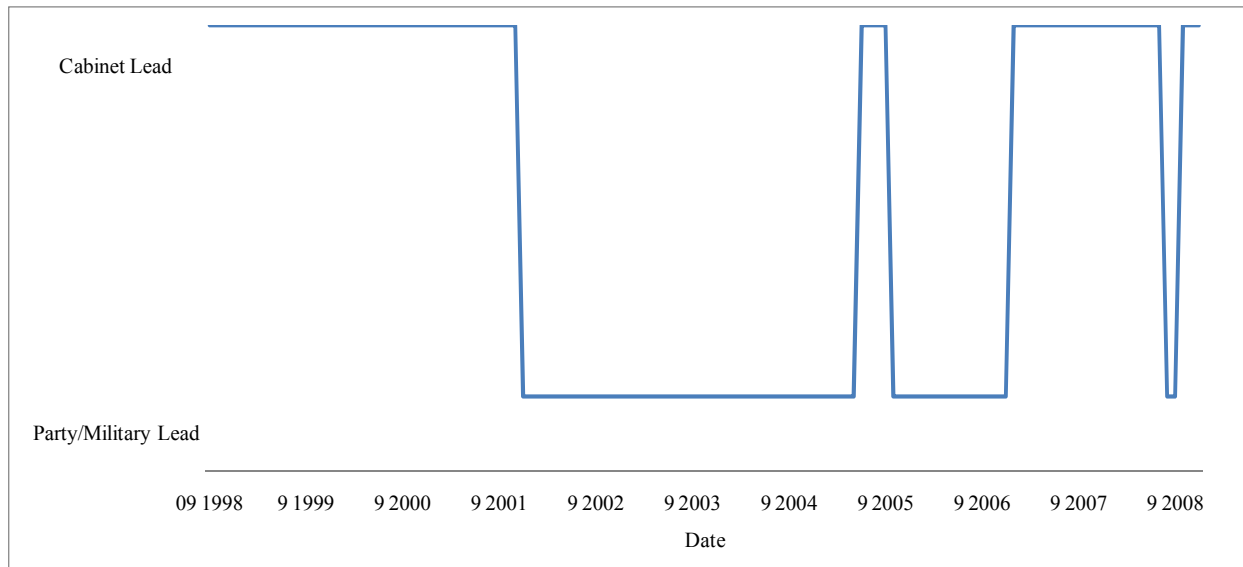


Figure 8.4: Institutional Lead on U.S. Policy, 1998-2009

Strategic change in the North’s policy towards the United States occurred after North Korea’s October 2006 nuclear test. With a tested nuclear deterrent in hand, the cabinet reengaged the Americans from what the state considered a position of strength. Though the party and military temporarily took back agenda control in late summer 2008 over what Pyongyang saw as the U.S. backtracking on its commitment to remove North Korea from the terrorism list, the cabinet again took center stage once Washington completed this action in October 2008.

Importance of the Internal Mechanism

One may argue that understanding this internal mechanism is not necessary to understand North Korean responses. An observer could theorize that treating North Korea as a reactive black box explains its responding to a perceived hard-line policy from Washington or Seoul with its own hard-line. Economic policy is more difficult to explain without reference to the internal situation, but one may dismiss it as relatively unimportant as unrelated to questions of high politics. Though there is some value to this basic shorthand for explaining North Korean actions, this section argues that the explanation and prediction of North Korean actions is not nearly as specific or productive without a full understanding of the internal mechanism of policy formulation, execution, and sustainability.

The primary difficulty with the contention that North Korean policy choices can be explained without reference to the internal mechanism is that it makes more difficult mediating between competing theories of North Korean actions. On U.S. policy, for example, is the state proactively pursuing security through nuclear, missile, and other asymmetric capabilities without reference to foreign actions or is it willing to denuclearize in exchange for progress towards other goals? There is a logical claim to both theories with tremendous impact on foreign policy

choices of several states in East Asia and the United States. If Pyongyang is pursuing nuclearization without reference to foreign actions, then denuclearization negotiations are a waste of time and resources and unnecessarily limit more coercive options against the state. Likewise, if foreign powers can convince North Korea to give up its nuclear drive without force, then the relevant actors can potentially avoid a high-cost military conflict to achieve these goals. One purpose of this study is to argue that the empirical evidence should mediate between these theories rather than preconception. As is often the case, empirical reality is much more complex than neat theories allow, but policy-relevant conclusions are not beyond the pale.

This study shows that Pyongyang, beyond tactical posturing, has demonstrated a strategic commitment at times to abandon negotiations with the Americans outright and pursue its nuclear and missile capabilities but also has shown an ability to slow or halt this drive under other conditions. Seizing on data selectively rather than systematically can bolster either theory but is not an intellectually honest evaluation of either argument. The more useful question, therefore, is what explains these variant strategies? Put differently, under what conditions does the regime consider halting or reversing its nuclear drive? If this can be identified, policymakers can proceed to the normative question as to whether those conditions are worth meeting.

The evidence presented here indicates North Korea is a highly reactive state, specifically in its U.S. policy. The cabinet, party, and military consistently advocate their agenda on U.S. policy and define the specifics of what each of those agendas consist of, but the simple decision as to whether to empower the cabinet, party, or military over the other comes down to the basic calculation of atmosphere. Regardless of the shape of the table in negotiations with room for two, three, four, or six parties, Washington has more control over this variable than any other single driver. Pyongyang is concerned with Washington, and Washington's actions can get Pyongyang to move.

This is not to suggest that the United States is responsible for North Korea's actions but simply to note that it has more power over the state in terms of inducements than it usually recognizes and less power of coercion than it often assumes. North Korea is not strategically proactive in its U.S. policy. It will take the lead to get Washington's attention, try to define the agenda, or take a hard-line against the United States when conditions are not in its favor but it usually does not pass on an opportunity to enhance its security and economic situation when it deems the time is ripe.

Pyongyang responds to both symbols and substance. Symbols have greater role for North Korea's ideologues, in particular – a point lost if one treats the country as a black box. It is generally accepted that ideology is eroding in North Korea but has some residual role. This model helps one explain concretely the effect of ideology on policy decisions and the regime's functions. Ideology remains an important component of regime legitimacy and one set of arguments for or against certain policy options. It helps explain North Korean actions that seem to defy logic at first glance without serving as a simple excuse for failure to understand the North's decision. Put differently, the ideology variable is not akin to arguing that Westerners cannot understand the Confucian or Korean mind – a contention I find neither accurate nor helpful. Ideology is not a “spigot variable” to be turned on and off when the model fails – either by overpredicting or underpredicting a certain behavior – but concretely points towards pressure on policy choices in a specific direction.

More broadly, another important question addressed by this study is what are the regime's core goals? It is a relatively simple enterprise to identify managing its relationship with the United States and South Korea and revitalizing its economy are core goals, but there are very different paths that Pyongyang can take to address each of these three issues with tremendous impact on the future of the state and region. The regime has demonstrated its ability to try a diversity of approaches that are inexplicable and puzzling without reference to the internal mechanism. Given the country's dismal economic situation, the cabinet articulates economic revitalization as critical to the regime's existence; it places the economic question on par with other existential security threats, which military opponents criticize. The regime must balance between competing goals – ideological and rational. Analyses that begin with a clear presumption about the regime's goals and conclude that it will never attempt a certain course of action without qualification of circumstances overstate their case.

Understanding how these three strategic issue areas interact helps explain why the regime does not react consistently to foreign policy options from Washington or Seoul without reference to the other issue areas. Importantly, Kim's divide-and-rule governance would make empowering a single institution on all three issue areas itself puzzling. Though providing consistency in advancing one of the policy platforms, this move would weaken Kim's institutional check on the empowered institution. Kim would be skirting the system of rule he has molded if he granted the military, for example, its comprehensive agenda and would have eroded the most significant barriers from the military ruling the system – de facto or otherwise. Indeed, as Figure 8.1 shows, no one institution has been able to sustain its agenda on all three issue areas for any significant period of time since 1998.

During this period of post-totalitarian institutionalism, Pyongyang has demonstrated an ability to manage this interaction by linking and de-linking issue areas. All three institutions utilized all contemporary information at their disposal to present arguments to advance their internally-consistent, comprehensive agendas. And while each institution's comprehensive agenda had a certain logic, the state empowering one institution on one issue and another institution on another simultaneously blocked each of these comprehensive platforms from being advanced. Put differently, this study shows that it is incorrect to say that North Korea does not have a strategy for the way forward or an explicit cause for being. It has three, and the state as a whole has simply only empowered certain aspects of each strategy at any given time, giving the impression that the state lacks a central purpose or is doing anything more than "muddling through."

This point has important implications for those crafting foreign policy towards North Korea. Part of Kim Dae Jung's Sunshine Policy, for example, theorized that unconditional engagement towards the North that included significant economic aid and development assistance would provide incentives for Pyongyang to reform its economy and open up to the outside world. Faced with serious economic problems, the regime would come to realize the necessity of diplomatic rapprochement with Seoul and Washington if sanctions were to be removed and North Korea integrated into the international order. The policy also hoped to gradually shift the social structure by encouraging a new class of businessmen in North Korea who developed their wealth from non-state employment and may press for greater business freedoms and engagement with the outside world.

The policy was a sophisticated and proactive approach towards the North that slowly made inroads into changing the North's social structure, but it ultimately proved inconclusive in governing the North's economic choices. The North's strategic economic choices have not correlated with its inter-Korean policy. For a time, Pyongyang empowered the cabinet to pursue economic reform policies but South Korean aid largely did not encourage the state to advance or retreat from these strategic choices. This study demonstrates that the North Korean leadership empowered one institution over another on economic policy based on two considerations: internal politics and realization of ground realities within North Korean society.

Kim dramatically empowered the cabinet on economic policy after he saw for himself the tremendous differences in level of development in Southern China and North Korea. His scathing attacks on the party's policy produced the most sweeping economic changes in North Korea to date. He backed off these policies with much less (observed) fanfare. Party arguments about corruption, sufficient food availability, a rising class of rich businessmen that could skirt regime control, and general modification of the social structure that Seoul had hoped for prompted the central leadership to switch course. Though the renewed administrative control over the economy has remained paramount, the cabinet's more vocal recognition of corruption and social ills that accompany this reversal may presage yet another shift back towards marketization and economic reform in the near term.

This analysis also points to the importance of Washington and Seoul finding common ground in its approach towards the North. Though it is popular to note that Pyongyang tries to create a "wedge" between these two allies in their approach towards the North, it has not required much help in this regard over the period in this study. Electoral politics in the United States and South Korea have stimulated significantly different approaches to North Korea. For example, by the time the Bush Administration completed its policy review of North Korea policy and shortly thereafter shifted to a harder line towards North Korea after 9/11, a liberal president occupied the Blue House in Seoul intensely committed to inter-Korean engagement. The critically important U.S.-South Korean alliance failed to produce a unified view of policy towards North Korea. President Bush reversed course after the October 2006 nuclear test and November 2006 elections that gave Democrats control of both houses of Congress. As the U.S. reached out to North Korea diplomatically, South Korean public opinion turned against engagement and its lame duck president could do little to stem the tide. By the end of 2007, South Korea elected a conservative president committed to a tougher line as the United States continued to engage.

Pyongyang exploited these differences tactically, but they did not have to work very hard to do so. Indeed, this study shows how certain bureaucratic actors tried to do precisely the opposite. Party opponents to inter-Korean engagement tried to link Washington and Seoul's policies to make its case against a separate, generally conciliatory policy towards the South. Pyongyang's strategic interests do not always call for separating Washington and Seoul. Instead its strategic objectives are most straightforward. If one ally is offering it concessions and pursuing a conciliatory policy, then it tries to get the other to do the same. Arguments that the North needs an enemy and oscillates between identifying the Americans and South Koreans for this purpose are interesting and theoretically persuasive as distinct possibilities, but the empirical evidence does not support them.

North Korea, Comparative Politics, and Downstream Consequences

Like every state, North Korea is unique at a certain level of specificity. However, asserting that it is non-comparable is unproductive and unpersuasive. Understanding the state requires reference points, and building comparative theory has wider applications beyond this one state. North Korea presumed oddity does not discount the ability to derive more general lessons about a group of post-totalitarian states. As noted at the outset of this study, there is a variety of post-totalitarian states that makes sub-classifying these states fruitful. Post-Maoist China looks very different than contemporary Romania, for example. Refining the varieties of post-totalitarianism helps us understand the state's functions and, consequently, contextualize and predict its policy responses. In short, North Korea and states like it should be brought into the comparative politics tradition more thoroughly.

Classifying a state as a part of a particular typology should have some utility. This is not simply a labeling exercise. In North Korea's case, post-totalitarian institutionalism's variant of the post-totalitarian set has specific, non-obvious downstream consequences. These are important to answer the question why this characterization matters. They are not necessarily intuitive without the model, making the effort to classify and characterize post-totalitarian states more helpful to both academics and foreign policy practitioners.

Post-totalitarian institutional states like North Korea are more moderate than their totalitarian predecessors. Observers rarely label North Korean actions as measured or moderate, but the appropriate comparison must be made. Pyongyang's actions are certainly further out of step with international norms than other post-totalitarian states like Russia, China, or even Cuba. One may argue that North Korea is one of, if not the, most extreme state in the world. It is a small, impoverish state, surrounded by three of the largest economies in the world. It officially clings to communist mantras when the world movement has long since faded. It maintains the highest conscription rate in the world and holds to self sufficiency as it fails – chronically – to feed its own population. However, recognizing the differences between North Korea today and North Korea two decades ago requires comparing these two states in time. Comparing North Korea today to other contemporary states has other uses, but understanding the moderation thesis requires a comparison to itself. Simply put, one must look at how the state has evolved to see if it has moderated or grown more extreme.

North Korea's post-totalitarian institutionalism under Kim Jong Il is more moderate than the totalitarian North Korea under Kim Il Sung. Post-totalitarian institutional states bring the expert and compartmented knowledge of its modern bureaucracy into national-level decisions. The modern bureaucracy is more than a transmission belt, implementing ideologically-defined policy; bureaucrats contribute specified knowledge to national decisions. A greater diversity of policy inputs affects policy decisions and implementation than under the previous regime where a single party applied a general ideology to make decisions. Under post-totalitarian institutionalism, technocrats and ideologues moderate one another in the sense that more components of the perceived national interest are integrated into policymaking. Policymaking becomes more representative of the state's composition, and the state's composition reflects a broader set of interests. This does not make the state in any way democratic or democratizing but it does make it more liberal than its predecessor.

Moderation does not necessarily mean aligning policy decisions with internationally proscribed norms. However, it does institutionalize a counterweight to a singular policy metric, and, in practice, the post-totalitarian institutional state also moderates according to international norms. Communist orthodoxy is out of step with contemporary global norms, and pragmatic national interests are closer to international norms, *ceteris paribus*. This does not mean that a sovereign state may not decide to develop nuclear weapons or maintain a large military to provide for its security, restrict foreign influences or capital, or take actions with international repercussions to satisfy domestic political needs. Indeed, one may argue that many democracies do many of these things to a certain degree. This does mean, however, that the post-totalitarian institutional state is more rational. It places less emphasis on a radical ideology to guide policy. It makes economic decisions, for example, more in accordance with contemporary international norms than under Kim Il Sung. Though North Korea could not join the International Monetary Fund tomorrow, it has at least voiced a tenuous interest and could conceivably meet its requirements for admittance with some effort. Its policy towards its southern neighbor is not exclusively dominated by a leadership committed to reunifying the state by force at the earliest opportunity. Reaching strategic accommodation with the hegemon is a distinct possibility. In effect, post-totalitarian institutional states are more moderate than their predecessors, because the current international norm favors pragmatic self-interest over ideologically-guided policy.

The model also suggests that this category of states is stable. North Korea is not muddling through or seeking a new modus operandi. Post-totalitarian institutionalism is sustainable. Though no one within the state chose this type of systemic function, it is still a stable political outcome. Party efforts in North Korea to reassert the old system have repeatedly failed. The cabinet and military have not been able to dominate either. These peer institutions advocate at cross-purposes under the authority of central leadership, and one does not have to eventually win in a permanent way. Indeed, an extensive set of checks prevent one institution from trying to usurp power over the others, and a security-conscious central leadership has a strong interest in maintaining a balance that it can control. Regime leadership has not forsaken terror or the permanent purge to maintain control. Though the state plays a precarious balancing act where tipping too far to one side in these inter-institutional debates could unravel the system, maintaining a long-term balance is indeed possible.

Furthermore, this concept of balance means the model provides analysts specific areas to watch that may portend a strategic shift in policy. This study has consistently demonstrated that a close reading of these debates can effectively show where the state is likely to move. When one institution goes silent for a prolonged period of time in face of strong advocacy from another rival institution or when an institution mildly supports its rival institution's position, then the state shortly thereafter generally takes action in accord with the strongly presented advocacy. When the three rival institutions agree on policy in media debates, the central authorities usually follow by deciding to implement that unanimous bureaucratic position.

North Korea's Future

The search for balance among the three institutions also gives analysts special ability to forecast longer term changes as well. If the balance is permanently broken, then the system is undergoing significant change. If one institution is able to thwart another not on specific policy disputes or corruption allegations but in a deep and sustained assault on the other that affects its

ability to function, then one should expect significant change. Put differently, post-totalitarian institutionalism requires a plural set of institutions. Breaking this institutional balance breaks the system. The specific circumstances would help determine whether such a change meant moving away from post-totalitarian institutionalism towards a more liberal polity or retrenchment. Currently, it is hard to see how North Korea could break from this political system without a substantial shock.

The most predictable shock is the death or permanent incapacitation of Kim Jong Il. Kim's health came into sharp relief in early Fall 2008 after he suffered a stroke. Though this study will not shed additional light on this specific incident, it does raise the more important issue to recognize: Kim is mortal, and he is not the system. The system will eventually have to address leadership change at the top. The top decision-maker is important, but a new leadership will not immediately revolutionize the system. It will have to deal with the same institutions that have demonstrated their staying power. Decisions may shift within the margins defined by these institutions, but the regime is unlikely to fall apart quickly or suddenly shift course with another person or group of people at the top. Though the succession issue is certainly important, there is an overabundance of attention on this variable compared to the minimal attention paid to the larger systemic question for which Kim is but one important part.

There are several plausible options for leadership at the top after Kim's death. Kim's brother-in-law Chang Song Taek, one of Kim's three sons, or someone else could simply replace Kim as the top leader. Alternatively, a collective leadership could emerge to replace the Dear Leader composed of representatives from each of these three powerful institutions. Though there has been contradictory evidence that Kim may have tapped one or another of his sons as his successor, it remains questionable whether even a formal and unambiguous designation would have much weight after Kim Jong Il's incapacitation or death. Kim's much more powerful father took two decades and several purges to lay the groundwork for Kim's own succession, so it is by no means certain that elites would accept Kim Jong Il's dying wish.

Despite the several unknowns in such a transition period, North Korea will evolve from its current political state as a highly institutionalized, modern state. Whomever or whatever follows Kim will follow from Kim's polity's post-totalitarian institutional starting point. It is not likely to quickly collapse like a personalist state after the death of the supreme strongman nor is it likely to evolve towards what analysts abroad consider that the state "needs" based on decades of ideological indoctrination or the Kims' cult of personality. It will evolve from its current starting point – potentially radically – but not without reference to the present functions and institutions that have real power in North Korean politics. In short, North Korea's strong institutions constrain the plausible possibilities for the near term in a post-Kim Jong Il North Korea and make comprehensive change in the successor regime less likely. Even in the most radical political change in North Korea that occurred after the Japanese defeat in World War II, Kim Il Sung's revolutionary polity had to deal with existing trained administrators and institutional structure to modify it. Despite the many unknowns, one can say with a high degree of confidence that North Korea's current institutions will be a relevant feature in any transition scenario.

Focusing on what is known rather than the unknown helps narrow the range of more likely outcomes. The internal checks explained in the model suggest that the risk of the military

easily taking control is unlikely. The long and lethal history between the Korean Peoples Army and State Security Department suggests that one will attempt to prevent the other from taking control. These organizations could conceivably fight one another in a type of civil war for control but they could also deter one another as well. What can be written with greater confidence is that individual ambition and fear of what may come if a rival takes power will likely trump the collective interest in stability. Though most North Korea analysts predict a peaceful transition of some form, there is certainly a possibility that individual groups, especially if faced with a rival coming to power, could risk everything to secure their own position on top. Like a basic prisoner's dilemma, the focus should be on the action of individual players – in this case, institutions with power – rather than the collective interest of elites. In this sense, a transition could be bloody and destabilizing in the short-term, but Kim's senior inner circle with tentacles into every major institution provide additional means to keep a lid on this type of leadership crisis. In short, one should not rule out the possibility of a bloody transition and understand the histories and interests of the players that may be involved in such a scenario should it develop.

Nevertheless, Kim Jong Il has not announced a successor like his father did. Kim Il Sung purged those opposed to the appointment, and the Kims' personality cult preparations made the father-to-son transition easier. In a certain respect, one of Kim Jong Il's sons may enjoy some of the authority of this weakening personality cult, but that does not preclude a non-Kim from attempting the job or even maintaining long-term control over North Korea. The model reminds us that analysts should not speculate on what the North's leadership needs to be successful or other normative arguments about how the regime should change to address the question how it likely will change. Focusing on the evolution concept means focusing on how the system is now and how it may change to form the next regime. That next regime need not be stable or survive but it must be an outgrowth of North Korea's current reality.

Discussion of possible successors is the topic du jour with more speculation than data. Indeed, one point of this study is to demonstrate that the question is not as important as most assume, since Kim is not the system. Nevertheless, the question has merit and requires an evaluation of the data publicly available. Kim's eldest son, Kim Chong Nam, resides in China and is reportedly out of favor with his father. He does not hold onto any of the reigns of power that would make him likely to emerge as the sole leader without help from someone within the state. Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law, Chang Song Taek, could possibly align with his nephew, but he too may simply become the new supreme leader himself. Alternatively, Kim Chong Nam's two younger brothers – both in their 20s – could take up the post with Kim Jong Un enjoying the greatest prospects of the three. However, this parlor game of guessing who will be the next supreme leader is truly irrelevant if one cannot say anything about how those successors may rule differently than Kim Jong Il or each other. It is unclear if swapping Kim Jong Un with Kim Jong Nam would make much difference as they seem to espouse many of the same positions as the current supreme leader and would be constrained by the same institutional system currently in place.

The individual best positioned to be a real power broker if not the de facto ruler himself is Chang Song Taek with extensive experience and contacts necessary to control some of North Korea's most formidable institutions. Indeed, Kim Jong Il purged Chang for gaining too much

of a personal following in the mid-2000s but brought him back into his inner circle after a few years of “reeducation.” Chang has significant responsibilities over the party and government but lacks control over the military and does not have a blood relationship with Kim Il Sung. If he came to replace Kim Jong Il, Chang would need to find a way to establish his legitimacy in North Korea’s long history of myth making. Both Kims significantly embellished and rewrote their resumes before and after coming to power, so this may not be as difficult of a task as some commentators have implied. Kim Il Sung’s legitimacy stems from his claims revolutionary heroism, so Chang would need to link his family to the revolution more than Kim Il Sung to tap into this source of internal legitimacy. Alternatively, he could establish his legitimacy over time by actually improving the rational functions of the North Korean system. If Chang decided to turn the state in another direction from his predecessor, he would need to do so through the North’s current institutions. He could modify the institutional structure over time, but Chang or any one of the Kims initially would essentially manage Kim Jong Il’s bureaucracy as Kim Jong Il initially sought to manage Kim Il Sung’s system.

North Korea’s political future is still a great unknown, inevitably shaped by future events. However, it will change from a knowable present. Understanding how the state functions currently helps guide policy decisions from neighboring states that could influence not only short-term policy choices but long-term ones as well. Kim Jong Il’s system has reacted with a certain level of predictability. As a reactionary state with a particular security focus on the United States, Washington has more power over the country than it often assesses, albeit of a different nature than often assumed. Sanctions and military moves can have some effect with opportunity costs, but the lessons of this study are that Washington and Seoul in particular have an important role to play in influencing North Korea’s internal debate. Empowering the cabinet’s agenda more effectively achieves American and South Korean policy goals than attempting to strong arm the country that is deeply dug in against military moves and its isolated economy is relatively immune from sanction efforts.

North Korea is a reactive system that is knowable and moldable. It is not a strange enigma that should be treated without reference to comparative theory or historical interactions. It is an extreme polity that produces a great deal of suffering for its own people and insecurity for an important region, but it also can be known and tamed. Understanding the bureaucratic positions of the main political institutions helps us peer inside North Korea’s red box, explain why this state responds to events the way it does, and proactively craft policies in Seoul and Washington that influence its decision-making.

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