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### **‘North Korea’ in a Post-Cold War United States**

by

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# **‘North Korea’ in a Post-Cold War United States**

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the ways in which ‘North Korea’ was securitized in a post-Cold War United States. It argues that U.S. perceptions of North Korea were a continuation of Cold War discourse of danger by other representations. North Korea was primarily understood as a security threat and such an understanding so dominated U.S. discourses as to close the possibility of alternative understandings. After showing that the North was represented as a missile threat, a nuclear threat, or a ‘time bomb,’ this paper argues that a Cold War institutional framework made such an identity representation possible. It concludes by analyzing the ways in which North Korea considered its own identity as an insecure state threatened by an ‘aggressive U.S.’ At the heart of the tension between the two countries stands the clash of identities, which resulted in a precarious “balance of terror” over the Korean peninsula.

## **About the Author**

Jae-Jung Suh is Assistant Professor of Government at Cornell University. His research interest includes international relations theory, international security, military alliance politics, the U.S.-Korea relationship, and Korean politics. Among his publications is *Rethinking Security in East Asia*, co-edited with Peter Katzenstein and Allen Carlson, (Stanford, 2004).

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## 1. Introduction

North Korea is a country every American loves to hate. At the same time it is a country that most Americans acknowledge they do not know. Herein lies the puzzle. How is it that Americans have come to hate a country that they do not know?

We sometimes learn of a foreign country in a direct personal encounter, however limited that direct, personal experience may be. But most of us at most of time get to know of a country via others' accounts: a news story, a travelogue, a CNN coverage, a history book, an anthropological study, descriptions offered by officials, etc. North Korea is no exception. Given that a vast majority of the Americans never visited North Korea, it is not an overstatement that Americans have learned of North Korea through accounts in the secondary sources they encounter. Then, is it possible that they have come to hate the country they do not know because they have come to understand the North through a multitude of American representations that portrays it as an object of concern?

This paper ponders the question. Building on the argument that American perceptions of North Korea were shaped within the Cold War framework, this paper argues that Americans love to hate the North because it has been made natural for them to see it as an object of hatred. Whatever the causes of the hatred may have been, whether or not the North is to be blamed for it, it has become a norm for the Americans to see the country as deviant, problematic and dangerous. Because North Korea is presented and understood only through a 'securitization' paradigm within which it is nothing but a security threat, and because such a paradigm enlarges the North's "evil" behavior and erases its less malignant one, Americans find it natural to see the North for what it is: a danger.<sup>1</sup>

If during the Cold War it was less problematic to hold this view because the North was, after all, part of the Communist bloc, the main source of danger, it became more difficult to hold on to this perception after the Soviet bloc disintegrated. No longer is it because the North is a Soviet or Chinese puppet that it is dangerous. Rather it is because the country is no longer a Soviet or Chinese puppet. To the post-Cold War, post-9/11 United States that identifies its security with the eradication of proliferation and terrorism, North Korea is dangerous in its own right. For it is a proliferator and terrorist.

This paper argues that U.S. perceptions of North Korea need to be situated within the broader discursive framework in which the United States defined its and others' identity in the post-Cold War world.<sup>2</sup> Central to this discursive framework was "securitization" whereby North Korea was identified primarily as a security threat and the United States as a security provider. The following analyzes the ways in which North Korea was discursively reconstituted as a threat to the post-Cold War United States. First examined is the process by which the North was represented as a "missile threat," followed by a discussion of the ways in which a "nuclear proliferation threat" became the dominant frame of understanding the North identity. Seen within such frames, North Korea was an unproblematic danger. The

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<sup>1</sup> Hazel Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea," *International Affairs* 76, no. 1: 111-132.

<sup>2</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

second section analyzes the ways in which the North understood itself and the United States. The aggressive North in U.S. eyes was regarded by the North Koreans as an insecure state that took various self-defensive measures against the threats by an aggressive U.S. The action-reaction cycle, which has gone on between the North and the United States, resulted in a precarious “balance of terror” over the Korean peninsula and the current impasse over the “North Korean nuclear crisis.”

## **2. North Korea According to the United States**

### ***North Korea as a “Missile Threat”***

Naming an object is a crucial first step in governance, as Confucius noted thousands of years ago. A name places the object in a particular location in a social order of things, imputing a status and a meaning to it, a consequential act that enables social actors to understand how to deal with it. The consequential nature of naming can be seen in the “politics of naming” that was vividly played out immediately after Pyongyang launched a rocket at the end of August 1998. U.S. intelligence immediately called it a “missile test;” this was then picked up and circulated as a “fact” by the media. Government and military officials then cited media reports to explain what Pyongyang had done and what they were about to do in response. These official statements lent more credence to the media reports of the “fact.” Added to this were assessments by foreign policy experts and North Korean observers as to possible motives behind this “missile test.” Some argued that it demonstrated yet once more Pyongyang’s dangerous aggressiveness while others suggested that it was designed to extract more concessions from the West. Security specialists also joined in with their analyses of the security implications this “missile launch” might have: Japan was now under immediate danger of a direct attack from North Korea; even the United States was seen as within the range of the North’s missiles. These specialists busily debated the best means to counter this new threat: whether to deploy Patriot batteries, to develop Theater Missile Defense, to employ preemptive measures, and so on.

Amidst all these reports, statements, analyses, and speculations, it had become accepted that the North had fired a missile. Not only did all these significations coalesce to produce what Stuart Hall called the “reality effect” but the “reality” also triggered real responses, which in turn had the effect of entrenching the “Hobbesian culture”--to use Wendt’s apt phrase--between the North and its neighbors.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese government immediately took punitive measures, such as cutting airline travel to North Korea and freezing KEDO funding. The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution condemning the North’s missile test fire. The U.S. Senate passed a resolution tying U.S. funding for heavy oil to the president’s certification that Pyongyang did not export missiles. The U.S. House cut off KEDO funding.

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<sup>3</sup> Hall, Stuart, “The Rediscovery of ‘Ideology’: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies,” *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. by Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran and Janet Woollacott (New York: Methuen, 1982). Wendt, Alexander, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Four days after it fired the “missile,” Pyongyang caught everybody off guard by announcing that it had launched a satellite. With unusual candor, it went so far as to provide a detailed description of the satellite’s orbit. On September 14, U.S. State and Defense spokespersons publicly acknowledged that it had indeed launched a satellite, but failed to put the satellite in orbit. By then, however, the symbolic struggle over this event was already over. It had become reality that North Korea fired a missile over Japan. And it had been taken for granted that the North’s missile test had undermined peace and stability in the region. By then, the missile was even given a name, *Taepodong*, by Western experts even if it was being called *Paektusan 1 ho* by the North Koreans.<sup>4</sup> The Japanese even coined a new hybrid term to describe the shock they felt when the “missile” flew over their heads: *Taepodong shoku*.

In this example, the politics of signification was played out after North Korea fired a projectile into space in 1998, yet the same politics were repeated a year later even *before* an action took place. Again, as before, U.S. intelligence picked up indications that the North was preparing to fire a “missile”; this was then dutifully reported by the media as a fact. Then policy makers and analysts acted on this fact, issuing statements, producing analyses, and implementing policy measures. South Korean, Japanese and U.S. officials expended a considerable amount of political capital to persuade the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) chairman to issue a statement criticizing North Korea’s “missile” test-firing. They also worked assiduously to convince the Chinese government to jump on the bandwagon. These diplomatic maneuverings had immediate political implications, of course, but it is notable that a considerable amount of work had to be done to make certain everyone on the bandwagon saw the same reality. At a deeper level, these statements and diplomatic gambits added another layer of reality to the “reality,” multiplying the “reality effect.”

In order to grasp the full significance of the establishment of this “reality,” we need to juxtapose it with other possible, less threatening realities. There is, of course, the North Korean official “reality” that the North Koreans had launched a satellite. This reality was consistent with the available data about the projectile’s trajectory, and was conceded by the U.S. government. To the extent that the North Koreans did have a scientific program to place a satellite in space, this reality was credible. Since there is little technological distinction between a satellite launch and a missile test-fire, however, this reality may not have made much difference in terms of its security implications. Whether or not the North had placed a satellite in space, it demonstrated to the world that it had the scientific know-how, technical prowess and political will to produce a projectile that it could use for a military purpose. What mattered the most to South Korea and the United States then was that they believed Pyongyang intended it to be a military device with which to undermine the peace and stability of the region. This concern was well reflected in all the official statements and analyses that repeatedly and pointedly called the North’s “missile test” a threat to peace. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright put it quite bluntly: “We stressed that another long-range missile launch, whether it is declared to be a missile test or

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. intelligence has called a missile by the name of its first launch site. Although *Taepodong* is reportedly an old name of what is now called *Musudanri* in *Hamgyôngbukto*, it is not clear why the old name, which incidentally sounds like “big cannon city,” was chosen.

an attempt to place a satellite in orbit, would be highly destabilizing and would have very serious consequences for our efforts to build better relations.”<sup>5</sup>

Even if it had been a missile, there would have been various possible meanings. But government officials produced a stream of significations to privilege one meaning over others. South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and President Clinton warned in their summit in July 1999 that if North Korea test-fired another missile it would “pose a serious obstacle to peace” on the Korean Peninsula. U.S. Secretary of Defense Cohen said after meeting Japan’s Defense Agency Director-General Hosei Norota, “another missile test by North Korea would create an element of instability and uncertainty in the region.” U.S. Secretary of State Albright, ROK Foreign Minister Hong Soon-Young, and Japanese Foreign Minister Komura Masahiko, who met trilaterally on July 27 in Singapore to coordinate their respective policies on the DPRK, agreed that this action “would adversely affect peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.” And they called on North Korea to “choose to build a positive relationship with its neighbors by foregoing such testing.”<sup>6</sup> This series of statements, produced by those who had powerful, privileged access to the public discourse, established the perimeters of a reality that was then taken for granted. North Korea’s “dangerous missile” became a fact.

However, other realities were possible--at least conceptually. First, the North’s missiles may have been a bargaining chip, as Leon Sigal suggests:

“If North Korea is determined to develop, deploy and export longer-range ballistic missiles, as some in Congress believe, it should have been testing and perfecting its No Dong, Taepo Dong-I and Taepo Dong-II missiles for several years. Yet the North did not conduct any tests from May 23, 1993 until August 31, 1998. Again, that is a strange way to develop new missiles. It suggests that North Korea is restraining itself somewhat in the hopes of conducting a missile deal with the United States. Pyongyang has been expressing interest in such a deal since 1992.”<sup>7</sup>

Alternatively, the missiles may have been a conventional deterrent. As I showed elsewhere, the North’s missiles were so inaccurate that a few hundred of them would have to be fired to destroy a meaningful military target such as a command center or an airport runway. Since North Korea had fewer than 100 missiles, it would end up wasting its limited arsenal. The North Koreans might be trying to terrorize the South and the United States to gain concessions, as suggested by Sigal and David Wright, but their intention might instead be to terrorize their opponents enough to deter an attack. Under the condition of its strategic inferiority, the North may be holding the missiles as a weapon of deterrence, much as U.S.

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<sup>5</sup> “US, Japan and South Korea use carrot and stick on North Korea,” Singapore, AFP, July 27, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Department of State, “Trilateral Meeting Joint Press Statement,” Washington, USIA Text, July 27, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Leon V. Sigal, *op. cit.*, 1999. David Wright also makes a similar argument. David C. Wright, “Will North Korea Negotiate Away Its Missiles?” Union of Concerned Scientists, <http://www.ucsusa.org/arms/index.html?NKmissiles.exec.html>, April 2, 1998.

and Russian missiles serve as deterrents.<sup>8</sup> *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported that American intelligence and military officials acknowledged as much. According to a briefing by CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and air force high officials in April 1997, the Rodong 1 missile is less suitable as a strategic offensive weapon than as a weapon of terror, because of its low accuracy and absence of a guidance system.<sup>9</sup>

It may turn out that neither of the two alternative realities is accurate. Nevertheless, they are consistent with known attributes of the “missile,” and explain Pyongyang’s motive at least as well as the dominant discourse does. All three could therefore have been given more or less equal footing in the public discourse, producing lively, healthy debate. The debate never transpired, however, because only one alternative was given access, a privileged one, to the discourse and was thus accepted as *the* reality. Entangled in the missile crises were both the “politics of naming” and the politics of security. More precisely, the two politics of naming and security were caught in a recursive cycle, the outcome of one producing the outcome of the other and vice versa: security concerns about the North’s projectile produced the reality of the North’s “missile threat,” which then produced such security measures as missile defense and the sale of missile-site-buster missiles, which then generated Pyongyang’s hostile reaction, which then reinforced the “dangerous North” reality, *ad infinitum*.

In order to maintain the “reality” of North Korea’s projectile as “missile,” as “threat to peace,” the production of representation needs highly disciplined, a point well illustrated by the events surrounding U.S. Ambassador Bosworth’s remarks in July 1999. In response to reporters’ questions on whether the DPRK had a sovereign right to test-launch another missile, Ambassador Bosworth was quoted as saying, “North Korea is a sovereign state and retains a right to test its missiles. But the North should give up its (missile) sovereignty to peacefully coexist with the world community.”<sup>10</sup> His comment came in the context of his appeal to Pyongyang to stop another missile test: “Firing a missile would have bad effects on neighboring countries, which are seriously concerned about North Korea’s possible test. Such a test would worsen security environments in the region.”

Despite his efforts at preventing a missile launch, which were consistent with Washington’s and Seoul’s official positions, Ambassador Bosworth came under criticism merely because of his reference to the North’s “sovereign right” to conduct missile tests.<sup>11</sup> *The Korea Herald* reported on the following day that ROK diplomatic analysts had said that Bosworth’s comment was made at the wrong time and in the wrong place--as the U.S. and the ROK were desperately trying to deter the DPRK from engaging in another missile test. A

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<sup>8</sup> For a fuller treatment of this line of reasoning, see Sô, Chaejông, "Pukmisailûi palchônnyôksawa [History of North's Missile Development]," *Wolgan Mal* August, 1999; and "Pukhan misailkwa migukûi misailpangô kyehoek [North Korean Missiles and U.S. Missile Defense Plan]," in *Han'gukûi sônt'aek [Korea's Choice: Bush's MD Plan and Its Targets]*, edited by Chông Uksik (Seoul, Korea: Samin, 2001), pp. 155-179.

<sup>9</sup> *Jane's Defence* May 28, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Jun Kwan-woo, "U.S. Envoy Urges N.K. To Give up 'Sovereign Right' To Test Missiles," *The Korea Herald*, Seoul, July 24, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Jun Kwan-woo, "U.S. Envoy Under Fire For Remarks on 'Sovereign' N.K.'s Missile Rights," *The Korea Herald*, Seoul, July 27, 1999.

diplomatic analyst at a private research institute said “Bosworth’s remarks could be misunderstood by the North” because, “whether intended or not by the ambassador, they are *identical* to the Pyongyang regime’s insistence” [emphasis added]. Another diplomatic observer stated, “The U.S. envoy was too naive, acting like an academician. He, who should represent the U.S. government’s official stance here, should have avoided making such a *straightforward* comment” [emphasis added]. The US embassy immediately denied the report, saying that Bosworth’s remarks were misinterpreted. But asked if the ambassador’s comment on the DPRK’s missile-test sovereignty represented the U.S. government’s official position, the U.S. Embassy in Seoul resorted to obfuscation for fear that a direct answer would appear to confirm Pyongyang’s claims. According to a Korea Herald report, Gerald McLouchlin, U.S. Embassy spokesman, stated, “It is not about sovereignty, but about whether or not such a (missile) test would be wise.” McLouchlin said that the ambassador was trying to urge the DPRK not to test.

No one has suggested that Bosworth’s comment was factually wrong or misinformed, as it would be impossible to refute the fact that there are no international practices, laws or norms that deny a state the right to test-fire a rocket/missile.<sup>12</sup> Indeed North Korea has the sovereign right to test a missile, whether or not this statement is identical to Pyongyang’s assertions. This “reality” of international affairs, however, was not consistent with or convenient to another “reality” of a dangerous, renegade North Korea. If the former were recognized as the reality, the latter could not be sustained, at least in this issue area, jeopardizing Washington’s and Seoul’s joint efforts to prevent the North’s missile test. In order for the allies to succeed in this task, they had to establish the “fact” that it is a missile that Pyongyang is firing into the sky and that this missile firing represents a heretic act, posing a threat to the region. Bosworth’s remarks could not be tolerated in the prevailing discourse, and had to be expunged.

Seen in this perspective, the crisis triggered by Ambassador Bosworth’s remarks was as much about identity preservation as about missile non-proliferation. Entangled in this little fiasco were both the “politics of signification” and the politics of security. The allies’ understanding of the North’s identity combined with the North’s projectile to constitute the social reality of the North’s “missile threat,” which then prompted the allies to react with such defensive measures as missile defense and missile-site busters. The allies’ defensive steps, seen from within the North’s understanding of the United States’s identity, constituted “offensive maneuvers,” which then triggered Pyongyang’s defensive moves. In an escalating cycle of insecurity in which security measures and identity politics fed into each other, one side’s defense fed into its antagonistic identity, which compelled the other to take its own defense measures, which reinforced its threatening identity, and so on.

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<sup>12</sup> The Missile Technology Control Regime bans exports of missiles with a range of 300km or higher, but does not prohibit test-firing. Peter Hayes argues that North Korea is "in contravention of an emerging norm" of no right of innocent missile passage, but he acknowledges that "there is no controlling legal authority or legal framework within which to make such a ruling." He also concedes that the U.S. as well as other missile states have violated this "emerging norm." Peter Hayes, "DPRK Missile Test: Violation of Japanese Airspace," Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report, September 3, 1998 (<http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9809/SEP03.html#contents>).



### *North Korea as a “Nuclear Threat”*<sup>13</sup>

In order to illustrate my argument about social reality of threat, it is useful to begin with an observation of a curious disjuncture between “stubborn realities” and social realities. On the one hand, there are states that have not only demonstrated their nuclear weapons in tests but also proliferated their materials and blueprints. Some of them are politically and religiously as well as geographically close to terrorists, and even harbored, and still do, them. One such country, Pakistan, has in recent years provided weapons and monetary assistance to the Taliban that had been punished by the U.S.-led coalition forces for having harbored Al Qaeda. It has expressed little interest in dismantling its nuclear weapons programs in exchange for monetary and political compensations. On the other hand, there is a North Korea that claims to possess nuclear weapons but has not tested any. It may or may not be able to field ICBMs that could hit the United States. It is far and away from typical terrorist hotspots, and its relationship with terrorist groups is limited and likely a thing of the past. Above all it has expressed its willingness to give up its nuclear weapons programs in exchange for none other than an improved, normalized relationship with Washington. Yet it is the latter that was being presented as the danger.

The point is not that North Korea poses no danger but that it is a danger to the extent that it is socially understood to be so and Pakistan is not a threat to the extent that it is socially accepted so. The disjuncture between the material and the social serves as an analytical reminder that the difference in threat perception may not be explained away solely in terms of the differences in the material capabilities that the two countries possess. An adequate explanation would have to combine an assessment of the material factors with an analysis of the social understandings that American actors have about the North’s roles, desires and nature. The social understandings are no vacuous fiction but rather result from socio-historical processes through which Americans come to share a particular image of the North on the basis of what they make of representations of the North’s deeds and words. It is to such social understandings that I turn in order to explain the disjuncture between the material and the social.

The same kind of recursive cycle between the security politics and identity politics that was observed in the missile crisis was repeated in how the United States and North Korea were caught in a nuclear crisis. If the “missile” politics showed a discursive tug of war between Washington’s and Seoul’s charges and Pyongyang’s denials, however, the nuclear crisis was the product of both parties’ charges and admissions that bound them in a tightening security dilemma. In launching its nuclear program, Pyongyang may have believed that it took what it deemed an evidently defensive measure because it was facing who it believed was an undoubtedly aggressive revisionist opponent in the Bush administration. But its action was in turn seen as hostile by the United States which held the mirror image of the identities: the United States and South Korea as status quo states and North Korea as revisionist. In the nuclear politics, furthermore, one side sought to deter the other by convincing the other of its willingness, as well as capacity, to inflict unacceptably costly damage. This type of rhetorical tactic and behavior only ended up adding to the view that it was truly aggressive and revisionist. Both sides’ words and actions reinforced the

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<sup>13</sup> For a fuller treatment, see Jae-Jung Suh, *op. cit.*

Hobbesian culture of enmity, within which the United States and the North escalated the vicious cycle of insecurity.

There is another important way the nuclear crisis was different from the missile politics. Although the nuclear politics was a higher stakes game, its short history—from the early 1990s—contained episodes not only of confrontation but also of negotiation. These episodes suggest not only that it may be possible for the United States and the North to escape from the insecurity dilemma, but also that the “Hobbesian culture” between them can complicate and even derail their attempts to escape it.<sup>14</sup> In 1991, Bush senior’s decision to withdraw tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea was reciprocated by Kim Il-Song’s signing of the North-South Denuclearization Declaration and the Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This *quid pro quo* began to deescalate the tension and unravel the Hobbesian culture, ultimately contributing to the summit meeting between Seoul and Pyongyang and the exchange of highest level officials between Pyongyang and Washington in 2000. Despite some ups and downs caused by suspicions about the other, the process seemed to be leading to a loosening of the insecurity dilemma by the end of 2000.

The end of the global Cold War enmity probably contributed to the loosening of the local enmity on the Korean Peninsula, which was further promoted by the regional rapprochement early in the 1990s when China and Russia became more favorably disposed toward South Korea and Japan. The single most important event that triggered the whole train of events, however, was a change in American behavior: namely, the U.S. withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons from Korea. Also critical to the process was that Pyongyang did not take advantage of the American action by launching a surprise attack on the South, as in a realist’s “worst case scenario,” but reciprocated with its own disarming moves. Washington’s *quid* was returned by Pyongyang’s *quo*, initiating a virtuous cycle of security enhancement that helped the United States and the North to begin to break the vicious cycle of insecurity. Quickly taking advantage of the opening, the two Koreas held a series of exchanges – reunions of separated families, cultural performances, and sports events – propelling the virtuous cycle ultimately to the summit in 2000. In a series of negotiations with Pyongyang, Washington too came close to resolving many issues of concern. Clinton’s visit to Pyongyang at the end of 2000 was supposed to put an end to the Hobbesian culture of enmity and open a new chapter in the history of the two countries.

Subsequent events are history. The virtuous cycle was halted in 2001 when President George W. Bush ordered a review of his predecessor’s engagement policy. In his 2002 state of the union address, President Bush restored the North’s identity as an “evil” that must be removed, thereby effectively ending the virtuous cycle. Bush’s name-calling was angrily returned by Pyongyang, which labeled the United States the “empire of the devil.” It is important for my purpose to recognize that no obvious changes in material power condition triggered such vitriolic exchanges. It was a change in the actors’ social understanding that broke the virtuous cycle. The new Bush administration brought to American decision making its Manichean understanding of the world where the North, together with Iraq and Iran,

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<sup>14</sup> On social production of “Hobbesian culture,” see Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

constituted the axis of evil that spreads the danger of terrorists, missiles, and nuclear weapons. Not only did the verbal exchanges reflect the new understanding of the actors' identities but they also provided the ideational context within which Washington and Pyongyang took actions that restored the vicious cycle. Because the former could not trust the "intransigent North" to honor the Geneva Framework Agreement, it halted the shipment of heavy oil; because the latter feared an "aggressive Washington," it restarted its nuclear programs. Within the restored Hobbesian culture, the other was always a suspect that compelled one to take defensive measures. Within the enmity, such defensive steps were perceived as a renegeing, an aggression, or a preparation for an attack. Thus the vicious cycle of insecurity was restored with vengeance.

The social structure of enmity serves as a perceptual prism that privileges an interpretation of facts and uncertainties about the North's nuclear program as the proliferation dangers. It discounts the possibility that the North, as well as the United States, is caught in a security dilemma; it amplifies the possibility that the North lies, cheats, and deceives. It skews the discursive space in such a way as to dismiss as a deception Pyongyang's offer to negotiate while accepting its rhetoric of war as true. Its denial of a weapons program is a lie; its admission a truth. The enmity constitutes the ideational context within which realists have it both ways. What is striking about the nuclear crisis is the ease with which many of the uncertainties and facts about the North's nuclear program have been assumed away or disregarded. Alternative interpretations have been quickly brushed aside as the threat of the "North's nuclear weapons" has established itself as the reality.

In order to understand the significance of the North Korean nuclear crisis for my argument it is imperative to take a step back from commonly accepted assumptions and leave open the possibility that known facts could be interpreted differently if alternative assumptions were brought to bear upon them. Instructive in this regard is the U.S. intelligence failure about Iraqi WMD programs, as a prescient article notes:

Mr. Powell's case was largely based on limited, fragmentary and mostly circumstantial evidence, with conclusions drawn on the basis of the *little challenged assumption* that Saddam Hussein would never dismantle old illicit weapons and would pursue new ones to the fullest extent possible.... too little credence [was] given to the possibility that satellite photographs and intercepted communications might have benign interpretations. [Emphasis added]<sup>15</sup>

The next necessary step is to acknowledge that although there were facts that lent themselves to the interpretation that Pyongyang had been in the process of manufacturing a nuclear bomb and although there were many uncertainties about the North's nuclear program that warrant security concerns by the United States, these uncertainties and facts could be interpreted in a number of different ways. One prominent interpretation held that Pyongyang had run its nuclear programs for the dual purpose of nuclear energy and weapons but that it

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Jehl and David E. Sanger, "Powell's Case, a Year Later: Gaps in Picture of Iraq Arms," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2004. [<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/01/international/middleeast/01WEAP.html>]

dropped its weapons program in 1991.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, as Leon Sigal suggests, the uncertainties and facts can be interpreted as representing Pyongyang's desire to negotiate with Washington for political and economic normalization.<sup>17</sup> What is striking about the nuclear crisis is the ease with which many of the uncertainties and facts about the North's nuclear program were assumed away or disregarded. Alternative interpretations were quickly brushed aside as the threat of the "North's nuclear weapons" established itself as the reality.

Even if Pyongyang might have been successful in developing nuclear weapons, it is not *a priori* obvious that it poses a national security threat to the United States. After all, the British and French possess nuclear weapons and yet do not represent a threat to the U.S. because they are seen in a different social context. Unlike London and Paris, furthermore, Pyongyang is likely years away from acquiring a missile that can deliver a nuclear warhead to the United States. Add to it the fact that Pyongyang has expressed its explicit desire to improve and normalize its relationship with Washington, as I showed in the beginning of this paper.<sup>18</sup> Kim Jong-Il sought for a summit meeting with Clinton and proposed to address all the concerns that Washington had about its weapons of mass destruction. Yet inconvenient facts that do not support the "proliferating North Korea" image tend to be unrecognized, ignored, or dismissed. What is continuously proliferating is the image of the "dangerous North," the end of the Cold War notwithstanding.

There have been many analyses of North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Virtually everyone started their analyses with the assumption that Pyongyang desired nuclear weapons, and virtually no one raised a question about Pyongyang's intention or interests. Even those who dealt with the issues rarely subjected their conclusions to rigorous strategic analysis. They merely stated that Pyongyang wanted nuclear weapons because of its strategic inferiority, made increasingly worse by its deteriorating economy. Unquestioned is whether nuclear weapons, if North Korea should acquire them, would provide the kind of security or offensive capability that the North was portrayed as seeking.<sup>19</sup>

Andrew Mack and Yi Yông-Hûi, the two intellectuals perhaps most critical of U.S. military postures in the Pacific, had the same blind spot when they made an otherwise sensible suggestion that any solution to the nuclear crisis had to deal with the North's

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<sup>16</sup> Both Selig Harrison and Lee Yông-Hûi suggest that the "doves" in the North's regime won the debate over the question of developing a fission bomb in December (November, according to Lee) 1991 when the Korean Workers Party Central Committee decided not to pursue a nuclear weapons program. Selig Harrison, "The United States and North Korea: The Nuclear Issue and Beyond," p. 11, an unpublished paper prepared for the conference "Korea in Transition: New Challenges and U.S. Policy," sponsored by the University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT and the Professors' World Peace Academy, April 16, 1994; and I Yông-Hûi, "Nambuk hwahaewa kunch'ukûi sinsidaerûl yôlja [Let's Open the New Era of South-North Reconciliation and Arms Reduction]," *Wolgan Mal* (Seoul), October 1993, pp. 58-63.

<sup>17</sup> Sigal, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> For these two points and a critique of the conventional wisdom, see Jae-Jung Suh, "North Korean 'Nuclear Threat' and Cold War Hangover: Northern Exposure or Explosion?" *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 28:1 (1996), pp. 13-26; and Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea, 1988-1995* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Michael Ertman, "North Korean Arms Capabilities and Implications: Nuclear, Chemical, and Ballistic Missiles," *Korea and World Affairs* 17:4 (Winter 1993), pp. 605-626.

security concerns. In explaining Pyongyang's interests in nuclear weapons, Mack offered logic that was strikingly similar to Yi's: Pyongyang wanted nuclear weapons as a deterrent because of its strategic inferiority. Their explanation, however, left unexamined the link between hardware and strategy. A nuclear deterrent is one of many ways of dealing with strategic inferiority, and a perceived military weakness does not necessarily lead one to favor the nuclear option.<sup>20</sup>

Sigal also comments:

If, as most people in Washington believed, North Korea had been determined to acquire nuclear arms in the early 1990s, it could have shut down its nuclear reactor and quickly reprocessed the spent fuel to extract plutonium, the explosive ingredient in bombs. But it did not reprocess any spent fuel. Neither did it shut down its reactor until May 1994, long after it was expected to do so. Even then, it allowed international inspectors to verify the procedure. That was a strange way to acquire nuclear arms. It suggests that, starting in 1991, North Korea was restraining itself somewhat in the hopes of concluding a nuclear deal with the United States.<sup>21</sup>

The power of the discourse of the North's "nuclear danger" re-asserted itself in the late 1990s when new suspicions began to surface. Newsweek reported on September 21, 1998 that U.S. intelligence had detected North Korean facilities where Pyongyang had tested "high-explosive lenses" used in nuclear devices. According to the report, this might be further evidence that North Korea was expanding its nuclear weapons program. In August, the New York Times reported that U.S. intelligence had spotted a secret underground complex that they believed Pyongyang was building to revive its nuclear weapons program. In May 1999 after a long tug of war with Pyongyang, Washington sent a team of experts to Kumchangri, the suspected nuclear complex, only to find an empty tunnel and no sign of nuclear activity. However, the damage had already been done: the concept of North Korea as a nuclear outlaw had been reinforced once more.

### ***North Korea as a "Time Bomb"***

In the 1990s, North Korea experienced a series of natural calamities as well as man-made disasters, which weakened its economic, political and military might significantly.<sup>22</sup> In the zero-sum competition such as the one between North Korea and the United States, the North's loss of power should have been welcomed because its loss was the U.S.'s gain. Washington should have rejoiced for its victory was near. That, however, was not to be the case.

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<sup>20</sup> I Yông-Hûi, *op. cit.*, 1993; Andrew Mack, "The Nuclear Crisis on the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Survey*, 33:4 (April 1993), pp. 339-359; and "A Nuclear North Korea: The Choices Are Narrowing," *World Policy Journal* 11 (Summer 1994), pp. 27-35.

<sup>21</sup> Leon V. Sigal, "How to End North Korea's Missile Program," Global Beat Syndicate, <http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat/syndicate/Sigal060299.html>, June 2, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> See Chong-Ae Yu's chapter in this volume for details.

The discourse of danger worked an interesting twist on the situation, and managed to produce a new post-Cold War danger: North Korea as a “time bomb,” a bomb with a short fuse that would implode or explode with serious negative repercussions for the security of surrounding countries. This discourse, particularly prevalent in the mid-1990s when many believed the North’s collapse was imminent, suggested two possible futures: that the collapse would inevitably cause chaos by unleashing a massive stream of refugees across the DMZ; or that Pyongyang would launch a suicidal attack immediately before the collapse. Many analysts discussed when the Northern regime would disintegrate and what security measures would best protect the allies’ interests. It was taken for granted that the North would collapse and that its demise would be a security threat one way or another.

This new danger of North Korea as a “time bomb” began to surface in 1992, at a time when North Korea was showing signs of a fuel shortage and other economic difficulties that would hamper its military operations. General Robert RisCassi, Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Forces in Korea, was one of the first to raise this specter. He recognized that the North’s pilot training sorties and large-scale exercises were significantly limited by shortages of fuel and spare parts or equipment and that the North Korean military was emphasizing training at the regimental level and lower, rather than at the corps and division level. But he emphasized that “North Korea could wage a ‘short violent war’ against South Korea,” adding that the military had not yet tapped its strategic fuel reserves.<sup>23</sup> Citing a fact well known throughout the 1980s, as if it were a new development, he estimated that 65 percent of the equipment needed by North Korean active duty forces had been moved within 100 km of the 38th parallel. The military has “forward deployed a capability that is significant,” including “enormous amounts of artillery.” In the event of conflict, Seoul could be quickly attacked, and allied command centers hit by waves of North Korean Special Forces. All in all, despite some problems, North Korea represented a potent danger, according to him.

As the North’s economic problems worsened during the 1990s, General RisCassi’s view was elaborated upon: North Korea still was a potential bomb but now its future was unpredictable--it might be a time bomb with a short fuse. Toby T. Gati, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, represented the threat as follows:

There remains a continuing threat to US and South Korean forces from the North Korean military. But domestic economic pressures are narrowing the Pyongyang regime’s room for maneuver. We remain uncertain about many aspects of the domestic situation in the North, but it is clear that the economy is in even more serious trouble than last year, including a chronic food shortage. Kim Jong II appears to be both actively and effectively in charge, even though he has not formally succeeded to his father’s official positions, but new and growing internal pressures could change the decision-making calculus that has long prevented conflict.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Starr, "Fuel Shortages Limit N Korea," *Jane's Defense Weekly* October 24, 1992, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Statement By Before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Hearing on Current and Projected National Security Threats to the Unites States, February 5, 1997.

North Korea's weakened economy and political instability led many in the U.S. to anticipate its disintegration and to worry about the potential destabilization such an event could cause throughout the Asia/Pacific region.<sup>25</sup> Gen. Garry Luck, commander of the USFK, was quoted in the report, "We worry that in a very short period, this country will either collapse, or take aggressive actions against the South in a desperate attempt to divert attention from its internal situation." Lt. General Patrick Hughes, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), made the point bluntly: the potential for war on the Korean peninsula was the agency's "primary near-term concern." He went on to say that "change is on the horizon and it's likely to be a difficult change." "We are threatened right now by a North Korea which is fragile and I think volatile and trying to determine what direction it will go in and whether or not it will be a violent evolution," he said.

CIA Acting Director George Tenet put North Korea at the top of a list of nations that could threaten peace in regions around the world because the "continued deterioration of the North Korean economy is weakening the stability of the regime." The dangers facing Pyongyang included the possibility that food shortages now affecting the general populace could spread to front-line military units, that Pyongyang's security services could become reluctant to crack down on dissent, and that the North's elite could desert its leader Kim Jong-Il. These dangers should worry the North's leadership, but should be welcomed by the power that saw Pyongyang as the evil that must go.

Even the possibility of Pyongyang's implosion even when the U.S. intelligences "have no evidence that any of these conditions are present at this time," however, was a source of concern for Washington. As Tenet acknowledged, "we remain concerned about how the regime's evolution will play out."<sup>26</sup> Within a level mindset, the possibility that the main adversary might collapse under its own weight would be welcomed as a scenario of an easy victory without shooting a shot; but within Washington's mindset, even such a scenario represented a worrisome development, a threat. Kurt Campbell, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, reproduced the twin images of the North as conventional danger and as "time bomb" in a congressional hearing:

The need for a combined U.S.-ROK military command and force structure to protect our common values is more compelling than ever. Today the United States and South Korea confront twin security challenges on the Korean Peninsula -- deterrence of armed conflict and preparation for crises short of war....

[The North's conventional forces] threaten the security of the Republic of Korea. Two-thirds of its 1.1 million military personnel are positioned within 100 kilometers of the Demilitarized Zone, with a substantial artillery force capable of striking Seoul with little advance notice. In addition, North Korea possesses missile and other weapons programs that heighten concern over its intentions....At the

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<sup>25</sup> Barbara Starr, "North Korea's Collapse Is Threat to Stability," *Jane's Defense Weekly* June 12, 1996, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Statement by Acting Director of Central Intelligence, George J. Tenet before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Hearing on Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States, February 5, 1997; Jim Adams, "U.S. Agencies See India-Pakistan, Korea Dangers," Reuters World Service, Washington, February 5, 1997.

same time, deteriorating economic conditions within North Korea and the recent defection of a senior DPRK official raise questions about future developments in the North. Therefore, it is only prudent for the U.S. and ROK to consult closely and be prepared for a range of contingencies that may occur on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>27</sup>

### *North Korea as the “Other”*

At the beginning of the twenty-first century when North Korea’s conventional military threat was increasingly coming into question, the new social realities of “the missile threat,” “the nuclear threat,” and “the time bomb” added another layer to the master discourse, “the dangerous North.” Because that master discourse had existed ever since Korea’s division in 1945, it made it all the easier to return to the familiar reality. The relative ease of restoring the vicious cycle and the relative difficulty of maintaining the virtuous cycle provide evidence that the discursive playing field was skewed in favor of the North’s dangerous identity. If the United States’s perception of the North as dangerous had been heavily influenced by the global Cold War enmity, since the 1990s the reality of “the dangerous North” was reproduced through the articulation of “the missile threat,” “the nuclear threat,” and “the time bomb.” Security practices combined with a constant articulation of danger to constitute the social reality of the danger and national security, in terms of which the allies made sense of the North and the world.

This is not to suggest that North Korea’s nuclear or missile threats were nothing but lies fabricated by intelligence officers. My argument is not that their perception of threat had no material basis or that their interpretation of material facts was so out of touch it bordered on fantasy. It is undeniable that there were “stubborn realities.” For example, it is a well-established fact that North Korea had a nuclear reactor and a reprocessing facility; it is also a fact that it fired a projectile into the space in 1998. As the North had been engaged in aggression, guerrilla infiltrations, and other brutal acts, Pyongyang’s past behavior warranted caution and suspicion. At the same time, however, there were other possible interpretations that could explain the same “stubborn realities” as well as the conventional wisdom. The alternative interpretations had the advantage of marshaling novel facts that did not fit the conventional discourse and that supported the alternatives. If the public space had been a “level playing field,” therefore, one would expect at least a debate between different discourses. But one observed none. The fact that there were no meaningful public debates between different views shows that the playing field was not level. Policy debates, to the extent they existed, were carried out only within the discursive space demarcated by the official U.S.; and policies that were not predicated on the same understanding of North Korean identity were excluded from the debates themselves. It is this skewed nature of the discursive playing field--the hegemonic status of North Korea’s identity as “a danger”--that I am pointing out.

It is worth emphasizing that the North’s identity as the other, as the threat, is not a pure fiction, created out of nothing. As Gramsci noted, in order for a discourse to be

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<sup>27</sup> Kurt Campbell, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Testimony before the House International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Hearing on US Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula, February 26, 1997.



accepted as common-sensically valid, it must have some correspondence to “stubborn realities” that it purports to describe. The North Koreans provide “stubborn realities,” – they do and say certain things – which are then given meanings and made sense of within discourses. Pyongyang ran nuclear reactors and reprocessing facilities, withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, kicked out IAEA inspectors, and declared its possession of nuclear weapons. My point is that reprehensible as these acts may be, they have been committed in the context of interaction between Pyongyang and Washington where one’s action triggered the other’s reaction and thus where both sides shared the responsibility for the ensuing outcome. And it is due to the nature of the identity framework that the North was seen as the sole violator.<sup>28</sup>

In U.S. security discourse, the identity of North Korea was an unquestioned, accepted fact of life that quietly permeated them all without displaying its overbearing presence. This state of affairs provided the condition of possibility for the national security managers to continue the old policy of enmity and to institute new policies of confrontation such as preemptive strike doctrine adopted by the Bush administration.

### **3. Institutional Framework of Identity Preservation**

The preceding sections should not be misunderstood as an argument that the United States produces a lie that bears no resemblance to the reality. My argument is that the representations that the United States generates are grounded on what the North has done and said and that the representations are part and parcel of the system of meanings within which the allied people understand their security environment. The representations *in toto* function much like an epistemological prism that orient the people to understand a particular set of the North’s past behavior and words as a basis for its dangerous identity and that narrows the margin of uncertainty about the North’s future behavior and intention in a way that inhibits the development of alternative possibilities for the North’s identity. There is no denying that the North itself provides the “raw material” for such representations by engaging in aggression, guerilla incursions, and other acts that can be seen dangerous and threatening.

Intersubjective identity, constituted by social practices and backed up by material reality, gains a life supporting system if it is institutionalized.<sup>29</sup> A socially produced and accepted identity does not necessarily find its place in political institutions but if it does, it enjoys the advantages that a mere social phenomenon is inscribed in institutions that further legitimize the social identity, increase the level of the clarity and specificity of the identity, and empowers its reproductivity. The increase in legitimacy, clarity, and power helps lengthen the life expectancy of the social identity beyond what it could achieve without the

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<sup>28</sup> Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1998).

<sup>29</sup> In this section, I use the term “institutionalization” in a narrow sense to refer to the process by which a practice or a norm takes a political institutional form such as a resolution, a law, a government agency, etc. This narrow use of the term must be distinguished from a broader definition that sociological institutionalists use that includes routinized pattern of behavior that is unproblematically accepted within a society. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989), John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977).

institutional embodiment. Not only does United States discursively constitute identity but it also helps spawn institutions that reinforce the identity.

The Department of Defense, together with its many sub-units such as the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), is one of the key institutional apparatuses that produce a stream of representations that stabilize the identity of the enemy and allies. If it was chiefly responsible at one time for the conventional wisdom regarding the North's conventional superiority, it has in the 1990s shifted its representational tactics to the production of "nuclear threat," "missile threat," and "time bomb," as I demonstrate in the previous sections. Suffice it to note here that their practices of identity constitution are made possible in the first place by the institutional arrangement that creates these bodies tasked to worry about where dangers may lie and empowered to tell the public who to worry about. Discourse of danger is a likely product of the state's security apparatuses, which lays a framework of meaning within which people make sense of the identity of the states in the world.

Of a number of ways in which intersubjective identity becomes institutionalized, resolutions and treaties are a means of inscription that gives the identity an officially sanctioned institutional identity. Immediately following the Korean War, for example, the UN Security Council resolutions (S/1501 and S/1511) identified North Korea as the "aggressor" in 1950, an identification reinforced by the UN General Assembly resolution 376 passed soon afterwards, putting to rest uncertainty about who initiated the attack. Social identity, if so embodied in political institutions, gains a staying power that intersubjectivity alone could not provide for, which can enable it to outlast the originating circumstances or changes in the object of the identity. The North's aggressor identity remains institutionalized because these resolutions remain effective to date despite the fact that the United Nations four decades later accepted North Korea as a member that pledged to honor the UN Charter, including the prohibition of the use of force. Furthermore, the General Assembly resolution 376, still in force, tasks the UN Command to the objectives of the unification and establishment of a democratic government in Korea, providing a legal ground on which the UN forces may march north and topple the Northern regime! The United Nations so institutionalized the North identity as the aggressor that it is now confronted with the contradiction that it has a member that it is tasked to destroy.<sup>30</sup>

If international treaties and resolutions serve to stabilize the North's identity, the absence of diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea functions as a primary institutional restraint on the possibility to change its identity. The absence deprives policy makers of the regularized, official channels of communication, leaving only the North's UN Representative Office in New York for a point of official communication. The absence also deprives officials of personal contacts. Washington further consolidated this excommunication by restricting the travel of North Korea's UN representatives to the headquarter district, i.e., a 25-mile radius from Columbus Circle, as per the Foreign Missions Act and the UN Headquarters Agreement. The excommunication and the absence of official contact serve to erect institutional barriers to identity transformation.

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<sup>30</sup> Li, Sang-Chôl, "Hanbando chôngjônch'ejewa UNC wisang [Korean Peninsula Armistice System and UNC's Status]," *Hanbando kunbit'ongje [Korean Peninsula Arms Control]* 34, no. (2003), 275-321.

Sanctions, a means of economically isolating a country, represent another institution that embodies, reinforces, and extends social identity. The total embargo invoked against North Korea three days after the outbreak of the Korean War to punish it for aggression also institutionalizes the North's identity as the aggressor, and as the embargo remains active almost a half century later, so does its identity. The foreign assets control regulations, the Trading with the Enemy Act, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, the Trade Agreement Extension Act, and Commerce Department's designation of the North in the most restrictive export control country group, Group Z, are all political tools of sanction.<sup>31</sup> Not only do these punitive measures serve an administrative purpose of severing trade and contact with North Korea but at the same time, they also embody an institutional arrangement that constantly reminds everybody of a particular identity of the North, that of a transgressor. As such, they are more than laws and regulations; they are part and parcel of the American state's practices that institutionalize North Korea's identity. These are more powerful institutional tool of identity preservation than academic's and media's representational practices because state practices are backed by the state's agencies that have the resources and power to reinforce the institutionalized identity of the North. Representational practices embedded in state institutions are discourses with purse and teeth.

The identity as the dangerous North is further strengthened by North Korea's designation as a terrorist country. The institutional matrix of the terrorist identity is undergirded by State Department's annual report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, as well as several Congressional resolutions including the Senate Congressional Resolution 99 and the House Congressional Resolution that condemned the "bombing by North Korean agents of Korean Air Lines Flight 858."<sup>32</sup> North Korea is also on the list of countries supporting international terrorism, which reinforces its terrorist identity. Such an identification is accompanied by punitive measures such as loan denial or trade restriction, which may serve a political purpose but exacerbates social enmity with the target country.<sup>33</sup> Because the President is required by institutional arrangement to take an action to remove a country from the terrorist list, his inaction perpetuates the identity of the terrorist North.<sup>34</sup> Once a terrorist identity is institutionalized, it is automatically renewed every year in the absence of an active intervention to terminate it.

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<sup>31</sup> Davis, Zachary S., et. al., *Korea: Procedural and Jurisdictional Questions Regarding Possible Normalization of Relations with North Korea* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Department of State, annual) <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/> [accessed on November 11, 2003]. "North Korea on the Terrorism List." Congressional Research Service memorandum, March 5, 2004. <http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKBriefingBook/terrorism/CRS-NKTerrorList.pdf> [accessed on March 26, 2004].

<sup>33</sup> For example, U.S. Executive Directors of international financial institutions are directed to vote against any loan or other program for a terrorist country. Also the Export Administration Act of 1979, as amended by the Anti-Terrorism and Arms Export Amendments Act of 1989, prohibits transactions with North Korea by the U.S. government or any American, transactions that include direct or indirect export of any Munitions Control List items as well as re-exports by non-U.S. persons. Trade Beneficiary Developing country status and Export-Import Bank guarantees are denied.

<sup>34</sup> There are two ways a country may be removed from the terrorist list: the President certifies that there has been "a fundamental change" in the leadership or policies of the government in question; or the President submits to Congress a determination that the government has not supported international terrorism during the preceding six-month period and has provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future.

The dangerous North identity is further fortified with North Korea's identification as a proliferation threat. Suffice to note here that the making was embedded in institutional arrangements and administrative findings. The Arms Export Control Act and the Export Administration Act authorize the President to impose sanctions for a two year-period if a foreign person knowingly exports, transfers or otherwise engages in trade "of items that contribute to missile proliferation." The U.S. imposed such sanctions on North Korea in 1992 when the North Korean government was found to have engaged in missile technology proliferation activities with Iran and Syria. The findings triggered the imposition of sanctions denying export licenses for items on the Munitions List and prohibiting all U.S. Government contracts as well as the importation of any products made by North Korean entities. Not only do these institutional measures identify the North as a proliferation threat but they also empower state agents to punish it, thereby bolstering the identity.

Some legislations betray a curious mixture of pan'gong [anti-communism] and panbuk [anti-North] as they identify the North as communist and penalize it for being so. Section 620(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act prohibits aid to any country controlled by the international communist movement, and was applied to North Korea in September 1961. In August of the following year, Section 620(f) was added, prohibiting assistance to communist countries and identifying them by name, including North Korea.<sup>35</sup> Section 8 of the 1986 Export-Import Bank Act prohibits Export-Import Bank guarantees, insurance, or credits for any purchases by Marxist-Leninist countries including North Korea. Long after the demise of the communist bloc and the Soviet Union, such identifiers as "international communist movement" and "Marxist-Leninist countries" may have lost the appeal of the Cold War period and perhaps even the meaning, the anti-communist institutions live on, reinforcing the North's identity and reproducing enmity with it.

North Korea is also identified as a "gross violator" of human rights in the State Department's Annual Human Rights Report. With the passing of the North Korean Human Rights Act, such an identity became institutionalized, releasing a host of institutional punitive measures, which then serve to stabilize the North's identification as a human rights violator. For example, assistance is prohibited to the government of "any country which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, including torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment..." Section 7001 of the International Financial Institutions Act requires that the U.S. Executive Directors of international financial institutions oppose any loan, extension of financial assistance, or technical assistance to any country the government of which engages in a "pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights," or "provides refuge to individuals committing acts of international terrorism by hijacking aircraft." The Gramm Amendment, Section 42 of the Bretton Woods Agreement Act, also requires the Secretary of the Treasury to direct the U.S. Executive Director of the IMF "to actively oppose any facility involving use of Fund credit by any Communist dictatorship" unless the Treasury certifies to the relevant congressional committee that certain economic criteria are met.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Section 620(b) was repealed on December 29, 1981 because of its redundancy with Section 620(f).

<sup>36</sup> The U.S. House and Senate introduced in 2003 the DPRK Freedom Bill that listed North Korea's alleged violations of human rights together with recommended actions to alleviate them. Although the bill was not

In 1995, the U.S. took some measures to ease the sanctions, implementing a policy initiative announced by the Clinton administration in October 1994 to encourage dialogue between North and South Korea and their respective allies, as per the Geneva Agreed Framework. On January 3, an amendment to the Foreign Assets Control Regulations eased some travel restrictions by allowing travel agents to apply for a license authorizing actions necessary for arranging noncommercial travel for U.S. individuals or groups involved in academics, sports, cultural and certain other areas. On January 10, the State Department announced that it had eased the economic sanctions against the North, thus allowing direct telephone communication, use of credit cards in the North and establishment of a new agency. On February 2, new foreign Assets Control Regulations came into effect allowing the export of informational materials to North Korea and all financial transactions directly related to the purchase and shipping of the materials. Finally on April 24, part 785 of the Export Administration Regulation was amended to allow the export to North Korea of commercially-supplied goods intended to meet basic human needs. The regulations stipulated shipments would be authorized under an individual validated license on a case-by-case basis.

However modest these steps might have been, they greatly helped defuse heightened tensions in 1994 to permit a limited level of communication, exchange and trade between the U.S. and North Korea. These modest changes, together with the Geneva agreement, had the potential for diminishing the taken-for-granted reality of the “dangerous” North, and represented a step in that direction, a step that subsequently ran into the wall of hegemonic discourse. The most conspicuous example of this collision was the “suspicion” raised by the Defense Intelligence Agency in 1998 that the North Koreans were building a secret underground nuclear facility in Kûmch’angni. The suspicion was resolved the next year after a U.S. inspection team found nothing but an empty tunnel; still the suspicion, despite having been proved false, served to fortify the “dangerous North” identity and helped stall the process of political rapprochement that was beginning to have the discursive effect of undermining that hegemonic identity.

#### **4. The World According to the North**

To the West, the North comes across an inimical Other whose very existence is anathema to its identity. To the North, however, the West is the Other. The North Koreans whose Juch’e identity demands “being the master of one’s own destiny” independent of outside influences perceive the autonomous and powerful West posing an existential threat that constantly seeks to shape their lives. Not only is the West seen as an existential threat but also as an aggressive agent who seeks to force its preferred life-style upon them and, failing in this, to strangle it out of existence. In the face of such a perennial existential threat, they have taken what they consider a series of legitimate self-defensive measures, only to provide the “stubborn reality” that the West understands is the North Korean danger.

While it is unproblematically accepted in the South and the United States that their combined military forces are purely defensive and thus pose no threat, the North is concerned about the capabilities as well as the intentions of the countries that surround it. From the

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passed at the time of the writing, the introduction of the bill embodies another layer of representations of the North as a rogue.

North's Juch'e perspective, the United States represents the "empire of devil" that harbors the "ulterior motive" to end its existence and maintains the massive offensive capability to realize the motive. From the perspective of the North that places a premium on self-reliance, South Korea, whose military is commanded by a U.S. general, is one of the tools that the aggressive Pentagon wields to threaten its existence. The North whose Juch'e identity grew out of its earlier anti-Japanese guerilla campaigns remains vigilant against the danger of Japanese remilitarization.

Pyongyang points to aspects of the South's political institutions as manifesting an "ulterior motive" to invade, in the same way that the South sees the aggressive nature in the North's system. For example, the South's current constitution claims jurisdiction over the entire Korean peninsula, with the implicit but unmistakable implication that what governs the North is an illegitimate regime that should be overthrown. Also it proclaims, while adopting the policy of peaceful unification, "liberal democracy" as the principle of unification, a formulation which Pyongyang finds not only incompatible with its political system but also contravening the principles of reunification that the two Koreas agreed to.<sup>37</sup> The South, furthermore, continues to hold on to several UN resolutions as the legal justification not only for claiming to be the sole legitimate government over all of Korea but also for the use, under the UN Command, of military force to occupy the North and to unseat a regime that it deems an illegal anti-state entity.<sup>38</sup> It also has laws, such as the National Security Law, that define the North as an illegal anti-state organization that must be eradicated. While the foregoing is no proof that the South harbors an "ulterior" motive to invade the North, it provides the "stubborn realities" that Pyongyang understands to be the evidence of such a motive.

Since the commander of the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) maintains operational command over the South's military, Pyongyang is concerned about not only the South but also the United States. The USFK maintains operational plans that include strikes deep into North Korea in the initial phase of a war and maneuverings designed to sap the North's military readiness, some of which border on preemptive strikes.<sup>39</sup> The possibility of preemptive strikes came dangerously close to becoming a reality in 1994 when President Clinton almost chose a military strike option to destroy Pyongyang's nuclear facilities, only to turn away at the last minute.<sup>40</sup> The 1994 episode was not unique. Even before President Bush included the North in the "axis of evil" and in the Nuclear Posture Review, and before preemptive strikes became part of the official policy of the administration, the United States contemplated, threatened, prepared for, and came close to preemptive nuclear attacks against

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<sup>37</sup> The North-South Joint Communiqué of 1972 lists the three agreed principles of reunification: peace, independence, and grand national unity. Pyongyang argues that the last principle, which dictates that the Koreans should unify regardless of political beliefs, is violated by the South's insistence on one type of political system. The North's reunification proposal, *Koryô Confederacy System*, leaves the question of the reunified Korea's political system to be determined by a future generation.

<sup>38</sup> Li, Sang-Chôl, "Hanbando Chôngjônch'ejewâ UNC wisang [Korean Peninsula Armistice System and UNC's Status]," *Hanbando kunbit'ongje [Korean Peninsula Arms Control]*, vol. 34 (2003), p. 309.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce B. Auster, Kevin Whitelaw, and Thomas Omestad, "Upping the Ante for Kim Jong Il: Pentagon Plan 5030, a New Blueprint for Facing Down North Korea," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 21 2003. See also OPLAN 5030 at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oplan-5030.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, New, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2001), Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

North Korea several times since the Korean War.<sup>41</sup> For example, in 1998, the U.S. Air Force practiced a preemptive nuclear strike against the North<sup>42</sup>; in 1976, in reaction to the killing of two American soldiers, B-52 bombers simulated bombing runs, flying from Guam toward the DMZ before veering off at the last moment<sup>43</sup>; and in 1968 when the North Koreans seized the American spy ship *Pueblo*, “the initial reaction of American decision-makers was to drop a nuclear weapon on Pyongyang,” an idea helped by the fact that “all the U.S. F-4 fighter planes held on constant alert on Korean airfields were loaded only with nuclear weapons.”<sup>44</sup>

The foregoing is not to argue that Seoul and Washington are bent on launching an attack to destroy the North. While the Bush administration after September 11 included North Korea in a number of nuclear or preemptive strike scenarios, it has sought a multilateral solution and continued humanitarian assistance. Seoul under the Roh administration pursued as its top priority the prevention of an open military conflict.<sup>45</sup> From Pyongyang’s perspective, however, these are the “stubborn realities” that present a serious threat to its existence.

Because the North’s Juch’e identity orients it to perceive danger in the outside, it is predisposed to take what it considers defensive measures against such danger. From the insecure North Korean perspective, the Korean War was a “victory” that successfully defended the Juch’e North against the aggressive American attempt. The war also served as a “stern teacher” that deeply ingrained in the North’s psychic the imperative of self-defense.<sup>46</sup> The North’s Juch’e identity, born of its guerilla struggle against the Imperial Japan and hardened by its tenuous relationships with the Soviet Union and China, turned during the Korean War particularly virulent against the United States, which replaced Japan as the North’s Other by the end of the war. Pyongyang has since reacted to what it perceived was Washington’s inherent hostility by sharply adapting its defensive measures to Washington’s moves.

In 1962, the Korean Labor Party adopted “*chawi* [self-defense]” as a guiding principle of its security policy and decided to implement what was commonly known as the “4-dae kunsan noson [Four-Fold Military Line]”: to arm the entire population, to turn the entire country into a fortress, to elevate every soldier into an officer, and to modernize the entire military.<sup>47</sup> This policy was commonly seen as an effort to turn North Korea into what

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<sup>41</sup> “Nuclear Posture Review” (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2002). National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, “Preemptive Posturing,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 58, no. 5 (2002).

<sup>43</sup> Peter Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg: American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1991), pp. 60-62.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> The previous administrations of Clinton and Kim Young Sam flip-flopped on whether to exercise a military option to take out the North’s nuclear program. See Samsŏng Lee, *Hanbando haekmunjewa migukwoegyo [The Nuclear Question and U.S. Policy on the Korean Peninsula]* (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: New Press, 2004), Chapter 1. See also Jon Halliday and Bruce Cumings, *Korea: The Unknown War*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

<sup>47</sup> The decision was made at the Central Committee meeting on December 12-14, 1962. For the details of the four programs, see the speech Kim Il-Sung gave at Kim Il Sung Military College on October 5, 1963. “Uri inmin kundae rul hyongmyong kundaero mandullmyo kukbang eso chawi ui pangch’im ul kwanch’ol haja” [Let Us Implement the Policy of Making Our People’s Army a Revolutionary Army and Attaining Self-reliance in

Lasswell called the “garrison state” that was allocating all its resources to its war efforts. According to a South Korean government source, for example, it was adopted to implement Kim Il-Sung’s appeal that “we must postpone economic development and hasten to acquire the capability to attack the South even without the Soviet Union’s support.”<sup>48</sup> Such a militarization drive is commonly explained in terms of what Western observers unproblematically take as Pyongyang’s ulterior motive: to reunify the nation by force.<sup>49</sup>

The policy shift in the early 1960s, however, was initiated by a group of “partisan generals” who were deeply concerned about what they perceived were the increasing threats from “imperialists” and the weakening and fracturing of the socialist bloc.<sup>50</sup> A year earlier in the South the military coup had just ended a civilian government and a mass-based reunification drive. The authoritarian regime, serious about its anti-Communist stance, immediately began a bold dual track initiative to develop its economy and military. Particularly alarming to the North that was witnessing Soviet support slipping at the time was that the South’s “rich nation, strong army” project was being financed by the Japanese and militarily supported by the Americans.<sup>51</sup> As the threat from the South was growing, the partisan generals observed with increasing concerns Khrushchev “capitulate” in the Cuban missile crisis and the Sino-Soviet grow virulent. The already cool North-Soviet relationship took a sharp turn for the worse in 1962 when the Soviets sharply curtailed their supply of economic and military assistance, dealing a serious blow to the North military. After a delegation failed in its desperate fence-mending mission later that year, the North Korean leadership was confronted with three choices: (1) do nothing; (2) expand military spending to match the South; or (3) increase the size of the military without corresponding increase in spending. It chose the labor-intensive policy that would refurbish its defensive capability on the cheap—but untenable in the long run: build fortresses throughout the country and create citizen soldiers to man them. This policy choice was also facilitated by Kim Il-Sung’s emphasis on the “people’s war” strategy that he developed in his anti-Japanese guerilla struggles and honed during the Korean War: stay close to the “mass” and fight a protracted guerilla war to drain the enemy’s power enough to force its retreat.

If the Korean Labor Party deliberately chose the 1962 policy to maintain a delicate balance between “arms on the one hand and hammer and sickle on the other,” in 1966 it made a major policy shift that tipped the balance in favor of the military *modernization* that

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National Defense], *Kim Il Sung chojak-jip [Collection of Works by Kim Il Sung]*, 17 (1963.1-1963.12) (Pyongyang: Choson Nodong-dang Ch'ulp'an-sa, 1982), pp. 432-450. Although North Koreans immediately began to concentrate on the development of machine industries to produce conventional weapons, it was not until after 1965 when they restored their relationship with the Soviet Union that they were able to import modern advanced weapons systems.

<sup>48</sup> Pukhanyôn'guso, *Pukhanch'ongram* (Seoul: Pukhanyôn'guso, 1983), p. 1439.

<sup>49</sup> Eberstadt, for example, argues that because Pyongyang still seeks “reunification by force,” it allocates too much of its resources to the war efforts, bankrupting the economy. Eberstadt, Nick. 1999. *The End of North Korea*. Washington, D.C.: AEI Press publisher for the American Enterprise Institute.

<sup>50</sup> Dae-Sook Suh argues that Kim Il-Sung didn’t make any report that the above South Korean source charges. According to him, “the partisan generals decided to strengthen their military capabilities and fight to maintain, and not to beg for, peace.” Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> In the early 1960s when China was preoccupied with its own domestic problems, it was not in a position to provide economic or military assistance to North Korea.



required high-tech weapons systems.<sup>52</sup> Reflecting the change, the North's defense spending jumped from 19.8% to 31% of the national budget in 1967 and remained at the level until 1971.<sup>53</sup> In this period, Pyongyang imported hundreds of modern weapons systems from the Soviet Union such as MIG-21 fighters, SU-7 bombers and T-54 tanks.<sup>54</sup> Military officers' influence increased in the decision-making hierarchy, as reflected in the fact that their number in the all-powerful Politburo rose from one in 1961 to four in 1966.<sup>55</sup> It was no coincidence that the North became more active militarily from 1967 to 1971: it increased its guerrilla infiltration operations, seized the U.S. spy ship, the Pueblo, and shot down an EC 121 plane.

These massive—and costly to the North's economy—military projects were triggered by what the North Korean officers observed with grave concern in Vietnam. They were alarmed that the United States was escalating its war efforts in Vietnam with few apparent restraints. Witnessing its war expanding in Indochina, the Koreans feared a widening of the military agenda by the “American imperialists.” Their fears were only exacerbated by what they perceived was the resurgence of “Japanese militarism” as Japan's support activities for the American war became more pronounced. Kim Il-Sung was particularly concerned about the “trilateral military alliance” that he feared was forming among Washington, Tokyo and Seoul against the isolated Pyongyang.<sup>56</sup> While Pyongyang was able to purchase expensive weapons systems from Moscow, its political relationship was still tenuous. Furthermore Pyongyang and Beijing became critical of, if not hostile to, each other as China was deeply embroiled in its cultural revolution.

Beginning in January 1969, however, Kim Il-Sung started openly criticizing high-ranking military officers for the 1966 policies.<sup>57</sup> Those responsible were purged for “revisionism,” “military factionalism,” and “adventurism,” and subsequently replaced with more moderate bureaucrats. The bureaucratic shake-up was followed by a moderation in weapons imports and adventurous military operations and a frank and public acknowledgement in 1970 that the large military expense had pernicious effects on its economy.<sup>58</sup> Yet it took two more years as well as Nixon's detente, the withdrawal of the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Division from the South and the North-South Joint Communiqué of 1972 that Pyongyang began to reduce its military budget from 30% to 17% of the national budget.<sup>59</sup> In the subsequent years, the North's defense budget decreased from 17% of the 1970s to 14~15% in the early 1980s and to 12~14% in the late 1980s.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kim Il-Sung, *Kim Il-Sung chôjakchip [Kim Il-Sung's Works]*, vol. 20 (1982), pp. 415 & 423.

<sup>53</sup> *Chôngch'isajôn* (Pyongyang: Sahoegwahakch'ulp'ansa, 1973), p. 963.

<sup>54</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, respective years).

<sup>55</sup> Suh, op. cit., pp. 211-223. *Pukhanch'ongram* (1983), p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> Kim Il-Sung, *Kim Il-Sung chôjakchip [Kim Il-Sung's Works]*, vol. 20 (1982), p. 383.

<sup>57</sup> *Pukhanch'ongram* (1983), pp. 1468-1470.

<sup>58</sup> Kim Il-Sung, *Kim Il-Sung chôjakchip [Kim Il-Sung's Works]*, vol. 25 (1983), pp. 256-258.

<sup>59</sup> *Chosun chungangnyôn'gam [Korea's Central Yearbook]* 1973, p. 253.

<sup>60</sup> Ham, T'aekyông, “Juch'e sasanggwa pukhanûi kukpangchôngch'aek: chawinosônûi ôpchôk mit han'gye [Juch'e Ideology and North Korea's Defense Policy: Self-Defense Policy's Achievement and Limits],” in *Pukhanûi chôngch'iinyôm: Juch'e sasang [North Korea's Political Ideology: Juch'e Ideology]* (Seoul: Kyungnamtaehakkyo kûktongmunjeyôn'guso, 1990), p. 176.

The surge of military expenditure and activities from 1966 to the early 1970s helped entrench the South's and West's perception of the North's aggressive identity. While Pyongyang took and justified these measures as a defensive maneuvering designed to complicate and frustrate America's escalation of its imperialist war against the socialist bloc, its "offensive defensive" tactics left an indelible mark on the South and the U.S. that the North was an aggressive entity. By the early 1970s, the North's aggressive identity became deeply institutionalized in the South and the United States, as reflected in the fact that their estimates of the North's defense spending remained around the 30% level regardless of Pyongyang's official announcements.<sup>61</sup>

Pyongyang began the 1970s with high hopes that Nixon's détente and the North-South rapprochement would increase its economic opportunities while decreasing its defense burdens. Its hopes were soon dashed as the oil shocks that hit the world economy left the North with unserviceable foreign debts. Its economic growth noticeably slowed down, beginning to fall behind the South's economy. While Seoul took advantage of its booming economy by developing indigenous defense industry and increasing its import of high-tech weapons systems, Pyongyang saw its military spending trailing Seoul's and the military balance tipping dangerously in its disfavor. It became particularly gravely worried about what it perceived to be America's nuclear war efforts against itself as the U.S. military applied its Air-Land Battle doctrine to the Korean theater in the early 1980s.<sup>62</sup>

To what it perceived was a nuclear war plan against itself, the North's military responded on the cheap.<sup>63</sup> Instead of matching American supersonic jets and nuclear weapons, it amassed its foot soldiers and concentrated its long-range artilleries near the DMZ. The concentration of its forces near the border complicated a nuclear counterforce attack because such an attack would run the risk of damaging as many forces in the South as in the North. It was also designed to enable the North Korean forces to "hug" the forces in the South lest they should be targeted with nuclear weapons.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the North deployed an increasingly large number of long-range artilleries that could put Seoul within the range. Their combined firepower could unleash as much destructive power as a nuclear warhead, giving the North a countervalue strike capability. If the United States had the nuclear capability and strategy to "end [the country] as they know it," the North armed itself with the conventional power to inflict a damage that would be acceptable to Washington or Seoul.<sup>65</sup> A mutual deterrence, sustained on the "balance of terror," resulted across the DMZ.

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<sup>61</sup> Ham, T'aek-Yông, "Pukhan'gunbijûnggangûi chongch'igyôngje [Political Economy of North Korea's Military Spending Increase]," in Institute of National Reunification, ed., *Kunch'uk mit kunbit'ongjee kwanhan yôn'gu [A Study on Disarmament and Arms Control]* (Seoul: Kukt'ot'ongilwon, 1989), pp. 107-159.

<sup>62</sup> Hayes, Peter. 1991. *Pacific Powderkeg: American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, pp. 89-103.

<sup>63</sup> Hayes argues that the Airland Battle doctrine was first tested in the 1983 Team Spirit exercise. *Ibid.*, p. 91. The North Korean media routinely criticize the annual Team Spirit Exercise as a nuclear war exercise.

<sup>64</sup> During the Cold War, the Warsaw militaries adopted such a posture, commonly called the hugging tactic, that would enable them to mingle with NATO forces soon after an outbreak of war, making it difficult for NATO to use nuclear weapons against them.

<sup>65</sup> President Clinton bluntly put the threat during his 1993 visit to South Korea: "if they [North Koreans] ever use them [nuclear weapons].... we would quickly and overwhelmingly retaliate.... It would mean the end of their country as they know it."

What the Soviets bankrupted themselves to achieve the North Koreans accomplished with the relatively cheaper conventional forces.

While the North's forward concentration of its forces might have balanced the U.S. nuclear forces, it provided the West with yet another piece of evidence that confirmed the North's aggressiveness. The forward redeployment of massive forces served as a palpable proof of its intention to take the South by force. The evidence leads a study by the Library of Congress to unproblematically conclude that the "Korean People's Army (KPA) is structured and deployed on the primacy of the offense" with three objectives: "the destruction of the enemy forces, the seizure and control of territory, and the destruction of the enemy's will to fight."<sup>66</sup> Such an understanding was facilitated by the wide understanding of the defensive nature of American forces as well as the unquestioned acceptance of the U.S. peaceful identity.

The American understanding of the North's aggressiveness notwithstanding, Pyongyang has since the late 1980s been troubled by the indications that its military capability fell further and further behind the South's, undermining its security and even threatening its survival. Its gross domestic product (GDP) stood at 3-5 percent of the South Korean GDP in 2000.<sup>67</sup> Because of the economic crisis, North Korea's import of weapons systems all but ceased by 1993, while Seoul routinely ranked among the world's largest weapons importers. In 1991 Seoul spent \$7.8 billion on its military, more than three times Pyongyang's \$2.0 billion; ten years later, Seoul's defense budget had grown to \$10.0 billion, almost eight times as much as Pyongyang's, which shrank to \$1.3 billion.<sup>68</sup> While Pyongyang was allocating a higher ratio of its national budget to the military, it would not be unreasonable to interpret the North's higher military spending ratio as a desperate effort to match its adversary's spending level -- obviously without success.

That the North was trailing the South in the arms race on the peninsula is vividly illustrated by a comparison of the quality of their weapons systems. While the North's main battle tanks, the T-54/55 and T-62, were introduced in 1949 and 1961, the South upgraded most of its 1950s vintage M-48s to M-48A3s or M-48A5s between 1980 and 1990.<sup>69</sup> During the same period, moreover, the South began producing a new-generation tank, the K-1, that carried several state-of-the-art features found in the M1 Abrams.<sup>70</sup> It is indicative of the arms

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<sup>66</sup> Arrigoni, Guy R. 1994. National Security. In *North Korea: A Country Study*, edited by Andrea Matles Savada, 249. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division Library of Congress.

<sup>67</sup> Chang-Ho Yoon and Lawrence J. Lau, eds., *North Korea in Transition: Prospects for Economic and Social Reform* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2001: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 280.

<sup>69</sup> Andrea Matles Savada and William Shaw, eds., *South Korea: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 284. See also John C. "Doc" Bahnsen, "The Koreans Build Their Own Armor Force While the U.S. Army fights Pentagon Bureaucrats," in *U.S.-Korean Security Relations: New Challenges and Opportunities* (Seoul: Council on U.S.-Korean Security Studies, 1987), pp. 213-22.

<sup>70</sup> The K-1 A-1, an upgraded version, is equipped with a CO<sub>2</sub> laser-range finder and a thermal viewer together with composite armor, an integrated fire control and an adjustable suspension, making the K-1 A-1 comparable to America's most advanced tank, the M-1 A-1. If the M-1 A-1's qualitative advantage over Iraq's T-72 tanks in Desert Storm is any indication, the South's K-1 A-1s would enjoy a similar, if not greater, edge over the North's

race trend that Seoul proceeded in the 1990s to manufacture the K-1 A-1, an upgraded version of the K-1, while Pyongyang failed to acquire the T-72 that had initially caused Seoul to launch the K-1 project. Furthermore, it was the South, not the North, that imported the latest Russian tank, the T-80U, in the late 1980s. Not only does the South Korean army operate as its mainstay the K1 A1s that are comparable to the most advanced U.S. tank, but it also maintains 80 T-80Us.

Particularly terrifying to the weak North was the election of George W. Bush, who brought in revolutionary changes in U.S. security policies, all of which had dire implications for the North. Not only did he elevated the North status to one of the primary threats to the U.S. but he also adopted the policy of preemptive strike.<sup>71</sup> His nuclear policy explicitly lists North Korea as one of its intended targets while his counterproliferation policy reportedly authorized the use of nuclear weapons against the countries, such as the North, that were close to acquiring nuclear capability.<sup>72</sup> Media reports of the Pentagon's war plans only fueled the North's fears.<sup>73</sup> The North's siege mentality was well articulated by Kim Jong-Il:

Because our country is developing socialism under constant military threats and siege by imperialism, there could not be the people, the socialist state or the party, were it not for the powerful military. In this sense, we can say the military is the people, the state, and the party.<sup>74</sup>

Faced with an overwhelming threat to its existence, Pyongyang could adopt two kinds of defensive policies to protect itself: it could try to increase its own capability or seek an alliance with other states. The latter became an impractical, if not unrealistic, option for Pyongyang in the 1990s when its traditional allies, China and Russia, raced to embrace South Korea as their new friend. Moscow went to the extreme of letting its mutual defense treaty with the North expire and taking more than ten years to replace it with a toothless friendship treaty. While Beijing did not follow Moscow to abandon Pyongyang, it seemed engaged in a policy of maintaining equidistance. Given its dilapidated economy and deteriorating technological base, Pyongyang found it difficult, if not impossible, to match the South's power by building up its internal strength. Its decision to enhance its missile program and to develop its "nuclear deterrent capability" grew out of its perceived necessity to counterbalance the South's growing power superiority and the U.S.'s increasing aggressiveness.

Pyongyang has since the early 1980s consistently focused on maximizing its missile range, and it has relied entirely on SCUD technology to do so. Both of these decisions have

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T-62s, which are Soviet-designed tanks one generation older than the T-72s. David Miller, *Modern Tanks and Fighting Vehicles* (New York: Smithmark, 1992), pp. 66-69.

<sup>71</sup> The White House. "National Security Strategy of the United States." Washington, DC, 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Department of Defense. "Nuclear Posture Review." Washington, DC, 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Arkin, William M. "Secret Plan Outlines the Unthinkable." *Los Angeles Times*, March 10 2002; and Allen, Mike, and Barton Gellman. "Preemptive Strikes Part of U.S. Strategic Doctrine; 'All Options' Open for Countering Unconventional Arms." *The Washington Post*, December 11 2002, A.01.

<sup>74</sup> *Kim Jong-il sonjip*, volume 14, p. 267.

larger political implications. To reach the continental United States with an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Pyongyang would need to develop something completely different from the SCUD engine, the only technology it has worked with for the past twenty years. There is little evidence that the North has the technological wherewithal to develop an ICBM-capable engine. Without outside help, which is not likely to come, it would be extremely difficult, although certainly not entirely impossible, for Pyongyang to develop a new class of missile engine powerful enough to propel an ICBM. Meanwhile, Pyongyang's exclusive focus on increasing missile range at the expense of accuracy -- coupled with its sense of insecurity and its inability to match the South's more sophisticated, more powerful weapons systems -- suggests that North Korea's leaders have sought some kind of capability to deter a war. Such missiles can be used as a weapon of terror with which to convince political leaders in the South and in the United States that their preemptive strikes would be punished with a massive destruction of civilian assets. Despite its incredibly inaccurate missiles, the North possesses the capacity to wreak havoc on Seoul and Tokyo even with conventional warheads, a prospect that Pyongyang hopes will dissuade South Korean and American political leaders from launching preemptive strikes.

The United States and South Korea jointly have more than enough military capacity to turn all of North Korea into ruins. Lacking the ability to match them in kind, the North seems to have turned to a method that will give it the power to inflict pain and damage that can outweigh any potential benefits of a first strike. It is the logic of Mutual Assured Destruction applied to the Korean peninsula, North Korean style.<sup>75</sup>

Maintaining the "balance of terror" this way, Kim Jong-Il adopted the *Sôn'gunjôngch'aek* [*military first policy*] that took advantage of the million men in uniform as a shock-force to spearhead his economic rehabilitation projects.<sup>76</sup> While the West sees the policy as yet another evidence of the North's emphasis on 'reunification by force,' Pyongyang has effectively deployed the well-organized and committed labor force in construction sites, farms, power plants, mines, and factories.<sup>77</sup> Lacking energy and capital inputs, it turned yet again to a labor-intensive development strategy where the military provided the backbone of the needed excess labor while setting the "heroic examples" the rest of the population was encouraged to emulate in its respective sectors.<sup>78</sup> It is the logic of "spin-off", North Korean style. While it remains to be seen how successful such a strategy will be in achieving Pyongyang's professed goal of "building *Kangsongdaeguk* [*powerful and prosperous nation*]," the North itself sees its military as an invaluable tool of deterrence and development, notwithstanding U.S. perceptions as a means of aggression.

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<sup>75</sup> Porter Goss, Director of CIA, acknowledged the "definite possibility" that Pyongyang was trying to convince the world of its nuclear capability in order to maximize its deterrent against possible U.S. attack. Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, March 17, 2005.

<sup>76</sup> The West's perception that military is a drain on the civilian economy overlooks the economic contributions that the North's military is making. Sahoegwahakwon ch'ôlhakyôn'guso. 2003. *Uri Tangûi Ch'ongtaech'ôlhak* [*Our Party's Gun Barrel Philosophy*]. Pyongyang: Sahoegwahakch'ulp'ansa.

<sup>77</sup> Koh, Byung Chul. "Military First Politics' and Building a 'Powerful and Prosperous Nation' in North Korea." In IFES Forum. Seoul: Kyungnam University, Institute of Far Eastern Studies, 2005.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, "Inmin'gundaerul ttara apuro [Forward with the People's Army]," *Rodong sinmun* editorial March 19, 2005.

## 5. Conclusion

Pyongyang strictly controls the flow of information regarding its national security while Washington and Seoul tightly manage whatever information they have about the North. The paucity of information provides fertile ground for biases to flourish. In a frank admission of difficulties in understanding the North's military, Olsen makes a strikingly Derridian poststructuralist remark:

Guesstimating is the main research tool of the governmental, academic, and journalistic watchers of North Korea in the countries that feel most threatened by North Korea: South Korea, Japan, and the United States.... Compounding the inadequacy of data about North Korea is the tendency of foreign analysts to color their assessments with personal biases and their national interests. South Koreans and Japanese of various political leanings do this routinely. Americans, too, tend to inject U.S. biases about North Korea or unthinkingly reflect those derived from South Korean or Japanese sources. The fundamental problem is that the paucity of information about North Korea causes Pyongyang watchers to rely on each other's analyses and rumors. Many analysts turn to two seemingly impartial sources of information about North Korea: Britain's International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and Sweden's Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Unfortunately, this is no solution because both institutions derive most of their data from the same dubious South Korean, Japanese, and U.S. sources. Clearly there is a cycle of misinformation at work here which precludes obtaining an accurate picture of North Korea.<sup>79</sup>

These representational practices produced a particular reality, but that reality is further buttressed by institutional arrangements and disciplinary power that the state brought to bear upon the politics of signification. These representations were not only embodied but also reinforced by the state's constitution, various laws and regulations, and state apparatuses they engendered. All of these coalesced to produce, reproduce, and entrench North Korea's identity in a particular way. As alternative representations were readily dismissed, that identity became the true, objective one.

Furthermore, there is a dialectical process by which the identity interacted with material reality to result in security dilemma. The discourses of proliferation threats predisposed those actors who operated within them to ignore inconvenient facts about Pyongyang's missiles and to zero in on confirming facts surrounding North Korea's nuclear program, reinforcing their prior conception of the North as a danger. The discourses of proliferation threats predisposed the actors to remain disinclined to consider the possibility that the North's actions, dangerous as they were, might be a defensive measure taken in response to what it perceived was a threat posed by the United States. The discourses constituted an ideational context within which the United States considered its own actions

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<sup>79</sup> Edward A. Olsen, "North Korea," in James Everett Katz, ed., *Arms Production in Developing Countries: An Analysis of Decision Making* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1984), p. 235.

defensive and the North's offensive, unwittingly and unknowingly reproducing a security dilemma. The discourse framed the North's projectiles and nuclear programs in a way that understood it as a threat; and such an understanding then justified and mandated the allies' taking security measures. Because the North operated within a frame of reference that reversed the identity roles for itself and the United States—a pacific North vs. an aggressive United States—it made sense of the allies' defensive measures as their preparation for aggression, an understanding that compelled its own countermeasures. The two sides made sense of the other's security measure in terms of their understanding of the other's identity, and since the other was—as it had been during the Cold War—understood as the Other, what it might have taken as a defensive measure was seen as a threatening move that called for a defense. Discursive politics interacted with security politics to constitute security dilemma.<sup>80</sup> The antagonistic identity distribution has resulted in the precarious “balance of terror” where each side maintains a level of destructive power enough to terrorize the other.<sup>81</sup>

According to Anthony Giddens, a defining characteristic of the modern state is its monopoly of the means of violence within the territorial boundary of the state. This involves a two-fold process: on the one hand, the development of the organization of violence by the state; and on the other hand, internal pacification. Internal pacification has been characterized by the withdrawal of the use of military power in the internal affairs of the state. “What it involves, however, is not the decline of war, but a concentration of military power ‘pointing outwards’ towards other states in the nation-state system.”<sup>82</sup> As Kaldor notes, this concurrent process of internal pacification and the externalization of violence is accompanied by “a tendency to channel domestic tensions outwards, against some external enemy. The need to establish some common identity as a basis for legitimacy within implies the existence of an ‘other’....”<sup>83</sup> In a similar manner, alliance practices achieve internal pacification by establishing some common identity against external enemies. And in the absence of actual fighting, the alliance, through all its representational practices and institutional arrangements, constitutes the identities of the allies and enemies.

The U.S.-Korea alliance has not only participated in the production of social identities of the United States, South Korea and North Korea but also hegemonized the enmity between them and North Korea. The hegemonic status of state identities ensured the preclusion of debates about the future of the alliance, only allowing a discursive space for consensus on the need. The hegemonic status of the amity made certain that American power be accepted as a helping hand whose provision was naturalized within the hegemonic enmity toward North Korea. Within the discursive boundary delimited by the alliance, there was little breathing space for alternative discourses or opposition.

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<sup>80</sup> Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>81</sup> J.J. Suh, “Assessing the Military Balance in Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 28 no. 4 (2004), pp. 63-88.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p. 192.

<sup>83</sup> Mary Kaldor, *The Imaginary War: Understanding the East-West Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 17.

U.S. perceptions of North Korea are a continuation of the Cold War discourse of danger by other representations.<sup>84</sup> And it is not difficult to see some of the Cold War institutions sustaining themselves on the post-Cold War discourse of danger within which North Korea, and other “rogues,” is constituted as threatening enemies. The Cold War alliances, which the United States built over five decades ago as part of its global confrontation against the communist bloc, for example, still remains as an active agent that works to preserve the “American lake.” The post-Cold War enmity also provides the social milieu within which new programs, such as the current versions of the missile defense and military transformation, are born and grow.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Elaine McClarnand and Steve Goodson, eds., *Impact of the Cold War on American Popular Culture, Studies in the Social Sciences*; V. 36 (Carrollton, Ga.: The State University of West Georgia, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> Linzer, Dafna. "U.S. Mised Allies About Nuclear Export: North Korea Sent Material to Pakistan, Not to Libya." *Washington Post*, March 20 2005, A01.