

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES KIM JONG-IL FROM GADDAFI : Problems of Nuclear Development Factor Analysis Methods and Proposal of Alternatives

Minjung Kim¹ and Donald Kirk²

¹Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea

²Correspondent, foreign print and broadcast media; author, eight books, four on Korea

Abstract

The focus of this study is the motivation for North Korea's nuclear development under Kim Jong-il as he came to rely on his program of nuclear warheads and missiles as integral in his consuming drive to unify the Korean peninsula. This study compares the North Korean program with that initiated by the Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi, pointing out similarities as well as critical differences. North Korea began its nuclear program in the late 1940s with the clear goal of using it as one means to occupy South Korea. The strategy then as now was that possession of the means to deliver a warhead to targets in the U.S., and to America's East Asian allies, notably Japan, would be crucial in preventing US intervention on behalf of South Korea. This motivation and strategy remains unchanged seven decades after its inception. This study attempts to verify the basic rationale for North Korea's nuclear development while stressing the importance of the country's distinctive if not unique approach. Focusing on the comparison with Libya, this paper discusses the reasons behind North Korea's nuclear program ranging from the need of the ruling Kim family to survive against domestic opposition to the North's peculiar position surrounded by historically hostile powers. At the same time, we need to consider such factors as the collapse of Communist rule in the Soviet Union and East Bloc and failed efforts at reaching agreement on the North's nuclear program. As the only nation to have tested a nuclear warhead in the 21st century, North Korea has its own unique set of motivations for behavior that threatens to bring about a second Korean War.

Introduction

In the past five years, North Korea's Korean Central News Agency mentioned the word "military first" more than 4,700 times.¹ The will to conquer South Korea and unify the Korean peninsula under its pseudo-communist regime helps to answer why North Korea has not given up its nuclear aspirations despite huge international pressures while Libya, also under intense pressure, yielded. This paper explains North Korean nuclear development by listing variables, divided between the capacity to make good on its dreams and the motivation to succeed. Citing capacity and motivation variables, the study examines the differing behaviors of the Libyan and the North Korean regimes.

In studying the rationale and background of North Korea's nuclear development, this paper primarily relies on experience and international relations theory rather than statistical or quantitative evidence. Our findings reflect in large measure the long experience of the authors in considering the human rights issue in North Korea. The authors' backgrounds include extensive interaction with organizations and government agencies that specialize in the North's approach toward human rights and in the dictatorship that enforces development of nuclear power to the exclusion of the basic welfare of the people. Further study of international relations relating to the Korean peninsula, historically and up to the present, revealing the evolution of the North as a nuclear power, is central to this analysis.

Part I. Kim Jong-il vs. Moammar Gaddafi

Rejection of the Libyan Case

The decision of Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi to jettison the nuclear program on which he had staked power and prestige stands as an example for all aspiring nuclear powers of both the folly of investing in nuclear weapons and the folly of abandoning them. It should be logical to accept the widespread view that Gaddafi in this case acted wisely, seeing that his nuclear power, such as it was, only impeded and obstructed normal relations with a wide range of countries. Clearly, as he recognized, Libya had much higher priorities. The subsequent downfall of Gaddafi, however, is often cited in North Korean rhetoric as one reason for not giving up nuclear power. Why surrender this threat to your enemies when they will see this gesture as a sign of weakness that they will exploit militarily, undermining, attacking and destroying the regime? Against frequent arguments heard in Washington and other capitals that North Korea should follow the Libyan example, North Korean propagandists had only to respond that Gaddafi's gesture, hailed at the time, rebounded against him, finally resulting in his utter destruction.

Tiran Rothman, at Tel-Aviv University, asked basic questions at a critical time – shortly after North Korea had conducted its first nuclear test, in October 2006, nearly three years after Gaddafi had stated that Libya was forsaking its nuclear program. “Why have states facing similar threats chosen to cope with them differently,” was the opening question. “What is the role of perception in determining a country's defense policy? What role do the external and internal security environment play in the choices made by a state? What lessons can be learned from the ‘practical’ choices recently made by Libya and North Korea?”²

It's worth noting that initially North Korea and Libya worked closely on nuclear development, almost partners in the same spirit as North Korea and Iran or, certainly, North Korea and Syria, where North Korea was constructing a nuclear reactor complex until Israel destroyed the facility in September 2007. Bruce Bechtol, former intelligence analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency, has pointed out that North Korea in the early 2000s provided uranium hexafluoride and technology to Libya.³ The “axis of evil” might well have been seen as extending from Libya to Syria and on to Iran. Gaddafi, however, decided on what might have appeared as the sensible, easy way out on the basis of what Rothman calls “a cost-benefit analysis of his country's nuclear policy, in view of its national interests as a whole.” In his view, “Libya's announcement of its intention to abandon its nuclear program in December 2003 shows that the regime realized that the costs involved in proceeding with the policy outweighed the benefits of continuing the nuclear program.” A major factor was that Libya faced no external threat. As Rothman wrote, “Since no enemy wished to harm Libya, continuing with its nuclear program would have been more harmful than stopping it.”⁴

That analysis, universally shared by the countries that were bringing such intense pressure on Gaddafi, only infuriated Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang. Gaddafi was swallowing what the North Koreans saw as the bait of removal of sanctions in exchange for giving up his nuclear dream. In reality, as far as North Koreans were concerned, he was a coward, almost a traitor, certainly a fool to have fallen for the blandishments and promises of western powers soon destined to betray him.

Reasons behind Gaddafi's Decision

The degree of deeply ethnocentric motivation to reunite the divided Korean peninsula alone differentiates the Korean case from that of Libya. Yet another factor to remember is that Libya was not close to producing a nuclear warhead when Gaddafi decided enough was enough and it was time to reconcile with the west. So doing, he agreed to give up not only his nuclear weapons program but also ballistic intercontinental ballistic missiles, biological and chemical weapons and the agents and chemicals used to make them. Libya's decision was further influenced by the post-9/11 security agenda including the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The trilateral negotiations between the United States, Libya, and the United Kingdom, as well as removal of sanctions, also contributed to Gaddafi's decision.

Gaddafi before his downfall in the Arab Spring turned over equipment, materiel, documents and much else. He was revealed to have received aid and advice for his nuclear program from A. Q. Khan, the “father” of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, who had provided similar assistance to Iran and North Korea. In the eight years between his decision to yield to demands to stop all activities related to weapons of mass production and his death at the hands of vengeful revolutionaries, he had reason to believe that he might

have been better recognized – and appreciated -- internationally for his decision and rescued from the forces aligned against him.

But why, then, have North Korea and Libya, both under highly authoritarian regimes facing similar threats, chosen to cope with them so differently? As for technological feasibility, North Korea now possesses full nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. In 1993 the CIA estimated that North Korea had extracted enough fuel rods for about 12 kilograms of plutonium, which is sufficient for one or two atomic bombs. However, in 1994 when President Clinton appeared on the verge of ordering a military attack, the infrastructure for North Korea’s nuclear fuel cycle was not enough to favor continuation of the nuclear program. The inception of the highly enriched uranium (HEU) program came after—not before—the Agreed Framework reached in October 1994 by North Korea and the US. North Korea’s nuclear weapons agenda was even more ominous to post-9/11 Americans. Also, despite the Geneva agreement in 1994 between the U.S. and North Korea as well as six-party negotiations from 2003 to 2007 among the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and North Korea, the Kim dynasty pressed ahead with development of nuclear weapons even under serious economic sanctions. In sum, despite having similar driving factors for Libya’s rollback, North Korea has not abandoned its nuclear program. This paper suggests that the degree of deeply ethnocentric motivation to reunite the divided Korean peninsula alone differentiates the Korean case from that of Libya.

Part II. A New Set of Factors for Proliferation

Literature Review

< Table 1. Existing Theories on Nuclear Proliferation Motivations >

Scholar	Year	Motivations				
		Military Motives	Political Motives	Economic Motives	-	-
George Quester ⁵	1973	Military Motives	Political Motives	Economic Motives	-	-
Scott Sagan ⁶	1996	Security	Domestic Politics	Norms	-	-
Kurt Campbell ⁷	2004	The Erosion of Regional or Global Security	Domestic Imperatives	A Change in US Foreign Policy and Security Policy	A Breakdown of the Global Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime	Increasing Availability of Technology
Etel Solingen ⁸	2007	Security	International Institutions	International Norms	Domestic Circumstances	Democracy vs. Autocracy
Joseph Cirincione ⁹	2007	Security	Prestige	Domestic Politics	Technology	Economics
Jacques E. C. Hymans ¹⁰	2008	Bureaucratic politics	National Prestige	“Oppositional Nationalism”	-	-
William Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova ¹¹	2010	Security	International Institutions	International Norms	Domestic Circumstances	

The authors cited above offer a wide range of views for why nations decide to “go nuclear” and why they do not. The overriding concern is “security” – a word that covers the desire for defense mainly against foreign enemies but also suggests the desire for territorial expansion and takeover of neighboring states. Issues of domestic politics and prestige also are a priority, sometimes ranking as high as defense or expansionist ambitions. s

< Table 2. Factors under Review, 1973-2010 >

		George Quester	Scott Sagan	Kurt Campbell	Etel Solingen	Joseph Cirincione	Jacques E. C. Hymans	W. Potter and G. Mukhatzha nova
Year		1973	1996	2004	2007	2007	2008	2010
F	Domestic Politics	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
	Security/ Military	O	O	O	O	O		O
A	Norms/ Prestige		O		O	O	O	O
C	International Pressure			O	O			O
T	Technology			O		O		
O	Domestic Economy	O				O		
R	US Policy			O				
S	“Oppositional Nationalism”						O	
	Democracy vs. Autocracy				O			

As shown in Table 2, crucial factors under consideration, besides external security and internal politics and prestige, are advances in technology, making it easier for countries to acquire nuclear weapons or the means to manufacture them, and the funds with which to buy them. Also important are willingness and motivation to adhere to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a complex network of reasons why countries agree to sign the treaty, to abide closely to its terms – and to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

A New Set of Factors for Proliferation

Table 3 is a newly-proposed comprehensive set of factors for proliferation to be discussed in this paper. Let us consider the categories and areas that afford the basis of comparison between North Korea and Libya. They fall into internal and external areas for review. At the top of the list, technology leads to the question of the capability of a country or regime eventually to build a warhead. In other words, are they able to achieve what they set out to do? In order to make a beginning, the regime needs the technological facility, the engineering and scientific background to do the job regardless of its stated intentions and claims. On the external side, is the regime sure or likely to obtain the technological assistance required from a friendly foreign country? Or might it be able to obtain vital information perhaps from a country that’s not so friendly but in which the regime has intelligence contacts and sources and relationships under which its agents could obtain foreign assistance or development aid applicable to the nuclear program?

Technological ability and resources, however, are not likely to provide the thrust that’s required for such a costly, complex program as nuclear weapons development. The motivational factor is crucial, and success hinges on the response to the question, why do these countries, North Korea and Libya, choose to become nuclear weapons powers? Again, we must consider internal as well as external factors. Under internal, we should focus on deterrence to complement conventional military forces and provide the means of deterrence that should compensate for deficits in size, training and equipment. On the external side of the ledger, the motivation is quite similar – to provide added security against threats from larger, superior foreign forces.

Another motivational factor to consider is political and diplomatic. Internally, within the fabric of the country, the motivation is the ability of nuclear power to serve as an institutional tool in order to fulfil the needs of the ruling elite in suppressing signs of domestic discontent or opposition within an entrenched bureaucracy. Diplomatically, the mere possession of nuclear weapons serves as a powerful negotiating tool, providing the edge needed for leverage against diplomatic foes in the United Nations and directly with countries that might otherwise look on a relatively small country without nuclear weapons as an inferior, weak negotiating partner that should be overwhelmed in talks. In other words, nuclear weapons enable

their possessor to pursue national interests against other otherwise much stronger nations.

< Table 3. A New Set of Factors for Proliferation >

		INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
+	Technology Factor : Can they build it?	Technological Feasibility : having sufficient facilities and nuclear material	Technological assistance from outside of the country : developing the technological infrastructure for a nuclear program with foreign aid
	Motivation Factor : Why they build it?	A Deterrence Equalizer : to make up for conventional military deficits (asymmetry)	Security Threats : to increase their security against foreign adversaries
-	Limitation (Adjustment) Factor : Why they abandon it?	Political / Institutional Tools : to advance domestic political and bureaucratic interests	Negotiation Tool : gives greater leverage in their relations with other countries and allows them to be bolder in the pursuit of their national interests
		The Leader's Subjective Perspective : the regime's foreign and security policy priorities, etc.	National Prestige : to increase its prestige internationally and to provide normative symbol of a state's identity
		Domestic Opposition : growing trends toward anti-nuclear weapons in the civil society	International Norm & Pressure : regimes such as the NPT, economic sanctions, etc.
		Domestic Economy : inability to support nuclear funding	Extended Deterrence : a security guarantee from a powerful alliance partner

The motivational factor relates directly to the prestige of the leader himself, in the North Korean case the Kim dynastic ruler. The leader, knowing that he has nuclear weapons that he may be capable of deploying, if not immediately, then within a few years, can flaunt his power and position in the face of respected and feared leaders within his own power elite and by extension show himself as a statesman comparable to leaders of other far stronger countries. At stake is the whole issue of national prestige, the need to boost the ranking of the country among other countries, whether friends or enemies, and to project national identity clearly and forcefully.

But why, under what circumstances, would a country abandon its nuclear program, its dream for elevating the prestige of the ruler and his standing among global leaders elsewhere? As in other areas, the answer here is divided between internal and external considerations. The leader may confront significant internal opposition, so strong that he is unable to stand up against his critics at home at a time when anti-nuclear voices are heard ever more loudly and frequently.

The leader may also succumb to economic problems. The question would be whether he can defend the enormous cost of a nuclear weapons program when industry is declining and citizens are suffering from famine and disease. Externally, the leader may be under powerful international pressure in which his country is increasingly isolated and abandoned even by its closest friends. Then too the leader may conclude that his country is safer when closely allied with others, forming an impervious deterrence against threats from neighbors as well as huge countries with large military forces, possibly quite far away but capable of attack at any time. For this reason alone, the leader may decide on the wisdom of a retreat from previous dreams of becoming a global nuclear power.

II. North Korea's Unique Motivation: Inspiration for Reunification

A Brief History

"Inspiration for reunification" is the avowed aim of North Korean leadership to unify the Korean peninsula under the rule of the Kim dynasty. This study now examines "inspiration for reunification" in terms of a wide range of factors.

North Korea's ultimate goal of conquering South Korea and reuniting the Korean peninsula under the Kim dynasty has always been crystal-clear. Kim Il-sung had to accept terrible disappointment in the Korean War after having recognized the determination of the United States under President Harry Truman to turn back his invasion of the South in June 1950. Kim clearly believed that he had all the support that he might need from both the newly ensconced Chinese communist regime, which had completed its victory over all the Chinese mainland the previous October, and also from the Soviet Union. He had conferred with the leaders of both countries, Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin, finally wringing from them their endorsement – and promise of arms and ammunition as well as economic aid – in order for his soldiers to take over the south in a matter of weeks.

Although severely rebuffed in the Korean War, in which Kim Il-sung's own forces were decimated and "volunteers" of the Chinese People's Liberation Army had to enter the conflict, rescuing him and his regime from oblivion, he never lost hope. His entire strategy since the suffering and losses of the war was based on his resolve to resume the conquest of the South. It was that dream that motivated him to order countless small-scale attacks across the demilitarized zone set up under terms of the truce that was signed in July 1953 at Panmunjom by Chinese, North Korean and American generals. (South Korea's President Rhee Syngman had a high-level military observer at all the truce talks but refused to endorse a document that he believed would sanctify the permanent division of the peninsula.) North Korea also staged assignation attempts, including the abortive raid on the Blue House in January 1968, intended to kill President Park Chung-hee, in which 29 North Korean soldiers, 26 South Korean and 4 American soldiers were killed, and then, two days later, the capture of the U.S. "spy ship" the Pueblo in international waters off the North Korean coast.

It would be a mistake to generalize excessively about the motivations behind development of a nuclear program. In the unique case of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, that is, North Korea, but two special factors are significant. First is that the primary reason for the North's nuclear development is the avowed aim of North Korean leadership to unify the Korean peninsula under the rule of the Kim dynasty, founded by Kim Il-sung when he returned from the Soviet Union in 1945 after serving as a Soviet army officer, and then carried on by his son, Kim Jong-il, who succeeded the founder after his death in 1994, and finally by the founder's grandson, Kim Jong-un, heir to power after the death of Kim Jong-il in 2011. The second factor in North Korea's nuclear development is that the North faces the same foes that opposed the North's attempt at taking over the South in the Korean War, namely the United States and the Republic of Korea, that is, South Korea.

Inspiration for Reunification: an Ethnocentric Motivation

The degree of deeply ethnocentric motivation to reunite the divided Korean peninsula alone differentiates the Korean case from that of Libya.

Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute has written that "calls for the reunification of the *minjok* (race), and for retribution against the enemy races or powers constantly reverberate within North Korea..." In fact, "This is where its nuclear weapons program fits into North Korea's designs." Of highest importance: "a nuclear arsenal that can imperil and break the foreign enemies who protect and prop up what Pyongyang regards as the vile puppet state in the South." Since "revolutionary upheaval" in the South was not likely, "the nuclear option looks to be the one and only trail by which to reach the Promised Kingdom."¹²

Homer T. Hodge, senior intelligence officer for Asia at the U.S. Army National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, accepted at face value the message, often expressed in North Korean rhetoric, "that Pyongyang's long-range strategy to dominate the peninsula by any means has not changed." Among all-too-obvious signs of this intention were "North Korea's continued focus of scarce resources to the military, development of longer-range ballistic missiles, and the recent revelation by Pyongyang that it seeks a nuclear weapons capability as indications that reunification remains the foremost goal." Indeed,

Hodge went on, “The preponderance of evidence clearly supports the conclusion that reunification under the leadership of Kim Jong-il, by whatever means, remains the supreme national task.” North Korean leaders, Hodge wrote, view the southern half of the country as occupied by ‘US imperialists’ and the government of South Korea as ‘puppets serving their imperial masters.’” He derided the argument that North Korea’s military build-up, including development of nuclear weapons, was for defensive purposes, as claimed by North Korean propaganda and North Korean sympathizers elsewhere, but for “defending all of Korea” and that “‘defense of the fatherland’” meant, first, “reclaiming that portion of Korea, i.e., South Korea – that is currently occupied and controlled by the ‘imperialists,’” and, secondly, “defending against further encroachment by ‘US imperialists.’”

Defensive vs. Offensive Designs

“Inspiration for reunification” may be understood as a critical factor in the need for security – that is, the security of North Korea as a separate entity and also the security of its dynastic rulers. However, although this motivation falls under the rubric of security, it is quite different.

Probably the greatest misunderstanding about North Korea’s nuclear program is that its primary goal is to insure the survival of the Kim dynasty from threats from dissidents within the ruling elite or from external pressures. Incredibly, North Korean rhetoric has actually persuaded a number of foreign observers to accept the view that nuclear weaponry serves a defensive purpose. That view is clearly absurd.

As for whether the threat of the use of nuclear weapons would deter aggressors from attacking, quite the opposite is more likely. The pursuit of nuclear weapons can result in substantial international conflict. As a state approaches the point of weaponization, it might experience military conflict since aggressive forces would be eager to destroy its nuclear capabilities. The question of whether George W. Bush as U.S. president had been justified in seeing Saddam Hussein’s regime as posing a nuclear threat became the focal point of extensive testimony in Washington. But in realistic terms, Bush’s invasion of Iraq was a rational means to prevent Iraq’s actual or potential use of WMD and Iraq’s collaboration with terrorist groups. In short, development of weapons of mass destruction and threats to use them would increase rather than reduce the chances of a military response in the form of a pre-emptive strike by aggressors.

As for whether possession of nuclear weapons would insure the security of the regime against dissidents, events over the years have proven that the country’s dynastic rulers have not needed to show off their nuclear prowess in order to punish their foes. The execution of Jang Song-thaek, husband of the sister of Kim Jong-il, that is, Kim Jong-un’s aunt, in December 2013 on a laundry list of charges of corruption and, above all, plotting to usurp power, was convincing enough evidence of the draconian sentences inflicted on those found guilty of any sign of disloyalty without recourse to the nuclear threat. Then, in February 2017, Kim Jong-un’s older half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, living in Macao, was assassinated in Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Malaysia in a plot concocted by North Korean agents. They had persuaded two young women working as masseuses or prostitutes in Kuala Lumpur, one Indonesian, the other Vietnamese, to place a damp cloth over his face as he was about to check in for a flight to Macao. The women, told they were carrying out a prank for a small amount of money, had no idea the cloth was smeared with nerve gas capable of killing in minutes. These two killings of people in the dynastic ruler’s immediate family who might pose a threat to Kim Jong-un’s power showed the vapidness of arguments that he needed a nuclear program to insure his strength on the home front.

Central to North Korea’s strategy for conquest is the *songun* system placing top emphasis on “military first” – the primacy of the armed forces. Kim Jong-il, whose authority rested mainly in his role as chairman of the national defense commission, placed *songun* on an even higher level than *juche*, the enduring legacy of his father’s rule. *Songun* was necessary to elevate the power of the armed forces especially while the country was in the throes of famine in the 1990’s. Kim Jong-un decreased usage of the term *songun*, however, preferring to fold it into *byungjin*, parallel development, meaning the armed forces and the economy should strengthen simultaneously. This term had been introduced decades earlier while Kim Il-sung was alive, but its revival in place of *songun* was intended to show the regime’s emphasis on economic priorities in tandem with the armed forces – a sign of the need for economic reform. The introduction of *byungjin* in place of *songun* was, in fact, an exercise in semantics that made no substantive difference in policy or goals. The point remained that North Korea under Kim Jong-il developed nuclear strength as a means for national expansion. At the same time, *songun* had to include economic considerations in view of its enormous cost and the depletion of the economy in order to carry out the

policy.

As Australian scholar Benjamin Habib has noted, North Korea's nuclear program was "central to the maintenance of the Songun politics system . . . to demonstrate Kim Jong Il's dedication to providing national security against external threats and to reassure the Korean People's Army (KPA) that Kim and the Party would provide it with priority access to the state's scarce resources." Kim Jong Il, Habib wrote, "was shrewd in courting the military to bolster his power base during a turbulent period of leadership transition, dismal economic performance, food shortages and external security threats. . . ." Habib quotes the Workers' Party newspaper *Rodong Sinmum* as having "described the role of the military in leading North Korea's economic reinvigoration." The defense industry would "rejuvenate all economic fields, to include light industry and agriculture and enhance the quality of people's lives" while "military activities generate more resources and economic goods than they consume, thus leading the country to economic recovery."¹³

But why could Kim Jong-il, and then his son, not have abandoned their nuclear-missile program and dedicated all available resource to economic reform? The answer had nothing to do with internal security and everything to do with building up North Korea's strength for what the Kim dynasty leaders saw as the need for vengeance against the United States and the Republic of Korea for having turned back dynasty founder Kim Il-sung's costly attempt at unifying the Korean peninsula by subjugating the South. To do so, of course, it would be necessary to develop a strong economy in which people had enough food and other resources to serve the ambitions of the dynasty.

Jimmy Carter, the former U.S. president, flew to Pyongyang in June 1994 to meet Kim Il-sung for a lengthy conversation in a boat on the Daedong River during which he said that he had received assurances that North Korea would "freeze" its nuclear program and remain a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. There is no evidence, however, that North Korea slowed down its development of nuclear weapons. After Kim Il-sung died several weeks later, the first Korean nuclear crisis blew up again in renewed fears of a second Korean War.

The pattern throughout the history of North Korea's nuclear program has been that of tensions rising to a crescendo, only to die down during negotiations and possibly agreement. President Bill Clinton at one stage appeared on the verge of a military response, which South Korea's President Kim Young-sam warned might result in 10 million deaths. Military as opposed to political and diplomatic hostilities seemed possible, but negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea in Geneva resulted in October 1994 in the signing of the Geneva framework agreement. The agreement called for North Korea to agree to shut down its five-megawatt "experimental" reactor at its nuclear complex at Yongbyon, admit inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency on a rotating basis to make sure the reactor remained closed, and totally stop its nuclear weapons program in return for which South Korea and Japan would pay most of the costs for building twin nuclear reactors to help fulfill the North's energy needs. An agency set up under the Geneva agreement called the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), under American leadership, headquartered on Third Avenue near the United Nations in New York, would supervise construction of the reactors and adherence to the treaty, under which the U.S. would contribute 50,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil a year to help fulfill energy needs until the reactors went on line.

Kim Jong-il, however, never had any intention of permanently shutting down his nuclear weapons program. They were at the core not merely of North Korea's ultimate design for taking over the South but also at the heart and soul of the mystique that he had to cultivate of himself as a god-like figure imbued with the philosophy of "*songbun*" and his post of chairman of the National Defense Commission. The Geneva framework exploded eight years later with the revelation that North Korea, while appearing to abide by its pledge to shut down the Yongbyon reactor, had been conducting separately a program for producing highly enriched uranium (HEU) capable of detonating nuclear warheads far more powerful than the devices already fabricated at Yongbyon with plutonium at their core. This revelation, during a mission to Pyongyang led by James Kelly, assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, led to a rapid series of events, including U.S. refusal to send more heavy oil, expulsion by North Korea of the IAEA inspectors and North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. North Korea not only maintained the HEU program but also reopened the Yongbyon reactor, resuming production of plutonium.

In a real sense, North Korea fulfilled the fears expressed by President George W. Bush in what came to be known as his "axis-of-evil" address in January 2002 in which he slipped in the line that North Korea, Iran and Iraq "constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." "By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger," he warned. "They could provide

these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred,” and “could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States.”

By sending U.S. troops into Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein, Bush eliminated Iraq from membership in this exclusive club of three miscreant states. The question of whether he had been justified in seeing Saddam Hussein’s regime as posing a nuclear threat became the focal point of extensive testimony in Washington. If the invasion of Iraq could not be justified, there was still no question of the existence of a two-way relationship between Iran and North Korea in which Iran provided the expertise, and fuel rods, needed for the North’s HEU program. Similarly, North Korea provided Iran with nuclear expertise as well as Scud and Rodong missiles manufactured in North Korea for its own forces and for markets in the Middle East and North Africa, also including Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen.

Inspiration for Reunification: the Essential Difference between the Libyan and Korean Cases

The motivation to earn badly needed funds and acquire expertise is quite different from the nuclear threat wielded as a device to bring about reunification of the Korean peninsula under the control of the Kim dynasty. Here the North Korean case differs markedly from that of Libya, whose leader, Gaddafi, was interested in the security of his regime as well as prestige and power but not necessarily aggression toward neighboring countries. Had the Kim dynasty not been influenced by the overwhelming desire to reunify the country, compensating for the bitter disappointment of the failure of the Korean War, its leaders might well have been far more open to massive foreign aid than was Gaddafi. North Korea might also have been spared the disastrous famine of the mid-1990s had funds for nuclear development been invested instead in importing emergency food shipments needed to stave off a tragedy in which as many as two million North Koreans died of disease and famine.

Unlike Gaddafi, Kim dynastic dictators established their rule as a religion, a substitute for Christianity, which had been extremely influential in all Korea, especially in the North, where Pyongyang was known as a “city of churches” and “Jerusalem of the East” right up to the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Evidence of the establishment of the Kim family rulers as substitute figures for God and Christ lies in the formulation of the North Korean state religion of “*juche*” or self-reliance in which Kim rulers are idolized as deities.

Victor Cha, with the National Security Council during the presidency of George W. Bush, got at the essential difference between the Libyan and Korean cases in the period just before Gaddafi made his grand concession to western pressure. His question was not directly related to Gaddafi but to the reasoning behind the extraordinary, consistently belligerent attitude of the Kim dynasty as it pressed ahead with the development of nuclear weapons even before the crisis that led to the 1994 Geneva framework agreement. “I take the primary agent of the DPRK ‘threat’ in the post-cold war era -- the nuclear weapons program -- and seek to explain the context of DPRK weaponization,” Cha wrote. “In short, are these weapons basically built out of insecurity, metaphorically as shields to ensure against acts by the United States and others to crush the regime? Or are they swords built for aggressive and revisionist purposes? Or are these programs essentially badges or symbols of prestige for an otherwise bankrupt regime?”¹⁴

Implications for Future of Korean Peninsula

North Korea’s nuclear program appears to be advancing steadily, perhaps rapidly. Of greatest significance is the ease and swiftness with which North Korean scientists, physicists and engineers are able to produce a nuclear warhead small enough to fix to the tip of an inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM). It is that ambition that has aroused the deepest concerns in the United States and other countries. North Korea has demonstrated in repeated tests the ability to fire short-and-mid-range missiles that would be capable of hitting targets anywhere in South Korea and almost anywhere in Japan. A number of North Korean missile tests have been failures, resulting in explosions soon after launch, but successes now outnumber the failures, and there is no doubt North Korea will be able to perfect the technology and engineering needed to conquer structural problems.

North Korea’s avowed aim in firing missiles that land in waters within Japan’s exclusion zone is to prove its capability of striking American bases, the majority of them clustered in the southern island prefecture of Okinawa and as far south as the American territory of Guam. The ability of North Korean missiles to strike desired targets is far from certain, but Kim Jong-un has boasted of improving accuracy. Most recently, North Korean missiles have been powered by solid rather than liquid fuel, making it far

easier to fire them without long waits during which they might be detected by satellite observation and tracking systems. North Korea has also advanced steadily in its ability to launch intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States. Also, North Korea is advancing in the technology for firing missiles from submarines that could get close to distant shores undetected.

North Korea, having conducted five underground nuclear tests within a ten-year period from 2006 to 2016, is widely expected to be planning a sixth test in 2017. One factor constraining Kim Jong-un from ordering such a test may be pressure exerted by China, especially since President Xi Jinping's meeting with President Donald Trump in Mar-a-Lago in April 2017. Another factor is concern about whether Trump would stage either a pre-emptive strike responding to the possibility of the test of a long-range missile carrying such a device or a retaliatory strike in response to a nuclear test or the test of an ICBM.

Conclusion and Areas for Further Research

This paper highlights the need for further research. Although statistical measurements are difficult to find and not necessarily reliable in highly authoritarian regimes, future research could be conducted to quantify main arguments using, for example, such sources as the Korea Central News Agency in North Korea, reporting statistics that would be inherently unreliable, as well as estimates and analyses by United Nations agencies, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and independent analysts with "think tanks." Also, whether reunification still remains the supreme national task after the introduction of *byungjin* (meaning the armed forces and the economy should strengthen simultaneously) in place of *songun* (military first) by Kim Jong-un needs to be studied.

The future, in short, remains highly uncertain. What is clear, however, is that North Korea will not abandon its nuclear-and-missile program despite sanctions and entreaties by foreign powers. It is highly doubtful that steps toward appeasement, such as visits to North Korea by South Korean groups or reopening the Gaeseong Industrial Complex or the Mount Geumgang tourist zone, will decrease the determination of Kim Jong-un, in the footsteps of his father, to insure his country's entry into the "nuclear club" of eight nuclear powers – nine including North Korea.

In considering North Korea's nuclear capabilities, two conclusions are inescapable. North Korea views takeover of South Korea as a primary goal. The purpose is conquest of the rest of the Korean peninsula, not "defense" of the North, which no one is threatening to attack other than in a pre-emptive strike to remove its ability to fire a nuclear warhead. The second conclusion is that the Libyan example had the reverse effect of encouraging North Korea never willingly to relinquish its nuclear capabilities. Libya stands as an example not merely of a failed nuclear state but one whose leader suffered the consequences while Kim Jong-il proudly insisted on brandishing the nuclear threat. Kim Jong-un, heir to his father's throne and legacy, views his country's nuclear program as a sacred trust before which he worships as integral to his power and the power of Korea as a united nation under Kim dynastic rule.

¹ Nicholas Eberstadt, "From 'Engagement' to Threat Reduction: Moving toward a North Korea Strategy That Works" (Statement prepared before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations On "Confronting the North Korea Threat: Reassessing Policy Options," January 31, 2017), p. 5.

² Tiran Rothman, *A State's Choice: Nuclear Policy in a Changing World Between Libya and North Korea* (Defense and Security Analysis, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2007), p. 298.

³ Bruce E. Bechtol Jr., *The Last Days of Kim Jong-il: The North Korean Threat in a Changing Era* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2010), p. 97.

⁴ Rothman, p. 311.

⁵ George Quester, *The Politics of Nuclear Proliferation* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

⁶ Scott D. Sagan, *Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb* (International Security Vol. 21, No. 3, 1996-1997): pp. 54-86.

⁷ Campbell, Kurt M., Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell Reiss, *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p.20.

⁸ Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 1-20.

⁹ Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scar: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 47.

¹⁰ Jacques E. C. Hymans, *Why Do States Acquire Nuclear Weapons? Comparing the Cases of India and France* (New York:

Nuclear India in the Twenty-First Century, D. R. SarDesai and Raju G. C. Thomas, eds., 2002), pp. 139-160;

_____, *Theories of nuclear proliferation: The state of the field*, (Nonproliferation Review 13, No. 3, 2006), pp.

455-465; _____, *Assessing North Korean Nuclear Intentions and Capacities: A New Approach* (Journal of East

Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 259-292.; Jacques E. C. Hymans, *Why Do States Acquire Nuclear Weapons? Comparing the Cases of India and France* (New York: Nuclear India in the Twenty-First Century, D. R. SarDesai and Raju G. C. Thomas, eds., 2002), pp.

139-160.

¹¹ William C. Potter & Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, *An Introduction to Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century* (Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century. Vol. 2: A Comparative Perspective), pp. 13-41.

¹² Nicholas Eberstadt, p. 3.

¹³ Habib, Benjamin (2011) 'North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and the maintenance of the Songun system', *The Pacific Review*, 24: 1, p. 46; Habib cites Pinkston, D. (2006) 'North Korea's foreign policy towards the United States', *Strategic Insights* V(7): p. 3.

¹⁴ Victor D. Cha, *North Korea's Weapons of Mass Destruction: Badges, Shields, or Swords?* (Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 117, No. 2, 2002), p. 211.