The threat from North Korea is likely to continue with the apparent absence of any intent or interest in giving up its nuclear ambitions in the near future. North Korean provocations are likely to feature conventional weapons backed up by Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal to deter any Korean and U.S. response against the North. Overall, there is a possibility of further military challenges from the North and a more unstable situation on the Korean peninsula, especially during the succession period apparently underway in North Korea. Therefore, resolving the North Korean nuclear issue through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) could help the resumption of the Six-Party Talks (6PT). However, the complex and intermingled goals of the 6PT are further limited by the new uranium enrichment program. During the present deadlock in these talks, Korea should support the activities of the UNSC and North Korea Sanctions Committee, strongly encourage the resumption of the 6PT, and make all diplomatic efforts to focus international pressure on Pyongyang aimed at making it cease disrupting regional security or furthering its nuclear ambitions. The best policy towards North Korea is a peaceful solution of the nuclear crisis through the UNSC together with the 6PT.

Introduction

The security environment of the Korean peninsula remains unstable and North Korea continues to threaten South Korea with nuclear arms as well as conventional weapons. It would be preferable for the South Korean government to play the leading role in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issues, rather than through the U.N. or other international organizations. In order to do so successfully, South Korea might need U.S. support. However, in reality, there are considerable limitations in doing so. In this regard, this paper examines an alternative strategy for Seoul, in case the situation does not provide satisfactory answers to the North Korean nuclear issue.

It should be remembered that no formal peace treaty was signed to end the Korean War and North Korea has not substantially changed its behavior over the past 60 years. Excerpts from the annual Defense White Papers show that the North Korean military threat continues:

• 1992 to 1993: The security environment on the Korean peninsula entered an impor-
tant transitional period, as the Cold War era characterized by animosity and confrontation was replaced with the spirit of coexistence and co-prosperity.

- 1996 to 1997: The security situation on the Korean peninsula in the 1990s moved toward the end of competition between North Korea and South Korea, though some tension occasionally appeared due to the death of Kim Il Sung and the North Korean nuclear issue.\(^1\)

- 2000: Despite the newly emerging atmosphere of reconciliation on the peninsula and positive diplomatic movements, it was too early to conclude that the North Korean military had given up on its longstanding strategy of communizing the South through force and fully given over to an open-door policy with the outside world. The best assessment was that this was only the beginning phase.\(^2\)

- 2004: Even in the aftermath of the inter-Korean summit, North Korea remained unchanged militarily. Since its adoption of the “Four-point Military Guidelines” as the backbone of its military policy in 1962, North Korea had completed its war preparation over an extended period of time. The country was believed to be maintaining its existing military policy for the time being.\(^3\)

- 2008: In terms of military strength, North Korea continued to maintain its huge conventional military power and to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This military capability poses a threat to peace on the Korean Peninsula and to the general security of the region.\(^4\)

As long as North Korea stays the same, the prospects for peace and security in the region will remain fragile and the South will still be vulnerable to surprise attacks by the North. Unless Korea and the international community are ready to deal with such provocations, we cannot expect stability in the region. War or peace on the Korean peninsula is dependent on the approaches followed in dealing with North Korea’s military threat. For instance, the attacks on the naval corvette Cheonan and the western Island of Yeonpyeong demonstrated the ever-present reality of the North Korean threat.

In terms of the nuclear issue, the Geneva Accord of 1994 between North Korea and the United States provided the North with time to militarize the plutonium extracted from a nuclear reactor and to increase its uranium enrichment facilities. Although the Six-Party Talks (6PT) have been ongoing since 2003, they have achieved no significant progress. Korea, the United States and Japan have justifiable doubts about the North’s sincerity of denuclearization and the effectiveness of the 6PT in resolving the nuclear issue.

It is extremely difficult to predict the future of North Korea and impossible to know what will change North Korea’s behavior. Pyongyang is trying to acquire nuclear power status by making more atomic bombs and developing inter-continental ballistic missiles.\(^5\) North Korea conducted a nuclear test in 2006 and again in 2009; in addition, it conducted long-range missile tests in 1998, 2006, and 2009. “The North is believed to have at least several nuclear weapons, with some experts saying it may have already developed nuclear warheads small enough to be mounted on ballistic missiles.”\(^6\)

North Korea wants to hold bilateral talks with the United States in a bid to negotiate nuclear disarmament and call for the removal of the U.S. nuclear umbrella over the South.\(^7\) However, the United States will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state. “The U.S. position on the DPRK has remained constant: we will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons power,” Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said in a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.\(^8\)