

Predicting the North Korea Policy of the Obama Administration: A Neo-Perry Process in the Offing?*

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- I. Introduction
- II. An Analytical Guide
- III. A Neo-Perry Process : A Likely Course
- IV. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to predict the North Korea policy the Obama administration is most likely to pursue during the first two years in office by carefully assessing and evaluating the actions taken and interpreting the statements made by key foreign policy decision makers in the administration. Serious consideration will also be given to structural constraints at various levels under which the Obama administration will have to operate. The paper concludes that when the rocket-launch-created-dust settles down, Obama, out of his conviction for strategic-pragmatism, and political, economic, and strategic necessity, seems likely to make powerful but prudent overtures to North Korea in his early years in office under the Neo-Perry Process framework that reflects years of U.S. experiences with North Korea.

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I. Introduction

President Barack Obama has come into office at a time of crisis and opportunity. Whether the Obama administration can successfully harmonize national priorities, such as a rapid economic recovery, with external concerns, such as relations with Iran and North Korea, will have significant political, economic, and strategic ramifications for not only the United States but also the rest of the world. This paper investigates the U.S.-North Korea struggle over the 'nuclear problem' that persisted for the past seventeen years defying various U.S.-led initiatives to resolve it. The U.S. has been a major player in the nuclear game on the Korean peninsula with enormous military capabilities and political leadership.

Therefore, it is plausible to ask whether a new administration in the U.S. can change the stalemated negotiations.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to predict the North Korea policy of the U.S. under President Obama. My attempt is not ambitious enough to predict the particular policies of the U.S. It will not tell us a certain move the U.S. is likely to make this coming Thursday. It seems, actually, impossible to explain and predict the "wayward path of a falling leaf"¹⁾ given the dynamic

nature of the bilateral relations between the U.S. and North Korea in general, and their fluctuating and inconstant decision making processes in particular. Neither will I be pretentious and make the prediction based on a very long term and abstract likelihood. Instead, I intend to predict the policy the Obama administration is most likely to pursue during the first two years in office by carefully assessing and evaluating the actions taken and interpreting the statements made by key foreign policy decision makers in the administration. I will also give my serious consideration to structural constraints at various levels under which the Obama administration will have to operate.

II. An Analytical Guide

The Obama administration's North Korea policy making process will be driven basically by the President's philosophical views on international politics and international/domestic constraints that limit his policy options. Understanding the inter-relationship between these two variables is also crucial in predicting the policy because "the structure selects," in the Waltzian sense, and at the same time, the perceived viability of the options can change depending on the philosophy of the decision maker. In the following sections, these issues will be discussed in some depth.

It seems reasonable to suggest that U.S.'s key allies in Northeast

1) Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading, MA, 1979, p. 121.

Asia will play a role. But, it is argued in this paper that these nations will try to influence the policy process, but, the impact will not be significant in terms of challenging the U.S. course. They may even synchronize their policies with that of the U.S. The case of South Korea can be taken as an example. South Korea's North Korea policy has steadily changed since the launching of the 'No-Nuclear, Opening-Up, 3000' program that reminded of the policy of the first-term Bush administration. It now embraces such notions as "mutual benefits and common prosperity."²⁾ The reason for the change appears to be related to the poverty of the hardline policy itself and the inauguration of the Obama administration in the U.S. It seems more important for the Lee government to be in sync with the U.S. than to pursue a policy of reciprocity toward the North. 'No-Nuclear, Opening-Up, 3000' program was actually an attempt to forge a unified front with the U.S. under the Bush administration. It appears pretty inconceivable for the Lee government to pursue an independent policy that would not only leave South Korea diplomatically isolated but also put him in a disadvantaged position in domestic politics. The South Korea-Japan coalition is also improbable considering that it is likely to politically backfire in South Korea and that the bilateral cooperation will certainly be the worst combination from the North Korean standpoint. The Obama administration will initially try a strong engagement policy toward the North. The U.S. will provide its Asian allies with face-savers and they will tacitly follow its initiative.

2) <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng/default.jsp?pgname=POLpolicy>.

Obama's Strategic-Pragmatism

The Obama administration's North Korea policy is likely to be based on what I would call a strategic-pragmatism. Pragmatism involves weighing costs and benefits and calculating probabilities, with a particular emphasis on consequences. A typical example of pragmatism in international politics is put forth by Hans Morgenthau, one of the best known conservative "realists," when he stresses that successful diplomacy should be divested of the "crusading spirit"; one must stay in touch with reality and keep the objective of foreign policy defined in terms of the "substance of real advantage."³⁾ Obama's approach is likely to be based on Morgenthau's maxims and guided by such notions as 'realistic' and 'pragmatic.' The view that the North Korea policy of the Obama administration will be pragmatic seems to be quite well warranted by Obama's speech at the Democratic Convention in 2004 that instantly made him a great national political figure.

"Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us—the spin masters, the negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of 'anything goes.' Well, I say to them tonight, there is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America. There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America."⁴⁾

There is a wealth of evidence that supports the claim that

3) Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Thompson, and David Clinton, *Politics Among Nations*, McGraw-Hill, 2005.

4) Barack Obama, 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, delivered 27 July 2004, Fleet Center, Boston.

Obama emphasizes the importance of 'interests' in executing U.S. foreign policy.⁵⁾ Aside from his pragmatic foreign policy philosophy, there is a political reason for Obama to stress his pragmatism. Obama represents "the change we can believe in." He needs to show to the United States and the rest of the world that he is different and better than George W. Bush who was perceived to be 'over-ideological' in his handling of foreign affairs. Obama may not be interested in using the 'ABB(Anything but Bush)' tactics. But, he is, after all, a politician. And, he will likely be forced by domestic political processes to use the option that his predecessor had used eight years ago.

Obama's inclination to a pragmatic foreign policy seems evident in his choice of key players in the administration's foreign policy-security team. He brought in Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates, and James Jones. "All three were on the opposite side from Obama on the defining foreign policy decision of the past decade: whether to invade Iraq." As Tumulty and Thompson suggests, these individuals "might have seemed more obvious choices had John McCain won the White House."⁶⁾ Obama's 'Team of Rivals' is another piece of evidence indicating that his foreign policy will be pragmatic. George W. Bush, who was uncomfortable with diversity, tended to

5) A prime example is Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007. Another good example is his statement that during his first year as president he would be willing to meet with leaders of nations that are hostile to the U.S., such as Iran, North Korea and Cuba with which George W. Bush even refused to negotiate during the early years in office. Transcript, Democratic Presidential Debate in Charleston, S.C., July 23, 2007.

6) Karen Tumulty and Mark Thompson, "A New World Order," *Time*, December 15, 2008.

surround himself with like-minded ideologues. Discordant voices, such as a Colin Powell, did not have his ear. Obama's "realist" rivals will help him keep his policy balance.

However, based on the readings of speeches and documents he produced, Obama's approach will be more than a 'value-free' calculation of immediate costs and benefits. After all, he is a man of strong opinions and values. He is a man who cherishes 'the audacity of hope,'⁷⁾ and is proud of playing the role of spreading American values throughout the world, not by force, but by setting an example.

He will surely consider democratic principles and humanistic values as the fundamental bases from which every U.S. foreign policy, or public policy for that matter, should be derived. But, at the same time, he will appreciate the importance of prioritizing the issues, and distinguishing between what can be accomplished now and what can be achieved in the future. He will embrace the wisdom that problems that are intractable now will become far easier to solve thanks to the accumulation of prior accomplishments. Thus, Obama's approach is closely linked to principles and values insofar as the collected pragmatic achievements will work together to contribute to the realization and promotion of such principles and values. It is in this sense that Obama's approach is 'strategic' as well as pragmatic.

Options for the United States

7) Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, Vintage, 2008.

Obama, as a strategic-pragmatist, will have to consider options available to the U.S. when he thinks about his North Korea policy. What he will immediately realize will be the lack of viable alternatives.⁸⁾ This constraint will be one of the most important factors that define the scope of policy actions and limit the policy maneuverability. Let us consider options available to the U.S.

One of the approaches that the Obama administration could pursue is inaction to preserve a status quo. The result would be a nuclear North Korea with all the unpleasant consequences. The nuclear materials/weapons the North has already produced pose a threat to the security of the U.S. with regard to global terrorism, but a nuclear North Korea would also make nations hosting U.S. troops (namely, Korea and Japan) vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. It may trigger a nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia, thereby impairing the various U.S. commercial interests in the region and damaging the non-proliferation regime that has long been a cornerstone of U.S. security policy for the last several decades. Furthermore, it may cause Iran to go nuclear, which is likely to increase the unwanted possibility of nuclear exchanges with Israel. Other nations in the Middle East and Europe may also develop or beef up their nuclear deterrent capabilities, which would lead to even more unpredictable and frightening regional and global consequences. Moreover, the threat to the U.S. will be greatly amplified by the potential development of North Korean ballistic missiles, which have the capability to reach major cities in the

8) Options discussed here have been addressed in Kun Young Park, "Explaining the United States' Approach to the North Korean Nuclear Disputes," *Korea Journal*, Winter 2005.

western U.S. The worst case scenario would be a North Korean nuclear attack on the U.S. resulting from the belief that it was about to be attacked in a 'preemptive war.'

Another option is for the U.S. to bring more pressure on North Korea, for example, referring the issue to the UN Security Council for sanctions. But the U.S. knows that the Council did not even condemn Pyongyang for pulling out of the NPT in 2003. Japan may join the U.S. sanction effort. But these two nations have already been sanctioning the North. The effect would be similar to 'not giving meat to a Buddhist monk.' Worse than that, pressure will increase the North Korean people's suffer and strengthen the pretext Kim will use to solidify his principle of "the Military-First Politics."

Another alternative approach is regime change, which received the lion's share of attention(especially from U.S. hardliners).⁹⁾ But, the mainstream at the White House and the State Department under Obama seems to understand that any external pressure short of a military attack is not likely to cause a regime change in North Korea. Currently, no significantly potent group exists to rebel against the "sun of the nation." Even if an external pressure could cause a regime change, it would most likely bring about a civil war, and the loss of central control would leave North Korean

9) For example, just days before President Bush approved the opening of negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear program, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld circulated to key members of the administration a Pentagon memorandum proposing that "the United States should team up with China to press for the ouster of North Korea's leadership." David Sanger, "Administration Divided Over North Korea." *The New York Times*, April 21, 2003.

WMD in the hands of unscrupulous domestic factions. This would result in potentially horrible consequences including the selling of the WMD to “rogues.” North Korean desperation and dysfunction would increase this possibility.¹⁰⁾

Still, another alternative is surgical strikes against suspected nuclear installations in North Korea. But the U.S. does not know the location of the alleged uranium enrichment program, a necessity for carrying out the strikes. And, the collateral damage that the strikes would cause, including that of radioactive fallout, would be enormous.

There is a high probability that the North would retaliate to strikes, causing a war on the peninsula. The nations in the region, particularly China and South Korea, might even try to obstruct U.S. war efforts for strategic, economic, and political reasons. China may dislike Kim Jong Il, but it has to help him in order to avoid a flood of refugees that would have a disastrous effect on Chinese social and economic order. China also recognizes the expected harm to its reputation, at home and abroad, if it failed to protect its sole military ally, given the Chinese leadership's favorite claim of having a relationship as close as ‘lips-to-teeth’ when describing the bilateral relationship with North Korea.

China also worries about the “infiltration of U.S. influence in Northeast Asia.” The Chinese government has always maintained

10) Mark Landler, “North Korea Says It Will Halt Talks and Restart Its Nuclear Program,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2009.

that the outbreak of another Korean War would seriously jeopardize China's national security. A more serious consequence of a war would be that "if the U.S. eventually occupies North Korea, it will in effect complete the U.S. encirclement of China."¹¹⁾ South Korea is also not likely to cooperate with the U.S. in a military strike. It may even show resistance so as not to allow the U.S. to risk South Korean lives. The alliance would then sharply deteriorate. The Chinese influence in Northeast Asia, as a result, would be greatly expanded at the expense of the U.S. A war would also put a large number of Americans, who are living and working in Korea, in harm's way. If North Korea has nuclear weapons, it might use them in a war, perhaps killing millions of people in South Korea; Japan would also be at risk.

Although the U.S. is capable of pursuing any of these alternatives, each of these approaches is likely to result in having only limited effects, or result in grave consequences that the U.S. may not be ready to face. The economic crisis and the financial constraint the U.S. government is currently experiencing will surely play a role in lowering the possibility that the U.S. would exercise its military power in order to solve the North Korean problem.

III. A Neo-Perry Process: A Likely Course

It seems plausible to argue, based on the preceding discussion,

11) Zong Hairen, "Hu Jintao writes to Kim Jong-il open door to six-party talks," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, August 28, 2003.

that the Obama administration's policy toward North Korea will be some reformulated or reconstructed 'Perry Process' that the Clinton administration pursued until George W. Bush took office. It will, of course, reflect the changed global, regional, and domestic environments and conditions including the economic crises(both in the U.S. and North Korea) and the increased nuclear and other military capabilities of the North. It seems reasonable to suggest, given that President Obama himself has a strong belief in the virtue and effectiveness of diplomacy and that there is no other viable option, that what can be called a 'Neo-Perry Process' will be at the core of the Obama administration's North Korea policy.

The gist of the Neo-Perry Process will be the U.S. proposal that the normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations will be simultaneously exchanged for the DPRK's complete dismantlement of its nuclear programs. In any serious peace negotiations, it is imperative that one side should be assured that its security will not be threatened by the other. In a more specific and relevant context, the Perry Report of 1999 is very instructive when suggesting that "United States policy must deal with the North Korean government as it is, not as the U.S. might wish it to be" and that "the U.S. should initiate negotiations with the DPRK based on the concept of mutually reducing threat."¹²⁾ In fact, North Korea has claimed that its security has been threatened by the U.S.'s hostile North Korea policy, while the U.S. has been seriously worried about the North's

12) "Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations," Unclassified Report by Dr. William J. Perry, U.S. North Korea Policy Coordinator and Special Advisor to the President and the Secretary of State, Washington, DC, October 12, 1999.

nuclear materials and weapons. North Korea has always suggested that its security would be attained only when it normalizes its relations with the U.S. and that the security it attains will relieve it of the necessity to possess nuclear deterrent capability. The U.S. has been persistently demanding the complete dismantlement of the North's nuclear programs. Importantly in this context, the Obama administration believes that the Bush administration did not make a serious attempt to test North Korea's intentions. For the former, the give-and-take type of solution may seem reasonable. Of course, there is a question about "when is the appropriate timing of the diplomatic normalization" given that the complete denuclearization will take years. This is an important question, but, at the same time, a technical one that the two nations can adequately address if there is a political will. Obama seems to have the will.

Under the framework of the Neo-Perry Process, the Obama administration is likely to address the North Korean nuclear questions with powerful incentives that it believes will not only have a great and positive impact on the negotiation process but also produce a solution within a relatively short period of time. Obama needs to show that he is right with his belief in pragmatic diplomacy, that he is capable of solving difficult security problems as a commander-in-chief (many, including Clinton and McCain, said he would not), and to avoid losing his supporters who were already fed up with the previous administrations' long but futile attempts to bring about a solution to the problem. In order to predict how the Obama administration will address the North Korean nuclear problems, a careful look at the list of contentious issues is necessary.

The Current Address of the Problem and the Neo-Perry Process

There are four major issues: (1) plutonium (2) nuclear weapons (3) enriched uranium and (4) the Syrian connection. On the first issue, David Albright, a scientist who enjoys confidence from both ends of the American political spectrum, is cautiously optimistic. According to him, North Korea provided the U.S. with an initial declaration that indicated that the North separated 30 kilograms of plutonium. Albright suggests that “30 kilograms is at the lower end of the range of plutonium that the U.S. has assessed North Korea could have separated.”¹³⁾ North Korea acknowledged, more recently, in the final declaration that it extracted 37 kilograms of plutonium.¹⁴⁾

Second, the North Korean declaration did not include information on nuclear weapons. The Bush administration suggested that it should be able to infer the quantity and quality of the nuclear weapons the North supposedly possesses upon verifying the 18,000 page declaration that included North Korean nuclear activities since 1986. The Bush security team believed that the declaration on the nuclear weapons and their dismantlement would be the most important issue to be addressed in the next phase of the negotiations.¹⁵⁾

Third, there is a problem concerning the uranium enrichment program, the existence of which North Korea denied in the declaration

13) Albright, David and Jacqueline Shire. 2008. “Slowly, but Surely, Pyongyang Is Moving,” *The Washington Post*, January 24.

14) Cooper, Helene. 2008. “U.S. may have overestimated North Korea’s plutonium,” *The International Herald Tribune*, May 31.

15) “Bush orders easing of sanctions against North Korea,” CNN: [http:// edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/06/26/us.nkorea/index.html?eref=edition](http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/06/26/us.nkorea/index.html?eref=edition).

(as it had denied over the few past years). Albright suggests that the Bush administration “misread(at best) or hyped information that North Korea had a large-scale uranium enrichment program.” According to him, North Korea acquired components for a centrifuge-enrichment program, but it is highly unlikely that it developed enrichment capabilities in the manner once claimed by the Bush administration.¹⁶⁾

Fourth, there was an accusation that North Korea had a nuclear connection to Syria a well-known neocon declared that Damascus had joined the axis of evil.¹⁷⁾ Yet, Albright states that “accusations in the Israeli media that North Korea transferred plutonium to Syria, where it was to be placed into bombs, are baseless.” He reasons that North Korea and Syria understood well that the transfer of nuclear material for weapons would be a *casus belli* with dangerous consequences for both.¹⁸⁾

The latest round of six-party talks aimed at denuclearizing North Korea ended December 11, 2008 in stalemate because North Korea refused to agree in writing that verification of its nuclear activities will include scientific sampling. The North insisted that “it is only required at this point to carry out the limited verification steps agreed in writing with the United States in October 2008, which did not include sampling provisions.”¹⁹⁾

16) Albright and Shire(2008).

17) John R. Bolton, “Syria Joins the Axis of Evil Article,” The Wall Street Journal, September 25, 2007.

18) Albright and Shire(2008).

19) Peter Crail, “Six-Party Talks Stall Over Sampling,” Arms Control Today, January/February 2009.

Given the current state of the North Korean nuclear row, how would the Obama administration respond under the framework of the Neo-Perry Process? First, as for the verification protocol, the Obama administration is likely to accept that the agreement on sampling will be negotiated in the third phase of the denuclearization road map.²⁰⁾ This would seem realistic to the Obama administration considering that the sampling may instantly reveal what the North might have wanted to conceal before getting a security guarantee from the U.S. In fact, despite the lack of agreement on sampling during the last talks, then Secretary of State Rice predicted that the North would agree to acceptable verification measures. She stated in December 19, 2008 that "within the context of the six-party talks, you ultimately will get a verification protocol that allows us to deal with a lot of very troubling activities."²¹⁾ North Korea appears to have left the door open to a written agreement once the October 2007 agreement has been fully implemented. A November 14 statement by a North Korean

20) North Korea objected to visits to undeclared facilities. And, the Obama administration is not likely to pursue this avenue. Under the proposal, heavily influenced by the State Department's arms control experts, the U.S. requested "full access to all materials" at sites that might have had a nuclear purpose in the past. However, this "sweeping" proposal did not get the support from China, Russia, and other countries. It even deeply split the Bush administration. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill was opposed to making such an opening bid, but he was overruled at higher levels. David Albright said it would be "completely unacceptable to any country's sovereignty" and amounted to "a verification wish list" and "a license to spy on any military site they have." Glenn Kessler, "Far-Reaching U.S. Plan Impaired N. Korea Deal: Demands Began to Undo Nuclear Accord." *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2008.

21) Interview, "Rice Defends Regime Change in Iraq, Stresses Diplomacy Elsewhere," Council on Foreign Relations, December 19, 2008. http://www.cfr.org/publication/18048/rice_defends_regime_change_in_iraq_stresses_diplomacy_elsewhere.html.

Foreign Ministry official explained that the written verification agreement defines “the way and scope of verification ... at the phase of disablement” and suggested that Pyongyang may be willing to address the question of sampling in the third and ostensibly final phase of the negotiations.²²⁾

Second, concerning the nuclear weapons that North Korea is believed to possess, the Obama administration will try hard to remove them. However, it understands that the threat is more political and psychological rather than purely military. Of course, as discussed above, the North Korean possession of nuclear weapons may lead to the collapse of the NPT system. But, probably the greater concern for the Obama administration would be the threat perceptions held by American taxpayers. The nuclear threat from an “evil regime,” whether it is real/imminent or not, will surely have a chilling psychological effect on the minds of ordinary Americans and it would be politically irresponsible if the government is not protecting them from that threat. But, many in the Obama security team appear to believe that North Korea, even if it has nuclear weapons that can reach American soil, would not fire them at the U.S. unless it was forced. Dennis C. Blair, the Director of National Intelligence, is one of the officials who believe this.²³⁾ But, politics and perceptions are far more important. The

22) Crail(2009).

23) Dennis Blair says the North Korea's small nuclear arsenal is more for deterrence, international prestige and coercive diplomacy. North Korea will not likely use its nuclear weapons unless it feels its security is at risk, the chief U.S. intelligence official said Thursday. Pyongyang probably views its nuclear weapons as being more for deterrence and coercive diplomacy than for warfighting. Dennis C. Blair, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee*

Obama administration will make a serious effort to this end.

There is a concern, though, that North Korea will never abandon its nuclear weapons and programs even if the U.S. normalizes relations with it. There were a lot in the Bush administration having this doubt. There are many people in the Obama administration who share this view. They tend to believe that the North thinks that it can “have a cake and eat it too.” The U.S. humiliating concession regarding the BDA issue is often cited as an example that caused such North Korean “illusion.” But it seems that, in the Obama administration, more people tend to acknowledge the fact that the North has a capability now to make nuclear weapons (such as nuclear technology, natural resources, and relevant scientists/engineers), and that if the North were required to reconstitute a nuclear weapons program for any reason after its dismantlement, it could do so far more quickly than several years ago. This means that the North has little to lose by dismantling its existing nuclear weapons program if it views that the normalization will bring about significant security and other benefits.²⁴⁾

on Intelligence, February 12, 2009.

24) North Korea made it clear that while it is willing to abide by 'verifiable dismantling of nuclear programs and facilities' in return for incentives specified in February 13 agreement, it is not going to abandon its nuclear weapons unless the U.S. removes its nuclear umbrella from South Korea. The North seems to use this card to gain bargaining leverage. The U.S. provision of extended nuclear deterrence for South Korea is the 'political' core of their mutual defense treaty. And, Kim Jong Il acknowledged in June 2000 that the U.S. Forces in Korea[and South Korea-U.S. mutual defense treaty] would play a stabilizing role in Northeast Asia, according to former President Kim Dae-jung. In March 1992, Kim Yong Sun, then-international secretary of the Labor Party of North Korea said to Arnold Kantor, then-Undersecretary of State, that the North would no longer demand the withdrawal of the U.S. Forces in South Korea. In 1995, Kim Yung Nam, then-Foreign Minister

Third, there is a question about a uranium enrichment program. This is a very important strategic, military, political, and moral question for the U.S. and the Obama administration. As is well known, this is a problem that undermined the Clinton administration's Agreed Framework and, thus, started the second North Korean nuclear crisis. On the other hand, there is ambiguity in the problem with potentially great moral implications. The Bush administration said that North Korea had admitted to possessing it. North Korea said that it is a fabrication.

The most important question that the Obama administration would ask regarding this issue will be whether the highly enriched uranium program (HEUP) that the Bush administration accused North Korea of having in October 2002 (and secretly developing for military purposes) was serious and threatening enough to nullify the Agreed Framework. Recently, there emerged evidence that throws doubt on the integrity of the Bush administration's decision. On February 27, 2007, at a hearing at the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Joseph DeTrani, the mission manager for North Korea with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, told Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island:

Senator Reed: Do you have any further indication of whether that program has progressed in the last six years, 1 or 2? The evidence—the credibility of the evidence that we had initially suggesting they had a program rather than aspirations?

confirmed the North Korean position. Selig Harrison, "Promoting a Soft Landing in Korea," *Foreign Policy*, No. 106, Spring 1997, pp.72-74.

Mr. DeTrani: Sir, we had high confidence. The assessment was with high confidence that, indeed, they were making acquisitions necessary for, if you will, a production-scale program. And we still have confidence that the program is in existence—at the mid-confidence level, yes, sir.²⁵⁾

Under the intelligence agencies' own definitions, the mid-confidence level “means the information is interpreted in various ways, we have alternative views” or it is “not fully corroborated.”²⁶⁾ On February 28, 2009, Christopher Hill, the chief American negotiator with North Korea, testified at the House Foreign Affairs committee that “If we determine that there is a program, it’s got to go.”²⁷⁾ This stance was far more “tentative” than American policy makers have taken about the program up until then.²⁸⁾

The Obama administration will have a need to find the truth on this issue for some significant reasons. It cannot completely solve the North Korean nuclear problem without identifying its source. And, since both parties accused each other of lying, the party who turns out to be a liar will suffer a severe blow in terms of integrity and moral leadership. In fact, the original assessment about North Korean HEUP came during the same period that the Bush administration was building its case about Iraq’s unconventional weapons programs, which turned out to be based on flawed intelligence.²⁹⁾ No less important, it involves domestic politics. If it

25) Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, “Current and Future Worldwide Threats to the National Security of the United States,” February 27, 2007.

26) David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, “U.S. Concedes Uncertainty on North Korean Uranium Effort,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2007.

27) Hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, “North Korea, the February 13 Agreement,” February 28, 2007.

28) Sanger and Broad(2007).

turns out that the Bush administration exaggerated and/or distorted the information in question to serve its political purposes, the Obama administration will easily reap a great political benefit by acknowledging the wrongdoings committed by the Republican administration, and at the same time, showing Americans and others that the Obama Democratic administration is honest and courageous, deserving respect and admiration. Secretary Clinton's statement on the North Korean uranium enrichment program is quite suggestive when she said:

There is a debate within the intelligence community as to exactly the extent of the highly-enriched-uranium program.³⁰⁾

In a slap at her predecessors, Clinton made it clear she believes that the Bush administration's decision to walk away from the Agreed Framework helped create the current crisis over North Korea's stash of nuclear weapons.³¹⁾ The Obama administration will investigate the cause of the second North Korean nuclear crisis. The investigation is likely to produce a solution to the problem of uranium enrichment that would allow the North the face-saver, while providing the administration with political and other benefits.

Finally, the question about the nuclear connection between North Korea and Syria that David Albright considers baseless is relatively easy to solve. The administration can conduct an investigation on the accusations in the Israeli media. As for the

29) Sanger and Broad(2007).

30) Glenn Kessler, "Clinton Criticizes Bush on N. Korea," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 2009.

31) Kessler(2009).

'box in the desert' that Israel bombed in September 2007, it is now gone. What the Obama administration would think important is to make sure that North Korea will not engage in nuclear proliferation in the future.

The Neo-Perry Process approach, based on the overarching notion of a simultaneous exchange of the diplomatic normalization and the denuclearization, and more specific and flexible measures noted above, is what the Obama administration is expected to pursue during the earlier years in Obama's first term. But, in case the Obama administration is willing to stimulate the negotiation process and move forward quickly, it may use the 'ace card' that would make the U.S. offer more credible, convincing, and politically attractive for the North. The ace card is the former President Clinton's visit to Pyongyang. For Kim Jong Il and North Korea, the October 2000 U.S. visit of Cho Myong Rok to sign the U.S.-DPRK joint communiqué was a watershed. The agreement carried existential significance for the North and served as a political symbol indicating the warmest level of relations the two nations had ever known. It was also auspicious timing given the culmination of the Perry Process that year. It is obvious that the North was deeply distressed that President Clinton was not able to visit Pyongyang due to unexpected electoral disputes in the U.S. The Clinton visit, if realized this time, will carry a message that the Obama administration is willing to restore or complete what may be called 'the 2000 regime' between the two nations. North Korea, as said above, will not afford to have this 'golden opportunity redux' pass.

A Possible Response by North Korea

It will be useful to assess the possible response to the U.S.'s Neo-Perry Process by North Korea especially in terms of determining, in advance, the future of the Process. It is difficult to predict how North Korea will react. An educated guess, which is possible by putting oneself in Kim Jong Il's shoes, is that North Korea will want to cut a deal with the U.S.(probably within the framework of the six-party talks) even though there may be months of cooling-down before resumption of the negotiation, given the current tension and uproar in the aftermath of the North's rocket launch.

There are a number of reasons for that prediction. First, as said above, North Korea is already nuclear-capable. The North will be able to reconstitute a nuclear program if deemed necessary. This means that it can abandon the nuclear program if the "price is right." Second, its economic stress will become a heavy political burden for Kim Jong Il. One can argue that Kim enjoys what can be called a 'hostile symbiotic relationship.' But, it seems quite clear that he knows that he can only afford to enjoy it in the short term. Third, the powerful overture by the Obama administration, including a security guarantee through diplomatic normalization, is more substantive, and therefore, more attractive compared with the proposals by the Bush administration. In November 2002, Kim sent Bush a letter saying that "If the United States recognizes our sovereignty and assures non-aggression, it is our view that we should be able to find a way to resolve the nuclear issue in compliance with the demands of a new century." Further, he declared, "If the United States makes a bold decision, we will respond accordingly."³² Fourth, it seems plausible to suggest that

32) Donald Gregg and Don Oberdorfer, "A Moment to Seize With North Korea," *The*

Obama's efforts will resonate well in North Korea just as Carter's did in 1994. Fifth, North Korea surely knows that Obama will take punitive actions against its recalcitrance if it undermines his 'audacious hope' for diplomacy. The Perry Report explicitly suggested that, "if North Korea rejects the diplomatic path, it will not be possible for the U.S. to pursue a new relationship with the North, and that, in that case, the U.S. would have to take other steps to assure its security and contain the threat." In fact, an attractive carrot with the implied threat of a harsh stick was point of the Perry Process. Not less importantly, it will be easy for North Korea to reason that Obama may even overreact for a domestic political reason, given widespread 'perception' in the U.S. that Democrats are 'soft' on security. Sixth, eight years are long enough for 'learning' to take effect. Kim Jong Il might have thought that his interest would have been greatly served if the Clinton visit were realized in 2000. The North Korean leader will not lose the long-awaited opportunity when it comes up. Seventh, China and Russia will have better positions to persuade and/or pressure North Korea given the forward-looking features of the U.S. proposal. The Obama administration's effort to forge international cooperation may also turn out to be effective and facilitative. The reasons provided above seem pretty convincing, although more detailed explanations for those reasons, which need a separate space, may be helpful.

Washington Post, June 22, 2005. The U.S. State Department showed interest in Kim's letter at the time, but the White House received it rather negatively, saying that it would not reward bad behavior.

IV. Conclusion

On April 13, the United Nations Security Council condemned the April 5, 2009 “launch” by the DPRK.³³⁾ North Korea, angered by the U.N.’s rebuke, “resolutely condemned” the U.N. action the next day that it “rampantly infringes upon the country’s sovereignty and severely debases the people’s dignity.” It threatened the world by saying that “We have no choice but to further strengthen our nuclear deterrent to cope with additional military threats by hostile forces,” and that “there is no need for the six-party talks anymore” and that it “will never, ever again take part in such talks and will be bound by any agreement reached at the talks.” Four years ago, on February 10, 2005, the North stated, after Secretary Rice labeled North Korea one of the “outposts of tyranny,” that “We have wanted the six-party talks but we are compelled to suspend our participation in the talks for an indefinite period till we have recognized that there is justification for us to attend the talks and there are ample conditions and atmosphere to expect positive results from the talks.”³⁴⁾ The North came back to the negotiating table in July 2005 because it believed that the “U.S. side clarified its official stand to recognize [North Korea] as a sovereign state, not to invade it and hold bilateral talks within the frame work of the six-party talks.”³⁵⁾

33) Statement by the President of the Security Council, the United Nations. <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/301/03/PDF/N0930103.pdf?OpenElement>.

34) James Brooke, “North Korea Says It Has Nuclear Weapons and Rejects Talks,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2005.

35) Arms Control Association, “Chronology of U.S.- North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” Nuclear/Ballistic Missile Nonproliferation Fact Sheet, June 2008. <http://armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>.

After all, the United States knows that North Korea has history of making blustering statements. At the White House and the State Department, officials seem to be ready to deal with short-term setbacks.³⁶⁾ The Obama administration will have to talk to the North Koreans soon about the American reporters held in the country. It is likely that the talks will lead to the resumption of serious bilateral negotiations on nuclear issues. When the dust settles down, Obama, out of his conviction for strategic- pragmatism, and political, economic, and strategic necessity, seems likely to make powerful but prudent overtures to North Korea in his early years in office under the framework that reflects years of U.S. experiences with North Korea.

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36) Mark Landler, "North Korea Says It Will Halt Talks and Restart Its Nuclear Program," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2009.

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Predicting the North Korea Policy of the Obama Administration: A Neo-Perry Process in the Offing?

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이 글의 목적은 미국 오바마 정부 초기의 대북정책을 예측하는 데 있다. 필자는 오바마 대통령 등 미국 의사결정권자들의 외교안보철학 관련 발언과 행동을 면밀히 검토하고, 미국 정부에게 부과되어 있는 구조적 제약을 고려하며, 나아가 미국의 제한된 대북정책 선택지를 감안하여 일단 적극적인 미국의 외교공세를 예상하였다. 그리고 북한의 경제, 사회, 외교적 현실을 고려할 때 일정한 조정 과정을 거치며 관계정상화와 북핵폐기를 교환하는 북미간 합의가 이루어질 것으로 보았다. 필자는 이러한 과정을 네오-페리프로세스로 명명하면서 오바마 정부의 의지에 따라서는 클린턴 전 대통령이 상당한 추동력을 부여토록 할 수 있다고 예측하였다. 그러나 적극적 대북 외교가 실패하고 있다고 인식되는 경우 오바마 정부는 국내정치를 고려하여 강경한 선택을 불사할 것으로 예상되었다.

주제어 : 북미기본합의, 페리 보고서, 신페리프로세스, 북미공동공무니케(2000), 7.1조치, 고농축우라늄프로그램, "전략적-실용주의"