North Korea's “Military-First” Policy and Inter-Korean Relations

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Abstract

This paper examines change in the North Korean military since the North-South Korea summit talks in June 2000. Although the historic summit talks had positive effects on inter-Korean relations and ROK security, there has not been significant progress in the military sector due to North Korea's insistence on “military bargaining” with the US and its military-focused system.

Despite the series of initiatives taken by North Korean authorities, including improvements in relations with Seoul and with the West, they have not addressed reform of the military-focused system. Pyongyang holds steadfastly to its “juche survival strategy,” maintaining the existing system with a strong central authority and “Military-First” Policy. Although there has been some movement toward improving management of the economy, it is too early to expect meaningful reform and opening along successful Chinese lines.

North Korea is expected to pursue its “strong and prosperous nation” policy by mobilizing internal resources and taking advantage of external aid. This strategy is not only unlikely to succeed but will stifle improvement in North-South Korean relations. Meanwhile, the frequent backtracking on agreements on exchanges and cooperation and the attempt to unilaterally control the direction of any progress may suffocate sympathetic sentiments. It may also affect negatively Pyongyang's drive for better international economic cooperation it regards as necessary to establish a “strong and prosperous nation.”
It has been just over two years since the historic North-South Korea summit talks. There has been considerable change in the intervening period and up to this point the situation on the Korean Peninsula has been comparatively stable. Many observers, in fact, say the prevailing movement is toward peace. Although there has been some controversy regarding the implementation of some security and peace provisions that were stipulated in the June 15, 2000, Joint Declaration, both nations are seen as making progress, albeit with ups and downs.

Despite progress in other areas, however, there is a long way to go in the military arena. There is concern in South Korea about the North's increase in military budget and current level of military training and especially regarding its development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). There has been little progress in achieving practical agreements between the two countries' military authorities or on the management of conventional military forces, let alone on the establishment of a durable peace regime.

The military sector is the ultimate key to improving inter-Korean relations. North and South Korea fought the devastating Korean War and have maintained a tense military confrontation ever since. Efforts toward national community can gain momentum only after South and North Korea reach agreements in principle on peace and security on the peninsula. Political, economic, social and cultural cooperation may end up being meaningless if the military standoff continues. Therefore, substantial progress in relaxing the military tension would be the cornerstone for dismantling the Cold-War structure on the Korean peninsula.

The fierce military standoff that has prevailed for the past 50 years is the biggest hurdle, although there are others, to any substantial progress in inter-Korean relations. North and South Korea have established

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1 There are no specific stipulations concerning security and peace in the “June 15 Joint Declaration.” However, the fact that the two hostile countries held the summit talks at all carries a significant meaning in terms of political confidence building. Item 2, which states that the two Koreas agreed to work for their reunification based on a proposal for federation of lower stage advanced by the North and a proposal for confederation put forth by the South, meaning to maintain the established system, can be viewed as a significant stipulation for peaceful co-existence. In addition, both sides were known to agree to stop mutual slander along the DMZ and to avoid war in the near future.
formidable military forces internally and cultivated alliances with outside powers such as the United States, China and the former Soviet Union in order to achieve their strategic objectives and maintain security. Although historically this structure has contributed to the deterrence of war and establishment of stability on the peninsula, substantial changes should be made now to ease tension and prepare the way for eventual reunification.

North Korea, in particular, has massed much more military power at the border and maintains a higher stage of military alert than the South. North Korea’s 1.17-million-strong regular army and 7.4 million reserve troops represent about 40 percent of its population, and its military economy, called the “second economy,” is equivalent to a remarkable one-quarter of its entire GNP. More significantly, the regime’s “military-first” policy has placed the military at the helm of national crisis management and given it responsibility for maintaining the status quo. That has reinforced the military’s political influence and makes it difficult to disregard the opinion of the military in political decisions. It is hard to envision any substantial progress in inter-Korean relations under the “military-first” policy that currently prevails in North Korea.

This article analyzes the systemic changes in North Korea since the June 2000 summit talks in an effort to determine how North-South Korean relations might be improved. The analysis focuses particularly on the slowly changing military sector and may offer insights for formulating South Korean policies toward North Korea by increasing the understanding of the military sector as the core of the Pyongyang regime.

North Korea’s “Military-First” Policy

The Kim Jong-il Regime and “Strong and Prosperous Nation” Ideology

The North Korean regime was severely shaken by Kim Il Sung’s death in 1994 but is believed to have regained political stability when the Kim Jong-il regime was launched in 1997–98. Furthermore, it appears to have grown stronger with Chairman Kim Jong-il at the helm since the
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inter-Korean summit talks in June 2000. Kim Jong-il is regarded as the future "reunification leader," adding this to his title as as the suryong (leader), the successor of the juche ideology.

The most important objective of the Kim Jong-il regime is survival. It aims to achieve this through economic growth under the slogan "building a strong and prosperous socialist nation through juche." This concept was highlighted for the first time in a Rodong Sinmun editorial just prior to the reconfirmation of Kim Jong-il for the post of Chairman and the adoption of the Kim Il Sung Constitution in August 1998. Its core tenet is the pursuit of a politically, ideologically, militarily and economically "strong and prosperous nation" with the combination of juche and traditional "strategies for building a strong and prosperous nation." The strategy "... starts with establishing a strong and prosperous nation ideology, building a strong army as the pillar of revolution and achieving noteworthy economic progress."³

It is well known that despite a slight rebound since 1999 the North Korean economy is still essentially stagnant. The recent economic upturn was due to a great extent to the mobilization for the Second Chollima Great Leap Forward Movement and an increase in external support. On the other hand, some analysts conclude that 1999 marked the economic bottom. In any case, the economy is less than 70% of what it was in the late 1980s.

North Korea has developed a variety of economic policies to overcome economic stagnation. Its strategy is to maximize its economic potential while maintaining its existing economic structure. In a September 1998 article titled "Uphold the tasks of the independent people's economy," Rodong Sinmun wrote, "Our economic structure, centered on a strong heavy-industry sector, is well balanced in terms of sectors." It went on to say that the strategy for an independent economy is "to maximize the mobilization of economic potential through resolution and discipline."⁴

At the beginning of 2001, a so-called "new thinking" policy was announced, raising expectations for some kind of regime reform. In

3 Rodong Sinmun, August 22, 1998.
4 Rodong Sinmun, September 17, 1998.
Rodong Sinmun’s New Year’s Day editorial, one of the key tasks cited was to develop and establish modern technology throughout the people’s economy. It emphasized an ideological point of view combined with a progressive spirit. A round that time, Kim Jong-il visited China, and his remarks about “sea change in heaven and earth” regarding China’s development on his visit to Shanghai, the symbol of China’s open economy, were interpreted as foreshadowing changes in North Korea. All things considered, however, North Korea is very unlikely to pursue “China-style reform” publicly. North Korea’s primary economic policy tasks are to achieve economic normalization through recovery of industrial momentum, foster science and technology, make a major leap forward in the IT sector and attract foreign capital through limited opening. This is intended to serve, for the time being, as limited economic freedom while allowing the regime to maintain its basic policy. This apparently is designed to maintain both regime stability and social order, rather than achieve a sharp increase in economic efficiency.

Meanwhile, North Korea is aggressively pursuing improvement in international relations while unfolding its regime operation strategy based on the “strong and prosperous nation” concept. Signs it wanted to improve its international relations have been evident since late 1999. Pyongyang made known its willingness to engage the West through UN diplomacy after vowing in the Berlin agreements with the US that September, not to test missiles as long as US-DPRK talks proceeded. This policy shift produced significant results as policy barriers toward North Korea came down quickly thanks to Seoul’s engagement policy. However, neither North Korea-US nor North Korea-Japan relations have progressed very far. The reason for the rocky relations with these major powers, unlike the smooth going with European and other Asian countries, is that there are issues that must be solved first; Pyongyang has yet to develop its position to deal with them positively, instead consolidating past gains and confirming the traditional friendly relations.

with China and Russia.

**Meaning of the “Military-First” Policy**

North Korea made clear that it would operate its government in “our own unique way,” calling it a “Military-First Policy.” When the concept first emerged as “Military First and Workers Second,” it was regarded as post-Kim Il Sung crisis management, but later it came to be understood as the long-term policy of Kim Jong-il’s rule.

Conceptually, North Korea’s “military-first” policy means “to value the military and to believe that reinforcing the military is the most important task,” whereas “Military First and Workers Second” is taken to mean “pursue the socialist agenda backed by the people’s army.” But the practical meaning of both terms is essentially the same. “Military First and Workers Second” is somewhat different than the principle of the communist revolution, where the greatest importance is placed on the working class and the Communist Party. North Korea defined the relationship between the former and the latter to be the “military-centered revolutionary” under the “party leadership principle.” It explains, “The people’s army is the true revolution arm of the working class, representing their pursuit of revolution, fighting spirit and principles.”

North Korea’s “military-first” policy operates under the principle of expanding the military’s role and privilege and enforcing the military state’s policy rule. There are six primary characteristics of the Kim Jong-il regime.

The first is a direct emphasis on the “military-first” revolutionary leadership and a “Military-First” Policy. The “military-first” policy has been continuously emphasized in the mass media as well as in New Year’s Day Addresses and major documents as Kim Jong-il’s governing style.

The second feature is the elevated status of military-related institutions. North Korea’s National Defense Committee is a military-related national institution and the National Central Military Committee is a party institution. The power of the National Defense Committee has increased under Kim Jong-il. It also is clear that the power of the Party’s Central Military Committee, overlapping with the National Defense
Commission, has expanded within the party. This is exemplified by Kim Jong-il’s simultaneously holding the titles of General Secretary of the party and head of the Party Central Military Committee.

The third characteristic is the promotion of core military personnel. Core military officers have been promoted to outrank party secretaries and politburo members. The rank structure of the presidential cabinet does not reflect the actual power structure within the party. Power is more dependent upon the situation and the individuals involved. Nevertheless, this marks a consistent trend in terms of who holds the power in the government.

Fourth, Kim Jong-il treats the military elite more favorably and has expanded military-related exercises. He has secured greater loyalty among the military through large-scale promotions of general officers. Since the late 1990s, he has continued to visit military units frequently to encourage them; some 70% of his activities in 1998 and 59% in 1999 were military-related. This trend decreased somewhat in 2000 but similar activities have increased again since 2001 in line with the rise in anti-US sentiment. Kim Jong-il’s visits to military units are seen as another calculated demonstration of embracing the military and fostering consensus among the mid-level officers.

Fifth is the military institutions’ power expansion. The Ministry of the People’s Armed Forces was given the responsibility to guard the borders, replacing the People’s Security Ministry, as well as the right to control passage into and out of Pyongyang. People’s Army units have been put in charge of guarding cooperative farms, railroads and factories.

The sixth characteristic is the social importance of military spirit as a way of creating unity between the army and the people. This is a core principle of the “military-first” policy and a mechanism for controlling the populace. It conveys that the military and the civilian population will act as one but in particular implies the military in the lead and civilians in support. Originally, the military-civilian unity meant civilian

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7 April 27, 1992, marked the largest number of general officer promotions ever on a single day, totaling 664; promotions included 16 generals, 28 colonel generals, 96 lieutenant generals and 524 major generals. A total of 1,164 have been promoted to date including 99 in July 1993, 14 in October 1995, 6 in February 1996, 123 in April 1997, 22 in April 1998, 79 in April 1999, 44 in April 2000 and 19 in April 2001.
support for the military. But with the recent economic difficulties, military support for civilians has been emphasized. However at the same time it now also includes the idea of civilian control by mobilizing the military and civilians for every important event.

The emphasis on the “military-first” policy has not lessened even following the North–South Korea summit talks. As mentioned above, the “military-first” policy is designed to build a “strong and prosperous nation” with an aggressive approach to economic recovery and regime maintenance. But at the same time, it serves as a social control mechanism guarding against excessive opening and reform and only allowing limited economic policy cooperation with South Korea. The “military-first” policy is now the “core methodology” for building a “strong and prosperous nation.”

Some points should be made to help clarify the “military-first” policy as Kim Jong-il’s core policy.

First, if the “military-first” policy is defined as “politics with the military in the lead,” how should the status of the North Korean military be evaluated? We might either overestimate the influence of the military in light of its increased status, scope and activities, or underestimate it as the basic element of a party state. The fact is that the political military elite in North Korea are given special treatment and have a separate chain of command from the General Staff of the People’s Army.

However, the general power structure of North Korea is a one-party-rulled, party-administration-military triangular system, where the Leader, Kim Jong-il, has final authority. Some believe that the non-military sector has been given more power, but this may be due to Kim Jong-il’s position as Chairman of the Supreme Military Leadership Institute. It is difficult to believe that the National Defense Committee would have responsibility for day-to-day operations.\(^8\)

Second, given the fact that the “military-first” policy by its nature strengthens the military, to what degree is it linked to the reinforcement of North Korea’s military power? Many North Korean documents

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\(^8\) On September 5, 1998, when Kim Jong-il was reappointed, the position of chairman was designated “the highest position, which leads and controls all activities of the nation’s politics, military and economy and organizes and guides all projects for the sake of national defense and wealth and prosperity”; however, this is understood as relating only to Kim Jong-il.
mention force improvement through the “military-first” policy. The military implications of this aspect cannot be ignored. For example, an April 2001 Supreme People’s Assembly report said, “The administration regards the military-centered revolution as a basic precept and will continue to make full effort for force improvement. We must do our best to mobilize our nation’s latent economic potential to reinforce the combat power of the People’s Army by establishing the gun-barrel-focused, military-focused spirit throughout the society and by adhering strictly to the “military-first” policy.” The report mentioned active utilization of the economy to support the military.  

However, this could be misunderstood if viewed from a defense perspective. Even if the military does have the first priority and if mobilizing economic power into the military sector is being emphasized, it is doubtful how productive that would be for force improvement. Rather, it might be understood that in an effort to maintain the regime, a significant military border guard force has been dispatched, and personnel to control entry to and exit from Pyongyang; attention was also given to guarding infrastructure such as economic facilities, factories, farms, roads and power plants. This could have a negative impact on the military force itself. In fact, North Korea’s military force has not dramatically changed, with the exception of partial measures such as missile development and increased deployment of long-range artillery near the front lines, since the late 1990s when the “military-first” policy emerged.

North Korea’s Policy and Changes of Its Military Posture

Military Policy in the Kim Jong-il Era

Socialist states are, from the viewpoint of Marxist-Leninism, “states in socialist revolution” and, according to Marx, changeable entities destined to become extinct, meaning one of the developmental stages of the revolution. In reality, however, according to Lenin’s “socialism in one

state” concept, they are to be protected in conflicts with capitalist states. The military in a socialist state has the dual task of backing the party’s socialist revolution, while defending the socialist state from the capitalist world order. In this respect, outside of the ordinary defensive role, the military of socialist states is charged with aggressively maintaining the socialist regime and completing the revolution internally and with diffusion of the revolution externally. 10

An analysis of North Korea’s military policies shows that revolutionary slogans such as “revolutionize the South” are still in use. North Korea has proposed arms control for propaganda purposes. It continues to threaten the South and use suicidal threats against the United States to the maximum, has built a large-scale military mobilization aimed at self-defense, and pursued guarantees of support from guardian states as a last defense. The purpose has been to achieve the two primary policy objectives of completion of the communist revolution in both internal and external dimensions, and self-defense in confrontations with South Korea and the United States. However, North Korea is believed to have moderated the above military policies since the 1990s, as military support from its patrons has declined under the post–Cold War security situation. Furthermore, Pyongyang’s previous military objective of dominance over the South has become impossible as it has fallen far behind in the economic competition with South Korea.

The Kim Jong-il era began under new circumstances and with new experiences, different from how things were under Kim Il Sung.

First of all, Kim Jong-il is relatively unfamiliar with guerilla warfare and the doctrine of Soviet-style mobile warfare. He pursues a comparatively active and liberal line of policy thinking but at the same time his extreme moods and “adventurous” disposition mean that he could create a potentially dangerous situation. This makes him difficult to predict. 11 In addition, as seen in his “military-first” policy, he has been

10 In this respect, increasing the political role of the North Korean Army and the “military-first” policy can be understood as basic operational mechanisms for a socialist state, although they differ by degree in each nation. See “Bukhan eui gunsa jaong chaek jaepyeongga” [Re-evaluation of Military Policy of North Korea], Choo-Suk Suh and Beomchul Shin (Seoul: KIDA, December 2000).

11 According to the former Korean Workers’ Party Secretary Hwang Jang-yeop, he values a “blitzkrieg” strategy, which means “suicidal military strikes” as an
using the military for political purposes and has an inclination to pursue an extreme tactic of brinkmanship for political expediency. But he also has displayed policy flexibility internally and externally, utilizing the military to prevent regime collapse when faced with the economic crisis of the 1990s, while at the same time focusing on asymmetric strategic weapons such as nuclear bombs and missiles as a mean of cost-saving military construction.

The military policy of the Kim Jong-il era is seen as seeking to secure regime maintenance by deploying the military along a defensive front, overcoming national crises and raising the military’s status through strategic transformation. Analysis shows that this policy transformation comes from the expectation that an opportunity to attack the South might arise if the regime could only overcome its economic crisis—even though its military capability is inferior to the combined ROK-US forces and the possibility of early victory is relatively low. In addition, unlike the relatively permanent communization strategy towards South Korea, the new policy can be evaluated as an opportunistic military policy that focuses on “regime defense first” and pursues escalation in strategic position to obtain military victory if invaded or given the opportunity to invade South Korea.

This military policy direction coincides with North Korea’s aggressive attitude toward South Korea as well as its policy to reach out to other states around the world. In other words, it aims to escape from the ongoing crisis by enhancing relations with South Korea and other nations while maintaining the basic nature of its regime and related policies. Pyongyang, maintaining its basic military policy, takes a reserved position on arms control—at that only partial arms control—but only after peace agreements are reached, US forces in South Korea are withdrawn or reduced, and South Korea reduces its defense buildup.

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North Korea’s “Military-First” Policy and Inter-Korean Relations

North Korea's Military Posture Changes

The overall economic depression and ensuing regime crisis in North Korea beginning in the 1990s had considerable impact on the defense sector. Pyongyang had continued with its goal of “Keeping Abreast in Economy and National Defense” since the early 1960s, including adding the “Four Military Articles” to the Revised Constitution of 1992. The economic stagnation, however, had considerable impact and changes in military’s posture became inevitable.

As North Korea endured more than a 40% reduction of its GNP since the late 1980s, as shown in Table 1, reduction in the military budget was inevitable. The considerable shortfall in the budget made it impossible to divert sufficient money from other sectors to the military; internal

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Table 1. North Korea’s Military Expenditure by Year (1991-2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GNP (Bank of Korea)</th>
<th>Total Budget (NK official figures)</th>
<th>Military Expenses</th>
<th>Share of Military Expenses to GNP (%)</th>
<th>Share of Military Expenses in Total Budget (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>171.7</td>
<td>51.3(20.8)</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>29.9(12.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>184.5</td>
<td>55.4(21.0)</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>30.0(11.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>187.2</td>
<td>56.2(21.5)</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>30.0(11.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>191.9</td>
<td>57.6(21.9)</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>30.0(11.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>208.2</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>47.8(13.3)</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>52.0(14.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>47.8(13.5)</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>51.0(14.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>50.0(13.7)</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>52.0(14.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1995-1998 are estimates, numbers in parentheses are North Korea’s official figures or corresponding calculations.
military self-supply, so-called dollar-earning units, was insufficient to have a measurable impact. Thus, the shortfall resulted in a reduction in military budget. The military budget cutback was accomplished by substituting strategic weapons development for conventional force increases, reducing the number and scale of military exercises and delaying the military build-up and equipment replacement.

North Korea has pursued nuclear arms and missile development since the 1970s and has accelerated the pace of development of such strategic weapons since the 1990s. Efforts to develop strategic weapons began in order to confront the combined ROK-US forces and to become a dominant military force, but gradually it came to be seen as a cost-effective way to increase military power. North Korea focused on overcoming the post–Cold War syndrome until 1992, but 1993 marked the turning point of an “offensive transition,” withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and striding forward with its missile development projects.

While its asymmetric force development has focused primarily on nuclear and missile armaments so far, the threat remains unclear. North Korea is believed to have dozens of kilograms of plutonium, incomplete detonating devices, and nuclear weapon assembly technology. The ongoing nuclear activities were to have been frozen by the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework between North Korea and the US. However, it is believed that a clear resolution of this matter will be reached only upon the conduct of special inspections according to the basic agreement and the transfer of fuel rods to a third country.

13 Whereas North Korea has reported to the IAEA that it extracted 90g of Plutonium, US CIA estimated it extracted 10–12kg. Some estimates go as high as a maximum of 40–80kg.
14 Currently, there is a stalemate concerning this issue with North Korea’s demanding compensation for the loss caused by delay in light-water reactor construction and the US’s demanding “improved implementation” such as resumption of general inspections and preparation for special inspections. In the midst of the delay, there is concern that the special inspection would be conducted too late or
Although North Korea's missile development has transitioned from the Scud missile to mid- and long-range IRBMs (intermediate-range ballistic missiles) such as the Rodong and Taepodong, it is still unclear whether its missile development has taken a gradual approach of extending ranges or a package approach through satellite launch. Pyongyang has consistently asserted that the Taepodong I it launched in August 1998 was an artificial satellite; Seoul and Washington initially said it was a disguised long-range missile but later called it a “failed artificial satellite.” There is speculation that the range of the Taepodong II currently under development is 4,000 to 6,000 km with a light warhead. If so, it could be used as an ICBM and highlights the fact that it is hard to characterize North Korea's missile development program.\(^{15}\)

Analysis reveals that North Korea's initial purpose in starting strategic weapon development was to deter a ROK-US attack against it and secure a “final weapon” to maximize its national status and prevent the US from reinforcing its troops if war broke out. North Korea's strategic weapon development coincided with the US initiation of a strategic weapon limitation policy in 1990. It is assumed that strategic weapons would be used as a last-ditch measure in an emergency as well as a bluff to improve Pyongyang's negotiating position with Washington, that is, to secure some benefit rather than to serve an aggressive purpose.

As an asymmetric military threat, chemical and biological weapons are relatively more useful. North Korea has the world's third-largest stockpile of chemical and biological weapons, although the exact specifications or condition of these weapons is unknown. CB weapons, especially biological, constitute a more substantial threat than do nuclear bombs and missiles because they could be used covertly. For this reason, international cooperation to abolish CB weapons is much more important than the effort to control nuclear weapons and missiles, which was the main concern throughout the 1990s.

Analysis shows that it was inevitable for North Korea either to cut back on its military power or reduce military activities due to its economic downturn. As shown in Table 2, North Korea's conventional

military systems, except submarines, grew at less than 3% during this period. Assuming the life span of major weapons systems is 20 to 30 years and 3-5% must be replaced annually, it is likely that North Korea's substantial arms build-up is almost stalemated.

Meanwhile, North Korea conducted large-scale military exercises to mirror ROK-US Team Spirit exercises until 1993 but dramatically scaled them back since 1994 due to a fuel shortage. In addition, to reinforce frontline military units, artillery was moved forward when controversies arose over Operation Plan 5027-98 and warnings were issued to North Korea, increasing tensions with the “danger” of US action against the North. But this should be viewed as a redeployment rather than an increase in overall firepower.

Table 2. North Korea’s Increase of Major Weapon Systems in the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon System</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>Increase rate</th>
<th>Average increase rate per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APCs</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>9,400</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface Combatants</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50$^1$</td>
<td>108.3%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Vessels</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>300$^2$</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical Aircraft</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Aircraft</td>
<td>760$^3$</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1. Except submarine boats from current estimates
Note 2. Naval patrol boats from current estimates
Note 3. Support aircraft and helicopters

16 The General Staff issued a statement regarding the ROK-US Operation Plan 5027-98 saying, “We have our own operation plans. “surgical strike” and “pre-emptive strike” are by no means just US options and the type of strike is also by no means limited to the US.” This was followed immediately by a series of rallies supporting this position inside North Korea. See Korean Central News Agency, December 2, 1998 (internet).
Prospects for North Korea’s Military Policy and North-South Korean Military Relations

Scenarios of Mid- and Long-term Regime Maintenance and Prospects for Military Policy

Pyongyang’s military-focused system, as expressed by the “strong and prosperous nation” and “military-first” policy, became the distinctive ruling style of the Kim Jong-il era during the crisis of the 1990s. To predict the future of the system, let’s look at how the system could possibly evolve.

North Korea is moving from a crisis management system to a state-run economy as Kim Jong-il’s regime continues to remain internally stable. For the time being, the country is expected to continue to utilize social control mechanisms such as use of the military to preserve regime stability. It is expected to continue construction of a politically and ideologically “strong and prosperous nation” through the party, a militarily “strong and prosperous nation” through the military and an economically “strong and prosperous nation” through the administration—all under continuous emphasis on the party’s central role from the perspective of revolutionary leadership. It is believed that the regime’s internal situation is the reason for its pursuit of aggressive multidirectional diplomacy to escape from being isolated.

What strategies will North Korea pursue in inter-Korean relations and international relations? What would North Korea do if these efforts were to fail? Although it is hard to determine Pyongyang’s position and strategies, some observers speculate that, in line with the current “strong and prosperous nation”-building philosophy, it would pursue limited opening and reform. But it also would undertake further opening and reform gradually under pressure from the international community and its own internal situation in the long term. It is obvious that regime stability is priority number one for the North Korean authorities, and for this reason, any expansion of opening and reform will proceed carefully.

The military is seen for the time being as maintaining its current posture and is expected to pursue enhancement of capabilities through increases in military exercises rather than through any significant reinforcement. If no inter-Korean agreement is reached on arms control,
then the North Korean military is expected to continue to work towards economical, asymmetric military capabilities such as chemical and biological weapons, dispatch of long-range firepower to the frontlines and/or irregular infiltration, even though some missile development strategies might be scaled back.

In the mid- and long-term, it is foreseeable that North Korea’s military-focused system and the “military-first” policy will be maintained under the premise of domestic regime maintenance as it attempts to improve international relations. However, this would have a huge impact on the military sector in the process of improvement of relations with the US and South Korea and a much bigger impact on the process of constructing a future peace regime on the Korean peninsula. If this is the case, the asymmetric military power development of the 1990s would be moderated through US-DPRK negotiations and conventional military activities would be deterred in the process of improving inter-Korean relations. 17

Prospects for Inter-Korean Military Relations and Policy Implications

An analysis of security issues on the Korean peninsula reveals that Pyongyang would still seek strategies that stress negotiation with the US. Although relations with Washington have been aggravated recently, it is believed that the North Korea has basic guidelines for a package deal of a US-DPRK peace agreement, withdrawal and reduction of US forces stationed in South Korea, suspension of missile development and experts, improving nuclear transparency if the country were removed from the list of states supporting terrorism, and resolving the issue of proxy satellite launches. North Korea’s strategy would be to seek arms reduction in inter-Korean military talks after reaching agreements with the US on “fundamental problems.”

Under these circumstances, North Korea has refused to engage in

17 Although if economic wealth can be transferred to North Korea due to improvements in inter-Korean relations and relations with the US and Japan, it will improve the logistics sector, secure military POL (petroleum, oils and lubricants) reserves, reinforce military exercises and resume military activities. However, an increased North Korean threat toward South Korea is unlikely.
military authority talks for various reasons despite changes in their policies and attitudes toward South Korea since the summit talks. It is believed that such negative attitude is due to concerns that its military-focused system could undergo fundamental changes if military matters progress too rapidly since it would like to use this as leverage to improve relations with the US. As a result, the possibility of significant progress seems impossible even if the 2nd Defense Ministerial Talks were to be held and military talks scheduled.

The North Korean attitude is still unclear regarding advances in military relations. Kim Jong-il apparently has assumed an ambiguous position, displaying a well-controlled military and emphasizing opposition to rapid progress in inter-Korean military relations whenever he has the opportunity. Kim Jong-il may have adopted this approach in order to disingenuously utilize the internal opposition as an excuse to deal strategically with South Korea at the negotiating table. Nevertheless, the existence of the military elite undoubtedly serves as a barrier to inter-Korean military relations. The possibility of a rapid advance in inter-Korean military relations is thus relatively low.

Given these circumstances, there are numerous criticisms of Seoul’s policy towards North Korea. As North Korea myopically focuses on regime maintenance, controversies are being raised about the scope of the engagement policy. The voices calling for coercive confrontation cannot be ignored as Pyongyang continues to pour out hostile remarks and attitudes and inter-Korean relations remain stalemated.

There is widespread belief that the pursuit of the current engagement policy over the long term would help North Korea resurrect its dying economy and assure regime survival. Continuing the engagement policy could at least lead to a Chinese-style reform and management system in the process of regime survival, providing an opportunity to achieve successful economic development without endangering political stability, as seen from the Chinese experience. In addition, it could lead to consolidation of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and eventually to peaceful reunification through improvements in inter-Korean relations.

However, a change in North Korea’s attitude is prerequisite to the success of the engagement policy. To achieve this kind of transformation in North Korea’s approach, South Korea first must find a way to encour-
age a more diplomatic disposition in inter-Korean negotiations. After this, a mutual give-and-take process could prove fruitful. Furthermore, if inter-Korean military talks were to take place successfully, there would be substantial progress in confidence building and mutual cooperation for peace on the Korean peninsula.