

The ROK-US Cooperation for Dealing with Political Crises in North Korea¹

Yong-Sup Han
Korea National Defense University

Abstract

This article offers four scenarios on how the North Korean situation might evolve following a North Korean collapse after the fall of the Kim family regime and one more scenario of North Korea's explosion, regardless of the fate of the Kim family regime. Analysis of the possible politico-military ramifications for the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the world has been done in light of each scenario. It also contemplates the need for bilateral cooperation between South Korea and the United States in the context of North Korea's total collapse. It argues that it is important to research thoroughly and map out comprehensively a plan on how the North Korean situation might evolve following. It contends that it is important to foster an environment in which South Korea's goals can be successfully accomplished rather than to respond to a situation passively after it has happened. It also points out how important it is for South Korea and the United States to dissuade China from unilaterally intervening in North Korea's political turmoil, since China's national power and influence would grow at such a time. Other necessary political and military considerations are also contemplated in this article.

Keywords: North Korea's collapse, political and military repercussions, the Korea-US cooperation, China's intervention, unification

I. The Political Crisis of the North Korean System

As the Jasmine Revolution swept countries in North Africa and the Middle East by toppling longtime dictators, it is natural that global attention is shifting to North Korea whose father-son dictatorship ruled the country for more than six decades. Ominous reports on the possibility of North Korea's collapse have circulated again after a first round of such rumors as early as 1996. Most interesting among recent reports is one published by the Russian research institute, IMEMO.² The IMEMO

report definitively predicts that North Korea will collapse by the year 2020. There are also American research reports³ which try to elaborate on what policy considerations need to be made in case of a North Korean collapse.

It is assumed that the current North Korean regime has further tightened its control over the North Korean residents, further worsening economic and social problems in North Korea. The Kim Jong-il and Jong-un hereditary dictatorship has aimed to prolong the regime and yet North Korean situations do not show any sign of amelioration, thus inviting more collapse scenarios. Thus, this article intends to develop the post collapse scenarios and their political and military consequences and their impact on South Korea, the United States, China, and other countries in Northeast Asia.

The political crisis of the North Korean system means the possible collapse of the North Korean state. This means a breakdown of North Korea's ruling system, in short, a state of anarchy deriving from a paralyzed central ruling system. Yet, over the short term, one should not conclude that a North Korean collapse will necessarily cause an extensive disturbance among the people or a bloody struggle among a small group of military officers.

One needs to think about how Kim Jong-il's monolithic system or Kim Jong-un's succession system might collapse. This is because the hereditary succession from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un can be likened to a monolithic theocratic dictatorship. If a Kim Jong-il–Kim Jong-un system breaks down in a situation in which no individual or group can possibly replace the Kim family rule, there must have been a process for assuring political continuity. If not a state of anarchy may result.

How the North Korean situation develops will hinge on the following questions: was it an individual or a group that deposed Kim Jong-un? If an individual, was it a Kim Jong-il confidant or a bodyguard? If it was a group, was it a party faction or a military faction, or an assassination group abetted by a foreign country? Was it planned, or was it accidental? Was Kim Jong-un ousted because he failed to provide the people with life necessities, or was there strong resistance to hereditary succession? How the post-collapse situation in North Korea develops will be contingent upon answers to these questions.

This article will suppose that the hereditary transition of power between Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un failed to succeed for some reason,

and, though multiple candidates vying to replace the Kim family's rule have persistently endeavored to seize power, no group has succeeded in doing so, thus leading to a state of confusion. In other words, the hypothesis is that the supreme leader who has led *suryong* [leader] politics and military-first politics has vanished and the link that held together the National Defense Commission (NDC), the military, the State Security Department, and the United Front Department has been severed, rendering state control and administrative powers completely irrecoverable. In sum, the central government has ceased to exist, and the North Korean elite and the masses alike are in a state of panic. The Kim family's dynastic rule, which lasted more than 70 years, has in this scenario, ended, heralding the demise of absolute power. In a way, the situation would be similar to the Ceausescu regime's end in 1989. The similarity between Romania and North Korea would be that the dictator was emasculated by a group, and a period of instability ensued. The difference would be that, in Romania, the substitute power emerged after a period of chaos, and that the entire communist bloc in Eastern Europe fell, which eventually led to the removal of Ceausescu.

On the surface, North Korea would be operated by a central government with an effective system of control and rule. Yet, the North Korean situation would most likely develop in one of three ways. This article will detail three scenarios and attempt to shed light on the possible politico-military impact each may have on the Korean peninsula as well as on Northeast Asia. It should also be stated that it is highly likely these three scenarios will occur consecutively. As a fourth scenario, this article will hypothesize a successful military coup months after North Korea's collapse and the subsequent emergence of a new ruling class. The fifth scenario is the explosion scenario under which the Kim Jong-un regime makes desperate efforts to turn an internal crisis into an external one. And then, the North Korean leader may launch a limited attack or an all-out attack against South Korea. In a live-or-die situation, North Korea might choose to invade South Korea, based on their pessimistic assessment that North Korea might have no other option than to live disgracefully under South Korean rule in the long run.

II. Five Scenarios for North Korean Political Crisis

While all scenarios are mutually exclusive, they represent all realistically possible cases.

The first scenario: various power groups in North Korea absorb the shock from the regime collapse and secretly look for a path to the future. The situation is not ripe for the different groups to wage a power struggle. A small number of North Koreans escape the country.

The second scenario: A power vacuum in North Korea has lasted more than six months, and the people are committing small riots and acts of terror to obtain food and daily necessities. There are gunfights between the military and the masses, but there are no large-scale shoot-outs or a national rebellion requiring organized involvement of the military. There are yet no attempts to smuggle out North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The third scenario: The power vacuum in North Korea drags out for the long term, and the people are carrying out large-scale riots. The military is systematically mobilized, and the military and the people clash. Different factions in the military collide, resorting to violence in the process. That results in a national rebellion and civil war. There are increasingly clear signs that some elements in the military are attempting to smuggle out WMD overseas or use the weapons at home or abroad.

The fourth scenario: Instability persists following a North Korean regime collapse. After months, Kim Jong-un's bodyguards stage a coup backed by the military, North Korea's most powerful organization. Consequently, a new ruling class emerges.

The fifth and last scenario: North Korea invades South Korea in a desperate manner because a North Korean leader or leaders believe that North Korean military superiority may turn out to be useless at a time of internal explosion. Therefore, the leader or leaders decide to go to war instead of being absorbed by the South.

The following sections develop each of these five scenarios and analyze how each might impact South Korea, Northeast Asia, and the world.

III. Scenario Explanations and Policy Implications

Under the first scenario, the hereditary succession system involving Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un is eliminated, and the shockwaves from a sudden power vacuum in North Korea sweep over the entire country. Various power groups in North Korea strive to absorb the impact from the overthrow of Kim Jong-un. All political factions move in silence, but no group is yet making an effort to become the substitute power. The state control and surveillance network has collapsed. No group is yet

waging a power struggle by resorting to violence. Groundless rumors and speculations spread rapidly across North Korea regarding the emasculation of Kim Jong-un. Political and social instability is on the rise, and the military's unity is disintegrating rapidly.

This scenario supposes that the transition of power from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un has completely failed. Those who have not been able to budge because of the tight control Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un, and the central government's public security authorities have wielded over them—namely, people who have been locked up in political prison camps and other types of prisons, prisoners of war from the Korean War, South Korean nationals who have been detained since they were abducted by North Korea, and North Koreans who have become disenchanted with their system—will start fleeing the country. Those residing near North Korea's borders or coastlines will start escaping to China, South Korea, Mongolia, Japan, and Southeast Asia, opting to ensure their own survival, find employment opportunities, and start a new life with their families abroad rather than live in fear in the North.

Officials who supported the Kim Jong-il–Kim Jong-un hereditary system will no longer have positive prospects for the future. What is more, they will foresee threats to their personal safety. Hence, some will seek asylum in China for their own as well as their families' safety. Some will wish to make an experienced leader like Kim Pyong-il, Kim Jong-il's half-brother, the successor to Kim Jong-un, but they face a dilemma because no group is willing to take the lead. Some in China will call for filling up the power vacuum by bringing back Kim Jong-il's eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, who has lived in exile in Macau over the past decade. Those factions who had strived to make Kim Jong-il's second son, Kim Jong-chol, the successor will meet in secret and try to enthrone Kim Jong-chol, but they will lack the means. At this point, a few reputable generals in the NDC will attempt to stage a military coup, but they will move furtively, failing to see any concrete corresponding action from the military. Groundless speculation and rumors will instantaneously spread like wildfire across North Korea concerning the whereabouts of Kim Jong-un, the reasons for his overthrow, fissures among the ruling elite, the North Korean military's movements, a possible US attack, and a possible South Korean invasion.

This crisis situation is similar to that near the end of the Koguryo Kingdom when a power vacuum ensued after General Yon Gaesomun's death. Nobody willingly stepped up to take power, and Yon Gaesomun's

younger brother, Yon Jongto, and Yon Gaesomun's three sons, Namsaeng, Namgon, and Namsan, waged a power struggle. In the end, they split up, some heading to China's Tang Dynasty and some to the Shilla Kingdom. Similar political chaos may well occur in North Korea. How would such a disorderly and chaotic political situation in North Korea affect South Korea?

A. The First Scenario: Split among Leader Groups

⁴The South Korean people, particularly those who have families and relatives in North Korea, will strongly ask the South Korean government to save their North Korean compatriots, who face the danger of massacre. The government, in turn, will be highly perplexed, for it will not know with which political faction or power group in North Korea it should contact to promote stability in North Korea. Furthermore, the South Korean government will urge North Korea to adopt democratic procedures in forming a responsible government that respects the people's human rights, freedoms, and welfare and appeal to the international community to that effect.

South Korea will want to know how the North Korean situation might develop, and whether an opportunity for unification might present itself. On the other hand, an increasing number of North Korean defectors will head, not only to China but also to South Korea. Hence, South Korea will direct more attention to reinforcing security along the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the demilitarized zone (DMZ), and in its airspace and to improving the system for managing North Korean defectors in South Korea.⁵ Should a handful of North Korean elites defect to South Korea and suggest to the South Korean government that they would like to take the lead in unifying North and South Korea, the South Korean government will have to mull over a response.

The South Korean government will give deep thought to the extent that rumors floating around in North Korea may affect inter-Korean relations and North Korea's future. It will particularly be mindful of rumors like "South Korea's special operations unit assassinated Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un," "North Korea's ruling class would be sentenced to death if they go to the South," "the ROK-US combined forces' invasion of North Korea is imminent," and "the Chinese army will enter North Korea." Concerning North Korean party, government, and military ruling elites who defect to South Korea, South Korea will need to establish and promulgate guidelines on handling them and giving

respectful treatment to them. At the same time, Seoul will need to formulate a policy and a set of guidelines on the treatment of North Korean defectors. Such guidelines will serve as incentives or counterincentives to those ruling elites and masses who are escaping to South Korea and other countries. A North Korean crisis will impact the South Korean people the most. South Korea's ruling and opposition parties will be locked in a conflict over how to respond to North Korea's internal chaos. The conflict might even escalate between the conservative and progressive camps. The right-wing and left-wing camps may carry out extreme acts, which in turn may lead to social disorder. The people will increasingly ask the government to map out a plan on the treatment of North Korean elites who escape to South Korea, possible responses to a lack of public security in North Korea, and the security of WMD in North Korea.

It will be important for the South Korean government to explain persuasively the North Korean situation to its people. It should also keep in mind that a North Korean collapse will not automatically lead straight to unification. What ramifications will North Korea's collapse have for East Asia as a whole? China will be highly concerned, for it knows that there is no trustable or effective political faction in North Korea. Yet, it will move quickly to establish a power group made up of primarily those officials who are close to China. At that point, some in Chinese ruling circles may suggest contacting Kim Jong-il's eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, in Macau and send him to North Korea. The Chinese might lend direct or indirect support to pro-China officials in North Korea, such as Jang Song-taek, to establish a China-friendly regime in North Korea. The number of North Koreans crossing the Sino-North Korea border and questions of how to manage them will pose a major headache for China. Beijing will likely deploy large numbers of People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops to the Yalu and Tumen River areas to reduce the number of North Korean defectors. Moreover, the Chinese government will remain alert to the relationship between ethnic Koreans living in Northeast China and North Korean defectors. The United States will fear that the Romanian scenario or Yugoslavia's division and civil wars may recur in North Korea following the disappearance of Kim Jong-un. Based on the ROK-US alliance, it will cooperate closely with Seoul in responding to the North Korean crisis. It will also seek to prevent China's intervention in North Korea. Japan will keep a close eye on the traffic of North Korean defectors and moves by the General Association of Korean Residents in

Japan (Chongryon). Russia, of course, will be vigilant any effort by South Korea and the United States to absorb North Korea.

On a global level, the responses will be similar to Northeast Asia's: Foreign media will run in-depth reports and commentary on North Korea's collapse. Aid to the North Korean people and the human rights of North Korean defectors will emerge as major issues. The media will speculate on the increasingly deteriorating security situation in North Korea, the possibility of massacres and a civil war, as well as the prospects of theft of North Korea's nuclear weapons or their transfer overseas.

B. The Second Scenario: Increasing Domestic Unrest and Possible Rebellion

Under the second scenario, the power vacuum in North Korea persists for months, and the masses carry out small riots and acts of terror to secure food and daily necessities. More people are fleeing North Korea than under the first scenario. The people break into granaries, public shops, and enterprises to steal food and consumer goods. The number of people killing and perpetrating acts of terror against the military and government personnel in Pyongyang and other provinces of North Korea grows exponentially. Due to the collapse of the distribution system, soldiers attack civilians to procure food, leading to small gunfights between the military and civilians. The military opens fire on North Korean defectors, and popular discontent with the military grows. The people increasingly raid military units and seize firearms. There are as yet no large-scale gun battles or a national rebellion in which the military is systematically involved. The military continues to exercise control and manage nuclear weapons properly. Persisting food shortages and worsening economic hardships lead to popular uprisings, which in turn result in a sustained period of anarchy in Pyongyang and other regions of North Korea. Rumors that anti-Kim Jong-un factions will stage armed uprisings against pro-Kim factions prevail.

This scenario assumes that the state has lost control and, that assassinations, acts of terror, and violence become rampant. The masses, which had endured years of repression and suffering under the Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un dictatorships, are now committing acts of terror against the former ruling class out of vengeance. The possibility of a mass exodus is growing. Tired of food and consumer goods shortages that have continued for months, coupled with domestic instability and

disturbances, more and more North Koreans follow those who have already fled the country. To North Korean cadres, it becomes clear that public security and order cannot be restored, and that substitute leaders cannot seize power. Under constant threats of assassination and terrorist attack, their sense of crisis grows even more, resulting in an increasing number of cadres leaving the country. Yet, a small class of elites in the military who have developed, possessed, and managed North Korea's WMD still understand the importance of the WMD issue. Fearing that risks to their personal safety by violating international norms might offset potential profits by smuggling the weapons overseas, they are reluctant to resort to smuggling taking them into their personal possession, or using the weapons to seize power or expand the war.

Under this scenario, groundless speculations and wild rumors will reach their peak, and political and social instability further intensifies in North Korea. Rumors abound that the North Korean military and public security authorities have brutally massacred the people. Social chaos and violence reach the extreme; humanitarian tragedies occur throughout North Korea. Disgusted with the hereditary succession from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un, North Korea's lower-ranking military cadres and the masses join hands and assassinate high-profile figures, commit acts of terrorism, extort firearms and weapons, free prisoners, and occupy military units, as was the case with Somalia. Those with weapons may exercise indiscriminate violence against the military, government offices, and party organs. The military will take the lead in quelling the masses, which, in turn, may generate further bloodshed and atrocities.

How would this impact South Korea, Northeast Asia, and the world? South Korea will carefully consider how to handle the countless North Korean defectors. Seoul will feel that the onus is upon South Korea to prevent massacres in North Korea, which are sure to occur. Furthermore, it will seriously mull over how to stabilize the North. At first, South Korea will look for ways to help North Korea with crisis management so that North Korea's crisis remains within its borders and does not spill over to South Korea. Seoul will have to appease the South Korean people and formulate an appropriate set of measures while keeping a close watch on the North Korean situation. The South Korean government will need to discuss the North Korean defectors issue with China. If defectors run into problems while trying to escape to China, North Koreans will flee to South Korea via the East Sea, the Yellow Sea, and the DMZ. In this light, South Korea will have to decide quickly how

many North Koreans it can accommodate and how, as well as where, to put them. In addition, Seoul will ponder how to procure the funds to support North Korean defectors, and how to establish the relationship between the North Koreans in South Korea and the people who remain in North Korea. Seoul will make plans on how to absorb and assimilate North Korean defectors into South Korea, and how to prevent the North Korean military from massacring North Koreans. If the North Korean masses increasingly raid the military and seize weapons and use those weapons to obtain food and daily necessities, and if the North Korean military massacres an increasing number of people, the South Korean civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) will need to call on their government to intervene in North Korea on humanitarian grounds, for the safety of the North Korean people. With respect to the soaring volume of North Korean defectors, more and more South Koreans will argue that South Korea should welcome them via the East Sea, the Yellow Sea, and the DMZ, rather than sending them to China. Opening up other parts of the DMZ in addition to the Gyeongui and Geumgangsang roads and railways, which are already in operation, will likely have huge ramifications for South Korea's national security and social order. How South Korea accommodates the mass influxes of North Korean defectors, plus the future of North-South relations, North Korea's domestic stability, and signals that South Korea sends prospective North Korean defectors will all create enormous social confusion in South Korea. The South Korean people will also call on the South Korean government to take preventive measures so that the increasing assassinations of high-profile North Korean figures and acts of terror do not escalate into a civil war in North Korea.

North Korea's crisis will challenge South Korea's policy-makers. First, South Korean policy-makers will need to decide whether to simply watch the collapse of North Korea or proactively intervene in the situation. At the same time, it will need to make crucial decisions of whom in North Korea it will contact. It should map out a concrete plan on how to treat and manage North Korea's civil servants, soldiers, and educators who escape to South Korea, how to provide them with job opportunities, and how to reeducate them. Another issue will be the provision of humanitarian assistance to the North Korean people, including food, medical supplies, and consumer goods.

How will a North Korean crisis affect East Asia? China will not want to be responsible for the trouble-ridden North Korea; crossing the border

and intervening in North Korea to restore domestic stability will also be difficult. While continuing to provide assistance to North Korea, Beijing will cross its fingers and hope that the North Korean crisis is resolved within North Korean borders, pursuant to the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs. China will continue to lend support to North Korea in the hopes of establishing a pro-China regime and restoring order in the country, for it does not want the collapsed North Korea to be absorbed into South Korea. China might even consider independent intervention in North Korea if a pro-China faction in North Korea requests China's intervention and assistance. China fears that it might lose a strategic buffer zone over the long haul, if North Korea is absorbed into South Korea.

To mitigate China's national security concerns, South Korea and China, and South Korea, the United States, and China will need to engage in bilateral and trilateral policy dialogues. A South Korea-US-China trilateral strategic dialogue will likely gain momentum if China concludes that there is no pro-China faction in North Korea, or there is one but it is unable to restore order in North Korea. In the United States, North Korea watchers will urge their government to take preventive steps so that the increasing disturbance and violence do not escalate into a national rebellion or civil war in North Korea. Washington will warn China against intervening in the North Korean crisis. What is more, the United States will make efforts to ensure that the chaos and violence in North Korea stays within North Korean borders. The United States will take advantage of the ROK-US alliance and positively review the feasibility of restoring order in North Korea and intervening in the North Korean situation. Japan, for its part, will try to dull the shock of a North Korean collapse through ROK-US-Japan trilateral policy coordination. Russia will make an effort to prevent third countries' intervention in North Korea.

On a global level, the international community will cooperate to address a mass exodus from and provide emergency aid to North Korea. The UN, in particular, may look back on the Yugoslavia crisis in the early 1990s and tilt toward intervention in the aftermath of a North Korean collapse. The UN may base this decision on three reasons. First, in case of a mass exodus from North Korea, it will be difficult to gauge the number of refugees. Moreover, each neighboring country will have a different capacity for accommodating North Korean refugees. Second, it will be impossible to know exactly which escape route most of the North

Korean refugees prefer: the North Korea–China border, the North Korea–Russia border, or the inter-Korean armistice line. Third, border enforcement aimed at warding off mass influxes of refugees may generate unforeseen human casualties, which may develop into a diplomatic conflict among countries concerned.

North Korean refugees could number as few as tens of thousands or as many as several millions, and their means and routes of escape will vary, depending on how the situation unfolds in North Korea.⁶ In response, the international community will adopt a "cooperative" plan for dealing with mass influxes of North Korean refugees. Emergency aid to North Korea will also be too much for any one country to handle. Exacerbating economic hardships, popular uprisings, and rebellions may suspend public services in North Korea, and, as result, the North Korean people may not be able to enjoy even the minimum quality of life that they deserve. To make matters worse, epidemics may be spread and claim many lives in North Korea. If natural calamities like flood and drought should occur, many more lives will be imperiled.

In the wake of a North Korean crisis, the international community, including the countries concerned, will provide emergency food aid to the North Korean people for humanitarian reasons. If necessary, it will also offer emergency relief aid such as medical supplies and other daily necessities. Furthermore, the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will spearhead the international community's animated discussions on the prospects of North Korean WMD leaks, including the outflow of nuclear weapons. The international community will most likely move briskly to prevent nuclear terrorism brought on by the use of North Korean nuclear weapons.

C. The Third Scenario on the Civil War

Under this scenario, a national rebellion occurs in North Korea, and the North Korean military splits into several factions and wages violent struggles against one another. Prior to North Korea's collapse, the NDC had exercised complete control over the North Korean armed forces and maintained order in the military and also sustained social order through public security organs. Following the collapse, however, the military is not under the central command of the NDC and has split up into several smaller groups. North Korea is fighting street battles or a war to quell riots across the country by mobilizing corps and divisions in forward and

rear areas. Civil rebellions are breaking out, and the North Korean military, having lost control, is intervening in the civil rebellions by mobilizing military forces at local levels or in Pyongyang itself. The military is mercilessly massacring those who spearheaded the civil rebellions. Prior to the country's collapse, the North Korean military has developed, possessed, and managed nuclear weapons which were under central control. Those in charge of nuclear weapons management in the North Korean military have split into different groups. Some are attempting to smuggle out nuclear weapons and materials overseas. Some may argue that the military, which has control of nuclear weapons, should come to power, devise a foreign policy, and attempt to stage a coup. Others may attempt to ensure their personal safety by taking nuclear weapons and materials to a country of their choice, whether South Korea, China, Russia or the United States, reporting them there, and receiving compensation. The most worrisome scenario would be the North Korean military, which has seized control of nuclear weapons, declaring that it is entitled to use its nuclear deterrent and launch other forms of military attack against those foreign powers intervening in North Korea's civil war. In the event the likelihood of a military collision on the Korean peninsula would peak. In the meantime, the possibility of the North Korean military's transfer of nuclear weapons and materials to Middle Eastern countries like Iran or Syria and to terrorist forces would increase. Hence, global tension is rising for fear of possible nuclear terrorism: which worries the world the most.

How would this scenario impact the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the world? Under this scenario, the impact on South Korea will be immense indeed. The South Korean security situation will become extremely unstable following a civil war in North Korea, which is located just north of South Korea. As the civil war intensifies in North Korea, the North Korean military may attempt to launch an attack against South Korea, contending that "South Korea's and the ROK-US combined forces' northward advance is imminent." In the meantime, South Korea will be locked in a heated debate over whether it should invoke a preventive right of self-defense, and what will be the proper timing, if adopted. At the ROK-US alliance level, the two allies will have sincere discussions on whether to implement Operational Plan 5029. Moreover, the South Korean government might announce a set of measures designed to dissuade China from unilaterally intervening in a North Korean rebellion or should North Korean military seek to transfer WMD

overseas. South Korea needs to be prepared for the possible defection of some North Korean nuclear engineers and experts to South Korea. It may even need to appeal to the United States and the UNSC for action, lest some of those engineers and experts make contact with Middle Eastern countries or terrorist organizations. In order to dispel the international community's growing concerns following North Korea's collapse, and to mitigate any security anxieties which may spring up during North Korea's absorption into South Korea, the South Korean government must announce its policy of keeping the Korean peninsula nuclear-free even after unification. If Seoul succeeds in obtaining North Korea's nuclear weapons, it may even have to announce that it will abolish them under the supervision of the international community.

In the meantime, the South Korean people and NGOs will call on the South Korean government to chart a plan to prevent the North Korean army from brutally suppressing the North Korean people. They will also urge their government to formulate a consistent and future-oriented set of measures on the handling and treatment of those North Korean officers and men who escape to South Korea. China will conclude that the internal strife in North Korea and the possibility of North Korea's WMD transfer will trigger an extremely unstable situation on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Hence, it will ask that the countries concerned exercise self-restraint and respond level-headedly in response to South Korea's independent intervention or the ROK-US combined forces' intervention. Beijing might even ask for an ROK-China bilateral dialogue to cooperate closely with South Korea on the North Korean crisis. If not, it may take the issue to the UNSC and request that it officially discuss resolving the North Korean civil war and preventing the possibility of WMD diversion.

With respect to South Korea's independent intervention or the ROK-US combined (after 2015, joint) forces' intervention, Russia, too, will ask the interested parties to exercise self-restraint and warn them against intervention. It will join hands with the Chinese and request the UNSC to address the North Korean problem. The United States and Japan will voice concerns about the ramifications of North Korea's civil war and poor control of WMD for the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. The two countries will likely call for ROK-US bilateral cooperation on issues requiring a military readiness posture. They will also likely push for ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation on issues requiring diplomatic and economic responses, recalling the

tradition of ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue and the North Korean question as a whole. Russia will see the reality for what it is—that North Korea is incorrigible—and support the peaceful unification and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, although reluctantly.

The international community will grow increasingly alarmed about the brain drain of fleeing North Korean nuclear scientists and nuclear engineers who took part in North Korea's nuclear program and the proliferation of North Korean nuclear weapons and materials, including their transfer to terrorist groups. Against this backdrop, the international community will share the understanding that a comprehensive plan is urgently needed and to that end will make concerted efforts through the UNSC, the G-8's Global Partnership Program, the Nuclear Security Summit, and, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The UN member states will likely raise the issue of dispatching peacekeeping forces to North Korea to prevent the North Korean civil war from escalating into massacres and a war with South Korea.

D. The fourth Scenario: Success of a Military Coup

Under the last scenario, a sustained period of instability ensues North Korea's collapse, and it is only after months that a palace coup occurs under the banner of fulfilling Kim Jong-il's and Kim Jong-un's dying wishes. The coup is spearheaded by the military, the largest power group in North Korea. A new ruling class emerges. This scenario is fundamentally different from the three aforementioned scenarios. The first three scenarios hypothesize a number of possible situations in North Korea, which is on the verge of collapse following the failure of the transition of hereditary power from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un, and speculate on the political and military repercussions that may follow.

This scenario, however, assumes that, despite the breakdown of the hereditary succession system centered on Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, the military, the most cohesive power group in North Korea, succeeds in a coup for the sake of stabilizing North Korea. This scenario rests on two bases. First, one needs to think about the possibility of the North Korean system's continued existence, without being integrated or absorbed into South Korea following a collapse. Second, one needs to hypothesize every possible situation when considering scenarios designed to predict the future of North Korea. However, this scenario differs slightly from typical scenarios offered by others,⁷ for it supposes

that instability persists for months following North Korea's complete collapse, and, when the masses or groups of disgruntled factions fail to launch a substitute regime, the military seizes power by staging a coup, on the grounds of overcoming the domestic turmoil.

How would this impact the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the world? A new wave of tensions will sweep through the Korean peninsula following the bloodshed and a successful bloody coup. The North Korean military will further tighten its grip on the country in order to finish building a powerful state, Kim Jong-il's last wish. The military's rule will be a modified version of Kim Jong-il's military-first politics. Tensions will run high on the Korean peninsula following the emergence of a military regime in the North; naturally, inter-Korean relations will be strained even more. On purpose, North Korea will build tensions with the outside world, but it will aim to maintain and strengthen its solidarity with China. Thus, tensions on the Korean peninsula will probably not spiral out of control. Faced with a politically unstable North Korea and a military coup in the North, South Korea will likely bolster its relations with the United States, China, Japan, and Russia and take reinforced measures on multiple fronts so that tensions deriving from the North Korean coup do not escalate into a military collision on the Korean peninsula. China will express relief that the bloodshed in North Korea has not led to a system collapse and that the military, which is a pro-China faction, succeeded in the coup. At the same time, it will call on the new North Korean military regime to adopt as its basic policy the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the preservation of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

The United States will closely monitor developments in North Korea while strengthening the ROK-US alliance so that North Korea's domestic instability does not spread across the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. Japan will promote close ROK-US-Japan trilateral policy coordination and walk in lock step with Seoul and Washington in order to prevent North Korea's unstable domestic situation and military coup from undermining the stability and peace of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. Russia will breathe a sigh of relief because the bloodshed and military coup in North Korea did not lead to a North Korean collapse. It will hope to strengthen the traditional North Korea–Russia bond with the new military regime.

The world will watch anxiously as it waits to see whether the new military regime in North Korea will help promote peace and stability on

the Korean peninsula. While the continued division of the Korean peninsula may dim hopes for unification, the world, for its part, may be relieved that the North Korean crisis has come to a close in a short time.

E. The Fifth Scenario: North Korea's Invasion into the South

This scenario assumes that the Kim Jong-un regime or the post-Kim family regime will invade South Korea, either for a limited attack or for an all-out attack by taking advantage of its nuclear weapons before absorption by the South may be possible. This scenario differs from the above-mentioned four scenarios which presupposed the replacement of the Kim family regime. The Kim family regime itself might try to rescue itself by using their military superiority over the South to get out of the defeating path to the North Korea's downfall, although the path seems inevitable to the eyes of the international community.

What impact will this scenario have on South Korea, the United States, China, and other countries? Should deterrence fail, South Korea's objective will be to limit the range of conflict to the local area in case of a limited attack, and to counterattack and drive out North Korean armed forces in case of an all-out attack in order to achieve unification. As predetermined in the joint operation plan between Seoul and Washington, Seoul needs to have close consultations with US forces in Korea and Washington while executing such operational plans as OPLAN 5027. Before the crisis in North Korea takes place, or during the initial phase of the crisis, it is important for Seoul and Washington to communicate to the North Korean leadership their joint solemn resolve that the two nations and the world will never tolerate a North Korean invasion and the two allies will pursue unification by force because the North Korean invasion has itself violated the UN Charter.

This time, it is also important that the two allies together make clear to China that China must not support a North Korean invasion. This is entirely different from the North Korean invasion of 1950. While conducting a joint counterattack operation against North Korea, it is necessary that Seoul and Washington bring this case to the United Nations so that the two allies gather international support for the counterattack, because North Korea breached the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula and the world in accordance with the United Nations' Charter. In this scenario, minority views that the United States should not cross the present Military Demarcation Line do not make sense at all. The international community and the two allies must show

North Korea their resolve: that a second Korean War initiated by the North will be punished with severe penalties-unification by force and massive retaliation with nuclear weapons in the case of North Korean use of nuclear or bio-chemical weapons.

Conclusion

This article has focused on four scenarios on how the North Korean situation might evolve following a North Korean collapse and a fifth which sees North Korea's explosion, regardless of the fate of the Kim family regime. It has also analyzed the possible politico-military ramifications for the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the world of each scenario. In addition it has also contemplated the need for bilateral cooperation between South Korea and the United States in the context of a political crisis in North Korea.

This article has shown that a North Korean collapse will itself produce an unprecedented shock to the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. It has also demonstrated the importance of conducting advance research and charting a set of measures to create a favorable strategic environment for South Korea on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia following a North Korean collapse. Much research has been conducted on the question of North Korea's collapse, but most of the research has focused on scenarios predicting the process by which North Korea might collapse. Yet, research on possible situations following a North Korean collapse and their possible impact has been practically nonexistent.

It is important to map out a comprehensive plan on how the North Korean situation might evolve, following the country's collapse. It is important to foster an environment where South Korea's goals can be successfully accomplished rather than to respond to a situation passively after it has happened. South Korea needs to be able to anticipate possible scenarios and formulate proactive policies under which it can create an environment conducive to its national interests, and its objective of permanent unification.

In contemplating various scenarios, it is important that South Korea and the United States prevent China's unilateral intervention into the North Korea's political turmoil.

It is also critical to realize that the innumerable problems which will likely arise in the aftermath of a North Korean collapse cannot be solved through exclusive, independent interventions by individual countries,

including South Korea. If American, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese interventions are inevitable, South Korea must take note of the following points to prevent the situation from deteriorating and to secure a central role for itself.

First, South Korea must make every effort to confine the emergency that occurs in North Korea within North Korean borders. It will be preferable if North Korea sees South Korea as an alternative regime as in the German case in which the East Germans preferred to be absorbed into West Germany. In this case, the bulk of the problems that the North Korean collapse may entail can be handled with more ease. South Korea first needs to obtain US support so that Washington plays a role of deterring and preventing China's intervention. It is natural for Northeast Asian nations to pay attention to the post collapse scenario and yet it is necessary that the efforts to resolve North Korea's political crisis should be led by South Korea. International organizations, including the UN, however, may have to intervene to bring an end to a civil war or massacres in North Korea or to establish tight control of North Korea's WMD, including nuclear weapons. South Korea needs to be prepared for this possibility and should actively wage multilateral and UN diplomacy in order to protect its national interests. In the event that the UN militarily intervenes in North Korea, for example by sending peacekeeping troops, South Korea needs to seek assurances, in advance, that once stability and peace are restored in North Korea, all foreign and international armed forces, with the exception of the South Korean army, will be withdrawn from North Korea.

While a North Korean collapse may heighten political, security, economic, and social instability and exacerbate the crisis on the Korean peninsula in the short term, over the medium to long term, it offers an opportunity for North Korea to find a better future than under the Kim Jong-il or Kim Jong-un rule. In this context, South Korea needs to build a system designed to detect fully and in advance changes in the North Korean system and signs of the system's collapse. Policy-makers and experts from countries with a direct interest in a North Korean crisis, such as the United States (hopefully, and China), will need to formulate a plan by coming together to develop various North Korean crises scenarios and conduct politico-military games. These joint efforts will reduce shocks and pave the way for collaboration on behalf of the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. In the policy deliberation process, South Korea's leading role and the US's supportive role are

necessary to lead the transition period peacefully and, hopefully, smoothly. The US role in securing a constructive Chinese role is essential in order to lead the transition period peacefully and in favor of South Korean's national interest.

Notes:

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