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Politico-Military Repercussions of North Korean Crisis

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I. The collapse of North Korean System

The collapse of the North Korean system means the collapse of the total establishment of the state. This, in turn, means a breakdown of North Korea's ruling system, in short a state of anarchy deriving from a paralyzed central ruling system. Experts equate "a state of anarchy, or an overall paralysis of governing and administrative powers, compounded by a weakened concentration of military power," with North Korea's collapse.¹ Yet, over the short term, one should not conclude that a North Korean collapse will necessarily be accompanied by an extensive disturbance among the people or a violent, bloody struggle of a small group of officers in the military.

If a North Korean collapse did not occur in a vacuum, one needs to think about how Kim Jong-il's monolithic system or Kim Jong-un's succession system collapsed. The reason is, the hereditary succession from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un can be likened to a monolithic theocratic dictatorship. If a Kim Jong-il–Kim Jong-un system broke down in a situation where no individual or group could possibly replace the Kim family rule, there must have been a process.

Whether North Korea's Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un died natural deaths, died in accidents, or were assassinated prior to the state's collapse may be the

¹ For various North Korean contingency scenarios, see "Kim Jong-il Dethroned in Courtyard *Coup d'Etat*," *Monthly Chosun*, ed., *Great Transformation on Korean Peninsula* (Seoul: Monthly Chosun, 2003), pp. 297–320.

crux of the problem. The reason is that, the downfall of the strong father-son system suggests someone removed the head of that system. That a substitute power has not taken over and a state of anarchy persists even after the disappearance of Kim Jong-un means the military, the most powerful group in North Korea, failed to promptly fill the vacuum of power but a popular revolution has not taken place yet, and the ruling elite has been torn up into pieces. A vacuum of power is silent like the eve of a storm but unpredictable, in that one does not know what is to come next. Groups of potential substitute powers are closely watching for an opportunity to make their appearance, but not one can step forward with confidence.

Who overthrew Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, and whether they were removed from power premeditatedly or accidentally will have a significant impact on how the North Korean situation unfolds. In short, how the North Korean situation develops will hinge on the following questions: was it an individual or a group that deposed Kim Jong-il and his son? If it was an individual, was it Kim Jong-il's 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?² In addition, the reason for Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un's removal may affect how the situation evolves following the disappearance of the father and son. Were they ousted because they failed to provide their people with a decent quality of life, or was strong resistance to hereditary succession from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un the cause of their removal? How the post-collapse situation in North Korea develops will be contingent upon the answer to this question.

Then how would the state of anarchy in North Korea evolve following the disappearance of Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, or the lack of a central governing power? This paper will suppose that the hereditary transition of power between Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un failed to succeed for some reason

² Koh Jae-hong, "Study of International Cooperation During North Korean Contingency," *Pukhan Hakpo* [North Korean Studies Journal], Vol. 33, No. 2 (2008), pp. 205–239.

and, though multiple candidates vying to replace the Kim family's rule have persistently endeavored to seize power, no group has succeeded in seizing power with authority, 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. This can be compared to the time between South Korean President Park Chung-hee's assassination on October 26, 1979 and December 12, 1979, when Chun Doo-hwan's palace *coup d'etat* succeeded. It was a tranquil period, just like the eve of a storm. The difference is that a central government existed in South Korea then. Governmental authority, therefore, remained solid. In contrast, in North Korea's case, the Kim family's dynastic rule which lasted more than 70 years would end, heralding the demise of absolute power. In a way, the situation would be similar to the Ceausescu regime's end in 1989. Hence, a North Korean collapse and the situation in South Korea in October 1979 would be different. The similarity between Romania and North Korea would be that the dictator is emasculated by a group, and a period of instability ensues. 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 highly likely develop in one of three ways. This paper will explain in detail the three scenarios and attempt to shed light on the possible politico-military impact they may have on the Korean peninsula as well as on Northeast Asia. It should also be clarified at this point that it is highly likely

these three scenarios will occur consecutively. As a fourth scenario, this paper will hypothesize a successful military coup months after North Korea's collapse and the subsequent emergence of a new ruling class. While all scenarios should be mutually exclusive, some should be representative of 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 their future. The situation is not ripe for the different groups to wage a power struggle. A small number of North Koreans are escaping the country.

The second scenario: The 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 lacuna 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.

Scenario number four: Instability persists following a North Korean regime collapse. After months, Kim Jong-il and 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 following chapters shall delve into each of these four scenarios and analyze how each might impact South Korea, Northeast Asia, and the world.

II. Calm Before the Storm: North Koreans' Escape

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 heat from the overthrow of Kim Jong-il and 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-il and 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 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.

A group of officials who had endeavored to consolidate the Kim Jong-il–Kim Jong-un hereditary system will no longer have prospects for the future. What is more, they will foresee threats to their personal safety. Hence, some of them will attempt to 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 next leader after Kim Jong-un, but they are in 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 or so. 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 speculations and rumors will instantaneously spread like a 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.

Near the end of the Koguryo Kingdom, a power vacuum ensued 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 each 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?

First, the South Korean people, particularly those who have families and relatives in North Korea, will strongly ask the South Korean government to save North Korean compatriots, who face the danger of massacres. The government, in turn, will be highly perplexed, for it would 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 undergo a democratic procedure in forming a responsible government that respects the people's human rights, freedoms, and welfare and appeal to the

international community to that effect.³ 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.⁴ 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 how the countless wild rumors floating around in North Korea might affect inter-Korean relations and North Korea's future. It would 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 would serve as an incentive or a counter-incentive 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

³ Yu Ho-yol, "North Korean Contingency in Political and Foreign Policy Fields: Types and Possible Responses," Park Kwan-yong et. al., eds., *North Korean Contingency and Our Response* (Seoul: Hanul, 2007), pp. 13–56.

⁴ Baik Seung-joo: "Military Preparations for North Korean Contingency," Park Kwan-yong et. al., eds., *North Korean Contingency and Our Response* (Seoul: Hanul, 2007), pp. 57–90.

what policy to employ to respond to North Korea's internal chaos. The conflict might even escalate between the conservative and progressive camps in the process. 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 persuasively explain the North Korean situation to the people. It should also keep in mind that a North Korean collapse will not automatically lead straight to unification.

What ramifications would 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 busily 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 sending 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 volume of North Koreans crossing the Sino-North Korea border and 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-il and Kim Jong-un. Based on the ROK-US alliance, it will cooperate closely with Seoul to respond 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 against the collapsed North Korea's absorption into South Korea or 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. Media will competitively run stories speculating 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.

III. 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 extort food and consumer goods. The number of people assassinating and perpetrating acts of terror against the military and government personnel in Pyongyang and other cities and provinces of North Korea is growing exponentially. Due to the collapse of the distribution system, some soldiers attack civilians to procure food, leading to small gunfights between the military and civilians. The military opens fire on some North Korean defectors, and the people's discontent with the military grows. The people increasingly raid military units and seize firearms. There are yet no large-scale gun battles or a national rebellion in which the military is systematically involved. Nobody is making an attempt to smuggle out WMD. The military continues to exercise control and manage nuclear weapons properly.

Persisting food shortages and worsening economic hardships may lead to popular uprisings, which in turn may result in a sustained period of anarchy

in Pyongyang and other regions of North Korea. Rumors will abound that anti-Kim Jong-il and anti-Kim Jong-un factions will stage armed uprisings against pro-Kim factions.

This scenario assumes that the state has lost control months ago, and that assassinations, acts of terror, and violence reign across the country. The masses had endured years of repression and suffering under the Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un dictatorships, and now, they are 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 disturbance, more and more North Koreans will likely follow the trail of people who have already fled the country. To North Korean cadres, it becomes clear that public security and order cannot be restored, and that a substitute power cannot seize the reins of power. Under constant threats of assassination and terrorist attack, their sense of crisis grows even more, resulting in a soaring 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 the profits they would reap by smuggling out the weapons overseas, they are reluctant to smuggle them out, take them into personal possession, or use 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 brutally massacred the people. The military and the people clash in a few places across North Korea, reminiscent of the Kwangju Massacre in South Korea in May 1980. 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 may 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 bloodshed and atrocities.

How would this impact South Korea, Northeast Asia, and the world?

South Korea will give deep thought to the handling of the countless North Korean defectors. Seoul will feel that the onus is upon South Korea to prevent massacre in North Korea, which is 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 needs to discuss the North Korean defectors issue with China. If they run into hurdles while trying to escape to China, North Koreans will flee to South Korea via the East Sea [Sea of Japan], the Yellow Sea, and the DMZ. In this light, South Korea will have to quickly decide how many North Koreans it can accommodate and how, as well as where to put them. In addition, Seoul will ponder on how it will procure the funds for supporting 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 chart plans on how to absorb and assimilate North Korean defectors into South Korea, and how to prevent the North Korean military from massacring the North Korean people.

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 the people more and more, the South Korean civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) will increasingly 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 Geumgangsan 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 mass influxes of North Korean defectors, plus the future of North-South relations, North Korea's domestic stability, and the 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 just watch the collapsed North Korea or proactively intervene in the situation. At the same time, it will need to make the crucial decision 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 hot potato will be the provision of humanitarian assistance to the North Korean people, including food, medical supplies, and consumer goods.

How would 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 would 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's absorption 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 concern, 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 has exhausted too much power 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, to ward off the possibility of Chinese intervention. 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

decide as such for three reasons. First, in the case of a mass exodus from North Korea, it would be difficult to gauge the number of refugees. Moreover, each neighboring country would have a different capacity for accommodating North Korean refugees. Second, it would be impossible to know exactly which escape route the mass influxes of North Korean refugees would 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 little 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.⁵ 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 one single 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 as human beings. To make matters worse, epidemics may be spread and claim many lives in North Korea. If natural calamities like flood and drought were to occur, many more people's lives would 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 outflows

⁵ Nam Sung-wook, "Contingency in North Korea and Our Efficient Response: On Economic Issues," Park Kwan-yong et. al., eds., *North Korean Contingency and Our Response* (Seoul: Hanul, 2007), pp. 91–128.

of nuclear weapons. The international community will likely move briskly to prevent nuclear terrorism brought on by North Korean nuclear weapons.

IV. Warning Signs on Civil War, Fate of North Korean Nuclear Arsenal

Under this scenario, a national rebellion occurs in North Korea, and the North Korean military splits up into several factions and wage violent struggles against one another. Prior to North Korea's collapse, the NDC exercised complete control over the North Korean armed forces and maintained order in not only the military but also 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 in and outside of the military, and the North Korean military, having lost its central control, are intervening in the civil rebellions by mobilizing military forces at local levels or in Pyongyang. The military is mercilessly massacring those who spearheaded the civil rebellions.

Prior to the country's collapse, the North Korean military developed, possessed, and managed nuclear weapons under central control, proudly chanting the slogan, "Long Live Brilliant Commander General Kim Jong-il for Building a World-class Nuclear Weapons State!" Those in charge of nuclear weapons management in the North Korean military has split up 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, announce 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, for example South Korea, China, and 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. The likelihood of a military collision on the Korean peninsula would peak, then. 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 has increased. 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 would 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, propagandizing 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 would be the proper timing of it. 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 in the case of the North Korean military's transfer of WMD overseas. South Korea needs to be prepared for the possible defection of some North Korean nuclear technology 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 concern 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 and shooting them to death. 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 would trigger an extremely unstable situation on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Hence, it will ask that 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 it to 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 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 concern 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 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 squarely 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 aimed at cooperative threat reduction, the Nuclear Security Summit, and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. What is more, 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.

V. Success of Military Coup and Emergence of Substitute Power

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 last scenario, however, hypothesizes that, despite the breakdown of the

hereditary succession system centered on Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, the military, the most superior power group in North Korea, succeeds in a coup on the grounds of stabilizing North Korea.

This scenario was conceived for two reasons. 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 coming up with scenarios designed to predict the future of North Korea. This scenario may not require further explanation, due to its similarities with Professor Yu, Ho-Yeol's predictions in his paper.⁶ However, this scenario differs from that offered by Professor Yu, 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 the success of a 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. North Korea will purposefully 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

⁶ Yu, Ho-Yeol, "Current State of North Korea and Types of its Contingencies," Iimin International Relations Institute Background Paper Series No.02 (June 2010)available at www.iiri.or.kr

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 did not lead 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 with bated breath 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.

VI. Conclusions

This paper offered four scenarios on how the North Korean situation might evolve following a North Korean collapse, and it analyzed the possible politico-military ramifications for the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the world

under each scenario.

This paper has shown that a North Korean collapse, with a deafening thud, would bring an unprecedented shock to the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. The paper 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. This paper categorized possible post-collapse developments in North Korea into four scenarios and analyzed each one. This paper has proven that more scientific and systematic research needs to be carried out to draw up effective policy alternatives. More specifically:

First, it is important to thoroughly research and map out a comprehensive plan on how the North Korean situation might develop following the country's collapse.

Second, it is necessary to be thoroughly prepared for the future, according to a plan.

Third, it is important to foster an environment where goals can be successfully accomplished. In other words, rather than responding to a situation after it has happened, South Korea needs to be able to foresee the scenario and formulate proactive policies under which it can create an environment conducive to its national interest.

Fourth, while executing a plan, South Korea needs to make efforts so that the actual implementation of the policy translates into peaceful integration or unification of North and South Korea.

Lastly, the fourth scenario, in which a new North Korean regime takes the reins of power following a successful military coup, after a sustained

period of instability, proves that it is of crucial importance for South Korea to strategically manage that time of instability while making the most of the opportunity for inter-Korean integration.

The paper also showed that the innumerable problems which will arise in the aftermath of a North Korean collapse cannot be solved through exclusive, independent interventions by individual countries, including South Korea. If US, 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 settle the emergency that occurs in North Korea within North Korean borders, under strict surveillance. Northeast Asian nations should first make an effort to solve the crisis, and this regional endeavor should be led by South Korea. International organizations, including the UN, 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 interest. In the event that the UN militarily intervenes in North Korea, for example by sending peacekeeping troops, South Korea needs to clarify, 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, should withdraw from North Korea as soon as possible.

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 head for a better path than where it used be under Kim Jong-il's and Kim Jong-un's rule. In this context, South Korea needs to build a system designed to fully detect in advance and predict 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 and China, will need to formulate a plan by coming together to develop various North Korean crisis scenarios and conduct politico-military games.