NO EXIT

NORTH KOREA, NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Jonathan D. Pollack

IISS

No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons and International Security

Jonathan D. Pollack

No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons and International Security

Jonathan D. Pollack

IISS The International Institute for Strategic Studies

The International Institute for Strategic Studies
Arundel House | 13–15 Arundel Street | Temple Place | London | WC2R 3DX | UK

First published May 2011 by **Routledge**
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

for **The International Institute for Strategic Studies**
Arundel House, 13–15 Arundel Street, Temple Place, London, WC2R 3DX, UK
www.iiss.org

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by **Routledge**
270 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis, an Informa Business

DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE John Chipman
EDITOR Nicholas Redman
ASSISTANT EDITOR Janis Lee
EDITORIAL Jeffrey Mazo, Sarah Johnstone, Ayse Abdullah
COVER/PRODUCTION John Buck

The International Institute for Strategic Studies is an independent centre for research, information and debate on the problems of conflict, however caused, that have, or potentially have, an important military content. The Council and Staff of the Institute are international and its membership is drawn from almost 100 countries. The Institute is independent and it alone decides what activities to conduct. It owes no allegiance to any government, any group of governments or any political or other organisation. The IISS stresses rigorous research with a forward-looking policy orientation and places particular emphasis on bringing new perspectives to the strategic debate.

The Institute's publications are designed to meet the needs of a wider audience than its own membership and are available on subscription, by mail order and in good bookshops. Further details at www.iiss.org.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Bell & Bain Ltd, Thornliebank, Glasgow

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

ADELPHI series
ISSN 1944-5571

ADELPHI 418-19
ISBN 978-0-415-67083-8

Contents

'It's mere chance that has brought us together. Mere chance? Then it's by chance this room is furnished as we see it. It's an accident that the sofa on the right is a livid green, and that one on the left's wine-red. Mere chance? Well, just try to shift the sofa and you'll see the difference quick enough ...

I tell you they've thought it all out. Down to the last detail. Nothing was left for chance. This room was all set for us ... we're chasing after each other, round and round in a vicious circle, like horses on a roundabout.'

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos* [No Exit], 1944.

'The smaller a nation, the stronger a nation must be to keep its pride.'

Kim Jong-il, interview with South Korean media representatives, *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 August 2000

'Where else was such a country, such a revolution?'

Rodong Sinmun, 8 January 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Barbara

This book explores Korea's political-military development since the end of the Pacific War, how nuclear technology shaped these possibilities, and the effects of both issues on the Korean peninsula and beyond. I focus primarily on North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK); its leaders and institutions; and on how its actions have influenced the policies of the Republic of Korea (ROK), China, Japan, Russia and the United States. For Washington, there is an understandable focus on nuclear diplomacy and on US policy options. My primary focus, however, is on the Korean peninsula, which often gets lost amidst detailed accounts of the US policy debate.

Practitioners and analysts hew to highly divergent and intensely held views of the DPRK. Those analysing the North must do so from a distance. It remains largely sealed from the outside world, with observers at best having episodic and highly constrained access. Despite the system's inherent insularity, the DPRK's history and strategic calculations are neither unknown nor impossible to fathom, though any claims to definitive knowledge should be viewed sceptically. But this underscores the need for a continued close attention to North Korea and of how this isolated, highly idiosyncratic system has shaped and continues to shape international security in one of the world's pivotal strategic locations.

My understanding of the DPRK has been influenced by individuals with deep knowledge and long personal experience in Korea. In particular, I want to acknowledge Stephen Bradner, Andrei Lankov

and Hans Maretzki. I do not expect any of them to agree fully with my arguments, but they have enriched my understanding and compelled me to carefully assess my assumptions and interpretations. I have also benefited from numerous exchanges with Stephen Linton, Alexandre Mansourov, Narushige Michishita, Chris Nelson, James Person, Joshua Pollack, Mitchell Reiss, Evans Revere and David Straub. I am indebted to Mitchell Reiss for a careful reading of the manuscript. In addition, I have learned much from an outpouring of studies on North Korean history, politics, economics, weapons development and nuclear diplomacy published in recent years, many of which I cite in the volume.

My analysis draws extensively on the DPRK's official media. Without access to decision-making in Pyongyang, careful scrutiny of these materials is crucial to understanding the language, logic and rhythms of North Korean policy. The primary sources compiled and disseminated by the Open Source Center were indispensable to this effort.[1] I am much indebted to the extraordinary work of the dedicated government researchers who grapple with these materials every day. Though I cannot acknowledge them by name, I have benefited greatly from their insights and their keen understanding of the North Korean media process.

I have also drawn extensively on the holdings of the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The Center's dissemination of previously unavailable primary sources has enabled scholars to reconstruct pivotal events in far greater detail. As the volume neared completion, James Person alerted me to newly available materials on North Korea from the 1960s and 1970s, when leaders in Pyongyang approached decisions on nuclear-weapons development. His forthcoming PhD dissertation will delve much more deeply into North Korean domestic politics during the 1950s and 1960s.

The research and writing for this volume was supported by a generous grant from the Program on Global Security and Sustainability of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. I owe special thanks to Amy Gordon, the Foundation's Director for International Peace and Security, for her support and encouragement. The grant enabled extensive international travel and repeated interactions with scholars, diplomats, technical specialists and government personnel on visits to China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Russia, as well as to various EU states. Many of these individuals have first-hand experience with the DPRK, either through study or government service. Some provided important insights into policy debate within their own countries. These

individuals must remain largely anonymous, but I have benefited greatly from their candor and their insights.

Over the course of this research, I twice visited the DPRK, where I participated in Track-Two dialogues with senior North Korean diplomatic personnel and other officials. Though these visits were relatively brief, they provided insight into North Korea that cannot be garnered from a distance. In addition, I benefited from discussions and interactions with past and present US officials. But this book is not an 'inside the Beltway' account. I am convinced that the how and why of the Korean nuclear impasse must begin with the DPRK system and its history.

I also want to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Naval War College, my professional home between October 2000 and November 2010. My research on the Korean nuclear issue began with a long article I published in the Naval War College Review in 2003 analysing the breakdown of the Agreed Framework, and my interest has persisted ever since.[2] The college's endorsement of this project and its administrative support freed me from many of my regular responsibilities. I owe particular thanks to Rear-Admiral James P. Wisecup, President of the Naval War College; Peter Dombrowski, Chairman of the Strategic Research Department; and Rear-Admiral Roger Nolan (Retd), Executive Director of the Naval War College Foundation. The views expressed in this book, however, are entirely my own.

I completed an earlier draft of this study before joining the Brookings Institution in December 2010. New information on the North's advances in enrichment technology became available at virtually the same time, necessitating revisions in the manuscript and a delay in final publication. Though I discuss some of the implications of the enrichment programme in several chapters, this issue warrants more extensive consideration than I was able to provide. I owe appreciation to Tim Huxley and Adam Ward of the IISS, who encouraged me to undertake this volume and who have patiently awaited its completion. Thanks are also owed to Nick Redman, Ayse Abdullah and Janis Lee, who did everything possible to expedite final publication.

Though this book culminates years of effort, it is by no means the end of this story. My title, expropriated from the translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's play, *Huis Clos*, is both metaphor and explanation. As a Korean colleague has explained to me, the Korean language has distinct words for entry (*eep-gu*) and exit (*chool-gu*). But a hybrid word (*chool-eep-gu*) is generally employed in describing a doorway – which is explained by the absence of rear doors from most Korean homes. In North Korean usage,

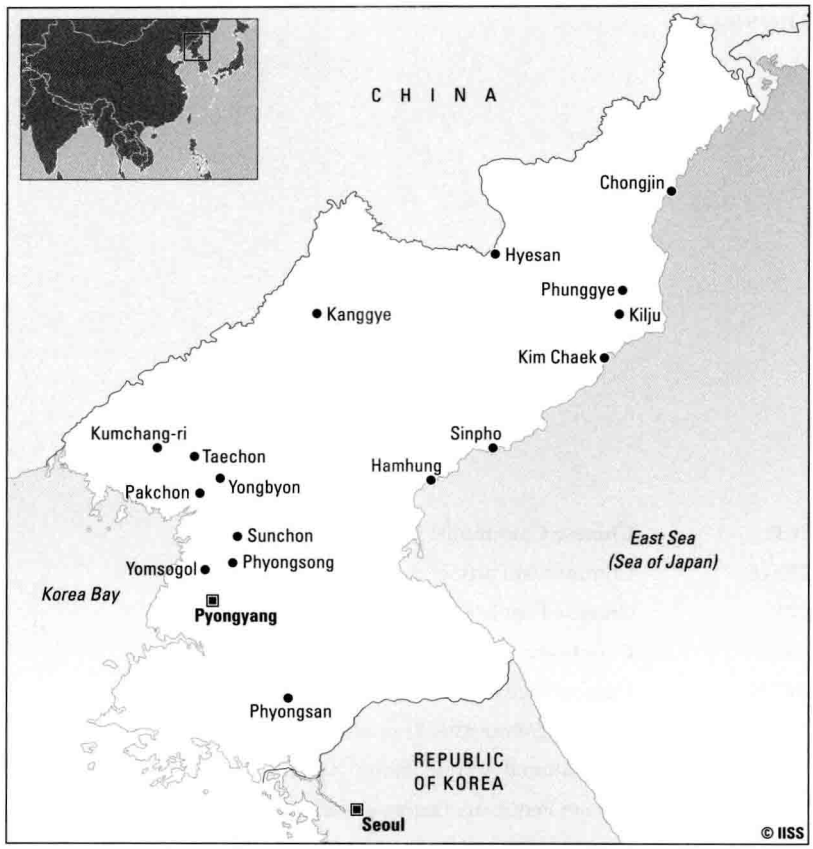
the sequence is reversed (*eep-chool-gu*), thus placing entry before exit, which seems particularly apt.[3] Unlike Sartre's literary work, however, this saga is not a one-act play. There has been no exit from the nuclear issue for Koreans in the north or south, for other states in Northeast Asia, or for the United States. The intractability of this issue should sober analysts and policymakers alike.

Finally and by no means least, I express my deep gratitude to my wife, Barbara. She has repeatedly accommodated my deep preoccupation with this project and the extensive travel and endless hours it has required. American officials urge strategic patience in achieving Korean denuclearisation; she has had to exhibit the same with me. For both of us, completion of this volume represents an exit of a kind. I doubt that she ever imagined that a book with nuclear weapons in the title would be dedicated to her, and she probably wondered at times if I would ever finish it, but at long last here it is.

JDP
Washington, DC
January 2011

GLOSSARY

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPV	Chinese People's Volunteers
DMZ	Demilitarised Zone
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
KEDO	Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation
KWP	Korean Workers' Party
KPA	Korean People's Army
LWR	Light-Water Reactor
NDC	National Defence Commission
NPT	Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
SPA	Supreme People's Assembly
WFP	World Food Programme
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction



North Korea's nuclear infrastructure: known and suspected locations

INTRODUCTION

Despite episodic, partial diplomatic successes and repeated calls for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, the behaviour of North Korea across the decades suggests the precise opposite. For a quarter of a century, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has defied, stymied, deferred or circumvented repeated efforts by allies, adversaries and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inhibit its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ensure Pyongyang's compliance with its declared non-proliferation obligations. Any residual ambiguity in North Korea's nuclear intentions dissipated over the past decade, though the ultimate scope and purposes of the nuclear programme (beyond protecting the DPRK from supposed existential threats from the United States and its insistence on treatment on 'an equal footing with other nuclear weapons states') remain obscure.[1]

The DPRK signalled its final breach of the nuclear divide with its pull-out from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in January 2003; there followed an official statement in February 2005 that it had manufactured nuclear weapons and the conducting of nuclear tests in October 2006 and May 2009.

The North has also asserted that its entire inventory of plutonium has been weaponised; it has claimed advances in enriched uranium as an alternative source of fissile material and made efforts to develop long-range missiles as a presumed means to deliver a nuclear weapon. It has also provoked sharp responses from the international community by transferring materials and technology with nuclear-weapons potential to other nuclear aspirants. The DPRK persists in making explicit claims to standing as a nuclear power outside the NPT, and insists that any future negotiations acknowledge its status as a nuclear-armed state. Despite continued technological, economic and industrial impediments to a fully realised nuclear capability and periodic intimations that it would be prepared to forgo its nuclear-weapons programme, the leadership of the DPRK long ago concluded that its power, identity and interests were more effectively ensured and protected with nuclear weapons than without them.

Why and how has the nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula reached this point, and what are the consequences? Is it more attributable to a failure of political will and diplomatic imagination on the part of those seeking to prevent the DPRK's nuclear-weapons development, or is it better explained by factors internal to the North Korean system and to the regime's perception of its place in the world? Perhaps more important is whether the pattern of the past decade will be sustained in future years, with no possibility of resolution or reversal.

These issues have long triggered intense debate among policy analysts. On one side of the debate are those who believe that North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons reflects anxieties triggered by the end of the Cold War and the DPRK's loss of explicit security guarantees from Russia and China.[2] But Pyongyang's quest for strategic autonomy has far deeper roots. The first meeting between senior US and DPRK officials

occurred in January 1992, when Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Arnold Kanter met in New York with the Korean Workers Party (KWP) Secretary for International Affairs, Kim Yong-sun.[3] These exchanges provided senior American policy-makers with initial exposure to the world as viewed by leaders in Pyongyang. However, America was a late entrant into the Korean nuclear saga, though it has been enmeshed in high-stakes diplomacy with North Korea ever since.

From the DPRK's earliest existence, North Korea's ruling elite has tried to define and build a state apart from the international system. Even during its period of maximal dependence on the Soviet Union and China, the DPRK insisted that its citizens envied no one, and that exclusionary strategies were necessary to protect it from the depredations of a malign outside world. Survivalism has long dominated the thinking of leaders in the North, who characterise the DPRK as a small, vulnerable system surrounded by far more powerful states unprepared to accord it requisite autonomy and international standing. Given the continuous deployment of US forces on the peninsula since the Korean War, the United States has loomed very large in Pyongyang's calculations. In the name of national defence, Pyongyang maintains in relative terms a level of military preparedness unmatched by any other state in the world. North Korea also denies outside powers information about its decision-making, on issues from the banal to the most consequential. Moreover, the information withheld from the outside world pales by comparison to what the North denies its own citizens.

Despite North Korea's extreme introversion, the documentary record on the DPRK is more substantial than many observers realise.[4] Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the DPRK's official version of the Korean War had begun to unravel, and this trickle became a torrent during the tenure of

Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Invaluable information (mainly from Soviet and East European archives and to a lesser extent from Chinese sources, but also encompassing interviews with participants in early Cold War history) produced an outpouring of new scholarship.[5] Archival information also included important disclosures about North Korea's early interest in nuclear technology, which came to fruition in weapons development decades later. Individuals who worked in the North or who have dealt with North Korean officials, diplomats and engineers have furnished additional insight into the evolution of the system.[6] Despite the obfuscation and obscurity, the DPRK's negotiating strategies and propaganda can be highly revealing. North Korean diplomats exhibit discipline, diligence and utter mastery of their negotiating brief. Even Google Earth provides valuable information about the system's economic underpinnings, military deployments and leadership locations.[7]

The DPRK is America's longest-standing adversary in the international system. Since the establishment of the North Korean state in September 1948, Washington and Pyongyang have never experienced normal relations, and the Korean War cemented lasting animosity on both sides. America has dealt with the North primarily in four contexts: as an enemy in the Korean conflict; as a primary focus of US defence planning in Northeast Asia for more than 60 years; as a US intelligence priority (in particular American efforts to monitor the DPRK's nuclear-weapons and missile activities); and in negotiations seeking to end the nuclear impasse. Despite intermittent political and diplomatic contact over the past two decades, especially negotiations during the Clinton administration, animosities and mutual suspicions have deepened ever since. The North's nuclear tests and its accumulation of fissile material are the latest and most lethal manifestations of this deeply troubling legacy.