

# POST US-DPRK NUCLEAR NEGOTIATION: HIDDEN CYCLE OF “RENEGE-WARNING- COUNTER RENEGE”

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*For nearly two decades, North Korean (NK or DPRK) nuclear development has been one of the most high-profile issues in Northeast Asia, and the United States has funneled profuse resources and time into denuclearizing North Korea, culminating in agreements such as the Agreed Framework (1994) and the February 13 Action Plan (2007). However, the NK nuclear issue is still presently jeopardizing regional stability. What went wrong? This paper attempts to illustrate why and how the US coercive diplomacy failed to denuclearize North Korea despite two settled agreements. This paper focuses on the events starting from after the “resolution” (signing of an agreement) leading up to the next “crisis.” Instead of segmenting the negotiation history into the typical “crisis-negotiation-resolution” block, this paper attempts to shed light on the obscured other half of the circle, the “renege-warning-counter renege” sequence. I introduce an analytical framework calibrating two variables - type of US renege and tone of the US-DPRK bilateral relationship - and trace how Pyongyang responds to different combinations of the two variables. The findings of this paper reveal a correlation between North Korea’s actions and a specific combination of the type of US renege and tone of the bilateral relationship. North Korea responds to indirect renege with benign negative responses (verbal threats) and responds to direct renege with malignant negative responses (actions). Pyongyang’s provocative actions, which are usually perceived as crisis invoking behavior, are in fact the result of US direct renege and a negative bilateral relationship.*

For nearly two decades, North Korean nuclear development has been one of the most high-profile issues in Northeast Asia. The United States has funneled copious amounts of resources and time in an attempt to denuclearize North Korea. Tactics differed with changing administrations, but the strategy has been coercive diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Despite tireless attempts by

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1 Thomas Schelling defines coercive diplomacy as the use of force peaceful or physical force

experts and negotiators during the past two decades, US coercive diplomacy has ultimately failed in denuclearizing North Korea. Considering Pyongyang's recent provocative behaviors, the problem is perhaps (even bigger and more festered than when it first oozed out). Then why did US coercive diplomacy fail? This paper attempts to illustrate why and how US coercive diplomacy towards North Korean nuclear issue failed despite the success of signing two monumental agreements: Agreed Framework (1994) and February 13 Action Plan (2007).

## Literature Review

There has been much effort in the academic community to explain North Korea's behavior and deduce a rationale. Scholars with first-hand negotiation experience such as Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci provide a minute-by-minute account of North Korea's brinkmanship diplomacy during the first nuclear crisis.<sup>2</sup> In terms of explaining Pyongyang's motivation for developing nuclear weapons, pro-engagement scholars point to external factors as central driving forces for the North's nuclear aspiration.<sup>3</sup> Structural imperatives such as a security vacuum after the fall of the Soviet Union, the US-ROK military alliance in the post-Cold War era, and neo-conservative politicians' hawkish measures under the Bush administration are identified as culprits forcing North Korea to resort to nuclear capability. This school of pundits contends that Pyongyang would be willing to give up its nuclear capability when the external driving forces are resolved.

On the other hand, more conservative voices point to internal factors for the North's nuclear aspiration. In this literature, North Korea's nuclear ambition stems from the aggressive nature of the regime, use of nuclear capabilities as a bargaining chip for economic concessions, and also as a regime legitimizing tool.<sup>4</sup> This line of approach assumes that Pyongyang

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to stop an adversary from doing something that he has already undertaken, while Alexander George confines the use of coercive diplomacy to defensive diplomacy. George emphasizes the simultaneous use of carrots (inducement) as well as sticks (threats). For more detail, see Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Virginia: Praeger, 1977) and Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009). Also, for a detailed case study of the successful use of coercive diplomacy, see Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, "Who Won Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and Its Implications for Theory and Policy," *International Security* 30 (2005): 47-86.

2 Joel S. Wit, David B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

3 See Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), and Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and US Disengagement* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002).

4 Victor D. Cha and David Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New

never had, nor will ever have, the intention of fully denuclearizing.

In terms of explaining North Korea's crisis behavior, its unique negotiation pattern is usually identified as crisis diplomacy or coercive diplomacy against the US.<sup>5</sup> Scott Snyder points to North Korea's historic and cultural attributes to explain her negotiation pattern.<sup>6</sup> Chuck Downs delineated the North's negotiation pattern as "agreeing in principle-reinterpreting the agreement-blaming the other for failure of talks" by analyzing more than a dozen cases of negotiation with North Korea.<sup>7</sup> Leon Sigal contends that the tit-for-tat principle has been strictly followed by the US and DPRK during negotiations despite the common knowledge that North Korea is unreliable and inconsistent.<sup>8</sup>

Previous research bears significant value in that they answer two questions: (1) why does North Korea want to develop nuclear weapons? and (2) how have the US and DPRK attempted to resolve the nuclear issue through negotiation? However, research has not explained why and how the US failed in denuclearizing North Korea. The first and second nuclear crisis repeated the "crisis-negotiation-resolution" sequence without any tangible results pointing towards denuclearization. The agreements signed in the "resolution" stage were the result of an arduous negotiation marathon and they contain detailed motions to achieve not only denuclearization, but also peace in Northeast Asia, at large. If only the Agreed Framework had been realized, we would be living in a peaceful and nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula, and the same goes for the February 13 Action Plan. Implementing the signed agreements presented a whole new level of challenges for both the US and DPRK, and both ultimately failed in realizing the agreements. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze why and how these comprehensive agreements failed to be realized. In performing such a task, I focus on

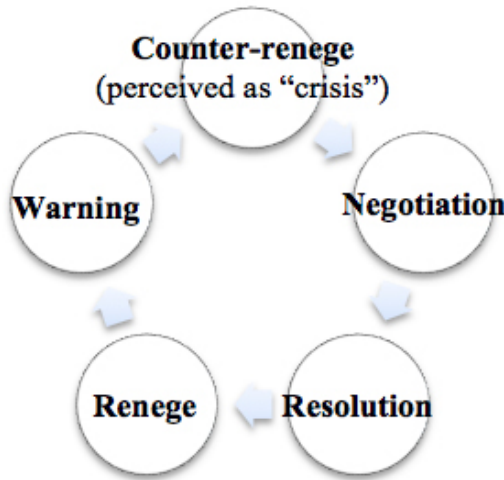
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York: Columbia University Press, 2005), and Jonathan Pollack, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development: Implications for Future Policy," *Proliferation Papers* 33 (Spring 2010).

- 5 For detailed definitions of NK's "Crisis Diplomacy," see Sang-sook Lee, "North Korea's Third Nuclear Test and Its Crisis Diplomacy," *IFANS Brief* 11 (2013). For detailed definitions of NK's "Coercive Diplomacy," see Hoon Seo, "North Korea's Coercive Diplomacy: Small Power's US Policy," *North Korean Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007), and Tae-Young Yoon, "North Korea Nuclear Issue and US Coercive Diplomacy: Carrots and Sticks," *Korean Journal of International Relations* 43, no. 1 (2003).
- 6 Scott Snyder identifies Kim Il-Sung's own guerrilla partisan experience, Japanese colonial rule experience, Stalinist institutional structure, Confucian norms, and emphasis on atmosphere (*punuigi*) as attributes to NK's negotiation behavior. See Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior* (Washington D.C.: Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace, 1999) for more detail.
- 7 Chuck Downs, *Over the Line: North Korea's Negotiating Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1999).
- 8 Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

the events starting from *after* the “resolution” (signing of the agreement) leading up to the next “crisis.” Instead of segmenting the negotiation history into the typical “crisis-negotiation-resolution” block, I attempt to shed light on the obscured other half of the circle: “renege-warning-counter renege.” Diagram 1 illustrates the full circle of the US-NK nuclear negotiation history.

**DIAGRAM 1** Full Cycle of US-DPRK Nuclear Negotiation



While the first half of the circle (crisis-negotiation-resolution) is well researched and abundantly analyzed, the latter half (renege-warning-counter renege/crisis) has hardly been explored.

**Methodology**

*Variables for Coding Events*

In order to analyze and deduce a correlation from the other half of the nuclear negotiation cycle, I categorize the types of US renege, tone of the bilateral relationship, and North Korea’s response as follows:

US Direct Renege is when the US reneges on a commitment stated in written and signed agreements (Agreed Framework, February 13 Action Plan).

*US Indirect Renege* is when the US does not outright renege, but delays fulfillment due to technical issues or raises suspicions about Pyongyang’s commitment.

*North Korea Benign Negative Response* is when the DPRK issues verbal threats and warnings towards the US when faced with a renege (only words not action).

*North Korea Malignant Negative Response* is when the DPRK executes a counter-renege in order to punish a US renege.

*Tone of Bilateral Relationship* is categorized into either amiable or hostile. The tone of the relationship is the atmosphere (*punuigi*)<sup>9</sup> between the two countries. Willingness to engage in bilateral talk is one of the critical factors in determining the tone of the relationship.

*Analytical Framework*

Incorporating the variables defined above, the analytical framework for this paper is illustrated in Table 1. The framework attempts to delineate the relationship between a dependent variable (type of NK response: benign/malignant) and two independent variables (type of US renege: indirect/direct; tone of bilateral relationship: amiable/hostile). This framework attempts to provide a better explanation for the complex dynamics of the US-DPRK nuclear negotiation by tracing how the two independent variables affect the outcome.

**TABLE 1** Analytical Framework

		Tone of US-DPRK Bilateral Relationship	
		Amiable	Hostile
Type	Indirect	A	B
	Direct	C	D

9 For a more detailed account of what North Korea perceives as atmosphere (*punuigi*) and how it determines the outcome of negotiation, see Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge*.

**Analysis**

*Quadrant A and C: Direct and Indirect Renege under an Amiable Relationship*

Despite the heightened tension during the first nuclear crisis (1992-1993), once the Agreed Framework was signed, the relationship between the Clinton administration and Kim Jong Il’s North Korea was amiable. During the implementation of the Agreed Framework, problems arose in all aspects, especially since the US Congress did not favor the deal signed by President Clinton and continued snooping for chances to throw off the agreement and return to hawkish measures. Table 2 lists the cases of indirect renege that manifested during the implementation of the Agreed Framework.

**TABLE 2** Cases of US Indirect Renege under an Amiable Bilateral Relationship

Case No.	Administration	US Indirect Renege	North Korea Response	Negotiation Period	Result of Negotiation
A-1	Clinton	US suspects North Korea’s diversion of heavy fuel oil (1995/02/16)	Benign Negative Response	4 months	Resolved. North agrees to allow monitoring of the use of heavy fuel oil (1995/06/13)
A-2		US suspects underground nuclear facility in Kumchang-ri (1998/01/02)	Benign Negative Response	12 months	Resolved. North agrees to allow inspection at Kumchang-ri site (1999/03/15)

Source: Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” Arms Control Association, April 2003.

Indirect as they were, both issues had the potential to throw off the entire agreement. However, as demonstrated from the two cases during the Clinton administration, North Korea can be surprisingly flexible and practical during negotiations. Under an amiable relationship, an indirect renege is addressed and resolved through negotiation, preventing it from escalating to a direct renege. In order to realize the provision of a light water reactor, North Korea promptly responded to US suspicions on various issues and

mostly catered to the US, trying to relieve American concerns. The DPRK agreed to install monitoring devices to confirm that the heavy fuel oil provided was not diverted to the military even when a request for a formal delivery schedule, which they had been demanding, was denied (case A-1). Suspicions regarding the Kumchang-ri site were resolved when Pyongyang allowed the US inspection team to satisfactorily scour the site (case A-2). The fact that the Clinton administration abstained from taking action also aided in a successful negotiated settlement.

*Quadrant B: Indirect Renegé under a Hostile Relationship*

The US-DPRK bilateral relationship under the Bush administration was mostly hostile. The Republican president started off his term by essentially denying the Agreed Framework with his ABC (Anything But Clinton) policy and the September 11 terrorist attack hammered in the hostile policy vis-à-vis North Korea for the next decade.<sup>10</sup> Various attempts to resolve the North Korea nuclear issue were made (most famously the Six Party Talks). However, under a hostile relationship, any glitch along the way is enough to thwart the entire implementation process. Unlike the two cases illustrated in Table 2, the two issues that arose during the Bush administration quickly led to the collapse of the Agreed Framework (case B-1) and September 19 Joint Statement (2005) (case B-2), as seen in table 3.

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10 For a detailed explanation on the establishment of Bush's ABC principle and its application to North Korea policy, see Mike Chinoy, *Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2009).

**TABLE 3** Cases of US Indirect Renege under a Hostile Bilateral Relationship

Case No.	Administration	US Indirect Renege	North Korean Response	Negotiation Period	Result of Negotiation	North Korean Response
B-1	Bush	US suspect North Korea's secret HEU program (2002/10/16)	Benign Negative	2 days	Unresolved. Direct Renege: US halts provision of heavy fuel oil (2002/11/14)	Malignant Negative
B-2		US enforces "sampling" during verification process (2008/11/13)	Benign Negative	7 days	Unresolved. Direct Renege: US halts provision of heavy fuel oil (2008/12/12)	Malignant Negative

Source: Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy," Arms Control Association, April 2003.

As shown in Table 2, the cases belonging to quadrant A (Table 2) had a negotiation period of average eight months. On the other hand, cases belonging to quadrant B (Table 3) were short-lived. When faced with a suspicion or disagreement on a particular issue, the US quickly moved ahead and took action by not delivering its end of the deal. For both cases B-1 and B-2, it took less than a month for the disagreements or suspicions to lead to a direct renege. There were indeed efforts for negotiation on the issues, but either one or both sides gave up too quickly. In case B-1, discussion quickly fell apart when hawks in Washington exploited then DPRK Vice Foreign Minister, Kang Seok-Ju's ambivalent response to announce the death of the Agreed Framework. Hardliners like John Bolton and Robert Joseph during the Bush administration were praying for chances to renounce the Agreed Framework under the ABC principle, and Kang Seok-Ju's vague rhetoric presented them with a perfect opportunity to make it happen. When James Kelly returned from a two-day talk in Pyongyang, Washington quickly announced North Korea's acknowledgement of the Highly-Enriched Uranium Program, proclaimed the end of the Agreed Framework, and halted the provision of heavy fuel oil. Pyongyang responded with counter-renege measures by breaking International Atomic Energy Agency seals, evicting the US inspection team, and announcing their withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.



In case B-2, the Bush administration got weary of dealing with North Korea towards the end of its term and ceased further attempts to do so. North Korea made many verbal threats (benign negative response) when faced with US accusations, but actual actions (malignant negative response) came only *after* the US had reneged on a promise first. Once the US reneged on a commitment directly stated in an agreement, Pyongyang did not hesitate to match it with a counter-renege. From the two cases (B-1 and B-2), it can be concluded that indirect renege under hostile relationship has strong proclivity to escalate to direct renege. Negotiations often fail to resolve the issue under a hostile relationship. Secondly, North Korea responds to indirect renege with a benign negative response (verbal threats) and responds to direct renege with a malignant negative response. North Korea rarely takes action until *after* the US commits direct renege (in these cases, halting heavy fuel oil delivery). From this it can be deduced that North Korea meets the principle of proportionality of response during the implementation process.

#### *Quadrant D: US Direct Renege under Hostile Relationship*

Direct renege under a hostile relationship is always met with a malignant negative response from North Korea. What is usually perceived as North Korea's "crisis" behavior is, in fact, Pyongyang's way of responding to a US direct renege. The cases in Table 4 demonstrate the relationship between a US direct renege and North Korea's response.

Tracing the tit-for-tat relationship between the US and North Korea provides a few insights that help explain how North Korea's provocative behavior is actually a punitive action against a US renege under a hostile relationship. First, the small time gap between US renege and North Korea's provocation suggests a causal relationship between two events. If North Korea was only aiming to provoke the US and the international society for bargaining leverage, then why would they act at the moment that they did? The size of the time gap, as small as one day, suggests that NK's provocations are reactive counter-renege measures against a previous US renege.

Second, a malignant negative response is always preceded by a benign negative response (verbal warning). When faced with a US renege on a specific agreement, Pyongyang issues a prior verbal warning stating an intention to respond with a counter-renege unless the US makes adjustments. North Korea's verbal warnings specifically lay out how the US reneged and how Pyongyang will respond to such a violation. Only *after* their verbal warnings (benign negative response) prove useless in altering US behavior does Pyongyang move on to take actions (malignant negative

response). If North Korea were solely aiming at creating a crisis atmosphere for negotiation leverage, any prior warning would diminish the dramatic effect of a ‘crisis.’

Third, even then their actions are confined to meet the principle of proportionality. North Korea undertakes no more or less actions than what they have listed in their verbal warnings and such actions are strictly limited to the scope of the agreement. If the US reneges on a certain promise in the agreement, North Korea counter-reneges on a promise laid out in the same agreement. This suggests that the malignant negative responses (actions) are executed as a punishment towards the US when words alone fail to deliver the message. North Korea does not introduce a new agenda or make a new demand following their malignant negative response.

**TABLE 4** US Direct Renege under a Hostile Relationship

Case No.	Administration	US Direct Renege	North Korean Response
D-1	Bush	Halt heavy fuel oil provision (2002/11/14)	Benign Negative Malignant Negative Break IAEA seal (2002/12/22) Evict IAEA (2002/12/27-31) Leave NPT (2003/01/10)
D-2		Sanction on Banco Delta Asia (2005/09/15)	Benign Negative Malignant Negative Refuse Six-Party Talks (2005/12/11)
D-3		Postpone de-listing from state-sponsored terrorism listing (2008/08/11)	Benign Negative Threaten to evict IAEA (2008/09/23) Malignant Negative Break IAEA seal (2008/09/23)
D-4		Halt heavy fuel oil provision (2008/12/12)	Benign Negative Malignant Negative Slow disablement process by half (2008/12/13)

Source: Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” Arms Control Association, April 2003.

**TABLE 5** Correlation Between NK Response Type and Bilateral Relationship Tone, Type of US Renege

		Tone of US-DPRK Bilateral Relationship	
		Amiable	Hostile
Type of US Renege	Indirect	Benign negative response	Benign negative response
	Direct	-	Malignant negative response

**Findings**

The findings of this paper are summarized in Table 5. In essence, the result of the analysis reveals a correlation between the dependent variable (type of NK response) and the two independent variables (tone of bilateral relationship and type of US renege).

To elaborate, two points can be made from Table 5. First, the type of North Korean response is affected just as much by the overall tone of the bilateral relationship as it is by the type of US renege. Under an amiable relationship, indirect renege is met with a benign negative response and does not escalate to direct renege since the issue is resolved through negotiation. However, under a hostile relationship, US indirect renege quickly escalates to US direct renege and North Korea promptly responds with a malignant negative response (counter-renege). Therefore, in times of a hostile relationship, there is much more action and less talk from both sides.

Second, North Korea’s responses meet the principle of proportionality. Despite popular perception about North Korea’s innate aggressiveness, Pyongyang regulates their response to correspond with the type of US renege. US indirect renege is met with a North Korean benign negative response, and US direct renege with a North Korean malignant negative response. Adherence to the tit-for-tat principle is also manifest in times of cooperation. Regardless of the tone of the bilateral relationship, cooperation is always met with cooperation. Table 6 provides an illustration of positive exchanges between the US and DPRK.

**TABLE 6** Cases of US Cooperation and North Korea Cooperation

US Cooperation	Administration	North Korea Cooperation
1994 Agreed Framework	Clinton	Freeze 5mw reactor (1994/11/01) Halt construction at 50mw, 200mw reactor Cease reprocessing (1994/11/01) IAEA confirm (1994/11/28)
First heavy fuel oil shipment (1995/01/18) Ease trade sanctions (1995/01/21) US-DPRK talk for liaison office (1995/01/31) Second heavy fuel oil shipment (1995/09/25)		
		North-South Talk (2000/06/15)
US-DPRK high level talk (2000/10/09-24)		
Sanction on Banco Delta Asia lifted	Bush	
		Shut down Yongbyon (2007/07/16) IAEA inspection (2007/09/11-14) North-South talk (2007/10/24)
US-DPRK high level talk (2008/03/13-04/08)		
		Submit declaration report (2008/05/08)
Terminate Trading with Enemy Act (2008/06/26)		
		Demolish Yongbyon cooling tower (2008/06/27)
De-listing from terror-sponsoring states (2008/10/11)		
	Re-freeze and re-seal reactors	

Source: Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” Arms Control Association, April 2003.

Another notable finding is that nuclear testing and missile launching are not directly related with the implementation progress of denuclearization.

The tit-for-tat principle during implementation does not explain those two behaviors. First, the time gap between a renege and the nuclear test/missile launch is too wide to draw a causal relationship between the two events. In the case of the “renege-warning-counter renege” sequence, the response time was a maximum of three months and an average of twenty days. However, the time gap is much larger in the case of a nuclear test and missile launch. The closest US renege prior to North Korea’s first nuclear test was the sanction on Banco Delta Asia, which took place eleven months prior to the test. Also, the second nuclear test occurred five months after the US announced halting provision of heavy fuel oil. If North Korea were to conduct nuclear a test/missile launch in order to counter a US renege and compel them to adjust their behavior, it would be more effective to conduct the tests in a more prompt fashion immediately following a US renege.

Second, the statements released prior to a nuclear test/missile launch do not contain any specific demands or reasons relating to the implementation process. In cases of a “renege-warning-counter renege” sequence, when faced with a US renege on a specific agreement, Pyongyang issues a verbal warning stating its recognition of a US renege and North Korea’s possible counter-renege. The scope of the action mentioned in the statements are very narrow and explicit as to illustrate what type of action committed by the US is considered a renege and what type of counter-renege is forthcoming. However, the statements issued prior to missile launch and nuclear tests are relatively broad and vague. The one reason that Pyongyang recurrently identifies as their motive for pursuing a nuclear deterrent is US hostile policy which could include wide range of actions such as threat of nuclear war, economic sanctions, and a hostile tone. Without providing any specific justification, the statement simply points to US policy as a whole for their negative response. Table 7 illustrates the tit-for-tat relationship in 12 years of implementation process. The outstanding time leap prior to a missile launch or nuclear test event distinguishes the two actions from the rest of the sequence.

**TABLE 7** Tit-for-Tat Relationship Between North Korea and the US During the Implementation Process

Case No.	Type of US Renege	Type of North Korea Response	Response Time
A-1	Indirect Renege US suspects North Korea's diversion of heavy fuel oil (1995/02/16)	Benign Negative	1 day
A-2	Indirect Renege US suspects under ground nuclear facility in Kumchang-ri (1998/01/02)	Benign Negative	1 day
B-1	Indirect Renege US suspects North Korea's secret HEU program (2002/10/16)	Benign Negative	1 day
D-1	Direct Renege US halts heavy fuel oil provision (2002/11/14)	Malignant Negative Break IAEA seal (2002/12/22) Evict IAEA (2002/12/27-31) Leave NPT (2003/01/10)	33 days
D-2	Direct Renege Sanction on Banco Delta Asia (2005/09/15)	Malignant Negative Refuse Six Party Talk (2005/12/11)	3 months
		Missile launch (2006/07/4-5) Nuclear test (2006/10/09)	11 months
D-3	Direct Renege US postpones de-listing from state-sponsoring terrorism (2008/08/11)	Malignant Negative Break IAEA seal (2008/09/23) Slow down fuel rod unloading (2008/11/12)	42 days
B-2	Indirect Renege US enforces "sampling" during verification process (2008/11/13)	Benign Negative	1 day

D-4	Direct Renege Halt heavy fuel oil provision (2008/12/12)	Malignant Negative Slow disablement speed by half (2008/12/13)	1 day
		Missile launch (2009/04/05) Nuclear test (2009/02/25)	5 months

Source: Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” Arms Control Association, April 2003.

These observations allow for the detachment of nuclear test/missile launch from the quid-pro-quo process of implementation. Instead, the two actions could be affected by other factors not explored in this research. Considering that statements issued prior to nuclear tests repeatedly point to the overall tone of the US-DPRK bilateral relationship, the tone of the relationship can be expected to play a role in North Korea’s missile launch or nuclear test. Also, by the process of elimination, domestic factors, which were not calibrated in this research, could be expected to have an influence. Domestic needs include political needs for regime legitimization (especially during a succession period) and technical needs where nuclear and missile technology requires tests at certain phases during the course of development. Therefore, further research could be designed by tuning into the two factors (overall tone of the relationship and domestic needs) to explain North Korea’s missile launch and nuclear test decisions.

**TABLE 8** Possible Design of Further Research

		Tone of US-DPRK Bilateral Relationship		
		Amiable	Hostile	
North Korea	Domestic need	Low	No test	-
		High	-	Nuclear test

**Conclusion**

The outcome of this research provides two insights. First, it confirms the belief championed by many scholars today that North Korea is, in fact, rational.<sup>11</sup> Pyongyang negotiates for an agreement that best serves their national interest just as any other state would. Also, North Korea respects the principle of proportionality in retaliation. Even when faced with their

11 David Kang, Leon Sigal, and Selig Harrison are major scholars asserting North Korea’s rationality.

counterpart's renege, they control their response to not risk throwing off the entire process since the agreement serves Pyongyang's interest, as well.

Second, the overall tone of the relationship is just as important to North Korea as is respecting commitments. This suggests that a specific issue-oriented approach is not applicable to tackling the issue of DPRK denuclearization. Trying to maintain an amiable relationship on nuclear issues while taking a hostile tone in economic issues is bound to fail in both areas. The idiosyncrasy of North Korea's negotiation pattern and the historical development of the nuclear issue requires a comprehensive approach, as well as a benevolent overall tone in the US-DPRK relationship for successful implementation.

North Korea's interest for nuclear possession began as a 'deterrence capability' and shifted to a 'bargaining chip' as the US actively engaged in negotiation with the North. However, it bounced back to being a deterrence tool as the US was perceived to be an unreliable counterpart, let alone providing any security guarantee. For the past two decades, the US has been just as unpredictable as North Korea, largely due to changing political line-ups and struggles with the Congress. The unpredictability of the US as perceived and learned by North Korea has strengthened their resolution for self-reliance.

In 2012, North Korea amended the constitution to solidify their status as a nuclear weapon state, and successor Kim Jong-Un seems resolved to rely on nuclear deterrence. Nuclear weapons have always been primarily for security guarantee, and Pyongyang's engagement in denuclearization negotiation was only possible when another form of security guarantee was provided (e.g. US-DPRK economic/political normalization). States could be security maximizers or power maximizers, but only after security needs are fulfilled, can a state attain further ambitions.<sup>12</sup> North Korea will not prioritize any other issue over their security concern. Therefore, dealing with North Korea's nuclear issue is the same as dealing with North Korea's security issue. A limited measure such as coercive diplomacy is not an appropriate strategy to address the DPRK security issue. A change in policy, not strategy, is called for to resolve the nuclear issue in conjuncture with the Korean Peninsula's security issue. Y

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12 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Illinois: Waveland Pr Inc, 2010).