Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to explore the dynamics of nuclear negotiations between North Korea and the United States in the 1990s with a view to evaluating the causes underlying the present tensions between the two, as well as the larger implications of this for the region. Its central focus is on the process of negotiations during, first, the evolution and then the framing of the Agreed Framework Accord (AF) between the U.S. and North Korea in 1994, as also their continued diplomatic interactions during its implementation.

The study also explores the various factors that led North Korea to develop its nuclear weapons as an instrument of state policy despite American efforts to dismantle it. It then examines the U.S. policy responses and examines the factors that made the U.S. open up direct negotiations with North Korea. U.S. compulsions that force it to continue to engage North Korea even though the latter shows little signs of either dismantling or stopping its nuclear programme are also examined in detail.

Most studies on the subject till now have mainly looked at North Korea's nuclear weapons' capability as a bargaining chip. Some, albeit fleetingly, have tried to understand the multiple purpose it serves. But very few have referred to Korean inputs - both official and academic - to get an insight into the thinking of the North Korean leadership. This study attempts to fill this gap.

Having examined the interplay of the determinants and compulsions on both the sides, the study tries to assess and evaluate the contribution made by the Agreed Framework Accord. It examines the process of its framing, its implementation, and the actual outcomes that it achieved along with its consequences in terms of continued regional tensions and instability. The study thus seeks to answer, inter alia, the question, as to what extent do the current tensions, problems and postures between the U.S. and North Korea flow from the flaws in the
Agreed Framework Accord and its achieved outcomes? Here again, while researchers have thoroughly studied the two aspects independently, there is hardly any study that makes a causal link between the two. This is what this study has examined and established.

Overview

The end of II World War saw the emergence of the U.S. as the pre-eminent force in world affairs. The source of its power lay not just in economic and conventional military strength, it also arose, in a very large measure, from its monopoly over the newly developed atom bomb. No other country had a nuclear weapon and every major country aspired for one. The first to do so, in 1949, was the USSR, which then emerged as the other Superpower. It was followed by the U.K. in 1954, France in 1960 and China in 1964. These five countries also happened to be the permanent members of the UN Security Council. They thus became the main arbiters of world politics. World affairs were governed by the relationship between the western powers, namely, the U.S., UK, and France on the one side and the USSR, on the other. While France has often tried to take an 'independent' policy stance, China has kept wavering despite its visible rapprochement with the U.S.

One of the main concerns of this group has been to preserve the monopoly of their group over nuclear weapons. They do not want other countries to acquire nuclear capabilities. While the nuclear five have disagreed on practically everything else, on this question they remain united. In 1968 they had brought forth the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was aimed at ensuring that World War II rivals like Germany and Japan do not go for nuclear weapons. Eventually, several countries became signatories to it. Another relatively insignificant but strategically placed country that signed it was North Korea (Quinones 2000: 36-37; Moltz and Mansourov 2000: 32-33). But, it soon found itself in a situation whereby it

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* By mid 1980s North Korea had adopted the policy of constructing nuclear power plants, both for prestige reasons since South Korea had by then already had three of them, as well as for economic reasons. When Kim Il-Sung sought the Soviet assistance in the construction of these, during his state visit to the Soviet Union in 1984, the Soviet side insisted on North Korea joining the NPT before implementing such a project. Thus on Soviet Union’s insistence North Korea signed the NPT in December 1985 and
became difficult for it to honour its commitment. In 1993, it gave notice of withdrawal from the Treaty and created a major challenge for the non-proliferation regime as also a critical international problem in the region. Despite their best efforts the U.S., Russia, Japan, South Korea and China, were not able to prevent North Korea’s final withdrawal from the NPT in March 2003. North Korea, in fact, now claims to have become a nuclear power in all but name (KCNA 2005; Vantage Point April 2005: 33). Its policy has set in motion a train of events whose eventual trajectory is very hard to predict. However, an examination of the evolution and implementation of the Framework Accord can perhaps be a useful way to appreciate what ails the contemporary Six-Party negotiations.

The Background

The Korean Peninsula lies off the coast of Japan and with a contiguous border with China. It is a mountainous region, which until 1910 was a single Kingdom, when it was invaded and occupied by Japan. In 1945, Japan was defeated in the World War II and the Korean peninsula was divided by the big powers as a result of their post-War power play. Though the 38th parallel remains the dividing line and the confrontation across it continues, the two halves have grown quite differently and, while grappling with each other for supremacy, have dealt with the powerful forces around them in their own, independent way.

In order to understand this region, it is vitally important to appreciate that events there, over the past 50 years, have been determined by the ebb and flow of the cross-currents in the relationships between the major regional and world powers. In that sense, the current nuclear strategy of North Korea is a continuation and a legacy of the Cold War. The one cannot be understood in isolation from the other.

subsequently on December 26, 1985 the governments of the Soviet Union and North Korea signed an 'Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation in the Construction of a Nuclear Power Plant in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea'. However, there were those countries who were under no such pressures and were able to refuse to sign the NPT on the grounds that it was discriminatory. India, Pakistan, Israel, and South Africa were amongst the prominent ones who refused to sign. North Korea also made a new proposal on March 31, 2005 that the Six Party talk should be transformed into disarmament talks as it had become a nuclear power.
South Korea has grown and become a world economic power to reckon with, but North Korea remains desperately poor and has become politically isolated after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. It is nevertheless a nation to be reckoned with because of its nuclear weapons programme. The situation in the Korean peninsula is thus very complex and it involves six countries: North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the U.S. There are several factors that determine the nature and scope of these Six-Party talks as also their efficacy in dealing with North Korea.

**Divisive Legacies:**

At the end of the nineteenth century the defining events for the region were - China's quest for a more visible international role through its own kind of 'restoration' and reforms; the success of the 'Meiji Reformation' in Japan which had turned it into an important economic and military power (Duus 1998) and the 'opening to the West' in Korea, which would transform it from a traditional to a modern nation with all the problems that go with it. The Korean nobility embraced Chinese culture and paid tribute to the Chinese emperor. In return, it was guaranteed protection. In comparison to Japan, however, China was weak. The dynamic power in the region was Japan, which was in an expansionary mode. This is what led to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, which Japan won. After that war Japan made it clear that it was going to keep alive its interests in Manchuria. It also realised that this would not be possible if Korea remained independent. The period 1894-1904 is best seen as one when Japan's primary continental purpose was to keep Korea within Japan's sphere of influence (Shinkichi 1974: 241).

Meanwhile, there was another power, a European one that was seeking to expand in the east: Russia. This expansion was to bring it into conflict with Japan. Russo-Japanese relations had been cordial until 1890 or so but had started souring because Japan sensed Russian designs in the Far East. It viewed Russia's construction of a Trans-Siberian Railway as an exercise towards this end. By the turn of the century it had become evident that it was only a matter of time before the two clashed. The immediate excuse came when a Japanese constable tried to assassinate Crown Prince Nicholas in January 1904. This finally led to the Russo-
Japanese War of 1904-05, which Russia lost. Japan became a major Asian power by virtue of having defeated a European power. The ripples were felt all over the world and for Korea this was going to seal their fate.

These successes helped to further strengthen Japan's conviction about its military superiority. In February 1904, it forced Korea to accede to the Japan-Korea Protocol, through which Japan acquired the right to interfere in Korea's internal affairs. This proved to be the thin end of the wedge because by 1910 Korea had become a Japanese colony and remained so until 1945. Nationalist resistance to Japan, however, was strong and never ceased. But for obvious reasons, it was driven either underground or into exile. As a result no clear or dominant political heir, either as an individual or a group, emerged by the time of the collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945.

Korea also had China to the North and only the river Yalu separated the two. China had always viewed Korea as a buffer state vital to its national security. It saw the Japanese occupation of Korea as a major threat, which indeed it was. Not surprisingly, in a span of 60 years (1894-1953) China got involved in three wars because of Korea. The first was, as mentioned, in 1894-95 when China fought Japan because the latter attempted to dominate Korea and China did not want to lose its hegemony over the Hermit Kingdom. When China lost to Japan it viewed its defeat as a profound humiliation because under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895 that terminated the war, among other things, China had to recognise the independence of Korea, cede Taiwan, the Pescadores and the Liaotung Peninsula to Japan. This, in turn, brought about the Triple Intervention by France, Germany and Russia, forcing Japan to give up its hold on Liaotung Peninsula as it would prove to be an obstacle to the peace and stability of the Far East. Thus at the end of the 19th century, peace and stability in the Far East region became the concern of outside powers. This enraged Japan and it resolved to resist the West. This eventually resulted in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.

It is interesting to note that in order to ward off a clash with Russia which had begun moving forces into Korea, Japan had proposed carving up areas of influence with the dividing line at the 38th Parallel (Oberdorfer 2001: 5). It was
apparently a coincidence that the U.S. later chose this line for accepting the Japanese surrender in 1945. Don Oberdorfer, a Korea expert and an Adjunct Professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, feels that this might have suggested to the Russians that the U.S. had finally recognised Russia's old claim of influence to the north of the line (Oberdorfer 2001: 6). Korea later came to be divided along this line in 1953.

The second war that China fought over Korea was not a direct one but an indirect one whereby it supported Kim Il-Sung's rebel bands against the Japanese during World War II. The third one was in 1950 by which time Korea had been bifurcated into South and North Korea. Even though North Korea was the responsibility of the Soviet Union at that time, China sent volunteers to it to counter the U.S. threat in South Korea as it found the North Korean army unable to stop the American advance towards the Yalu River and, therefore, its own security threatened by it. China got fully involved in the Korean War of 1950-53.

As for the U.S., until the final days of World War II it had shown no interest in the Korean peninsula. In fact, it turned out that it was because of the secret agreement between William Howard Taft who was then the Secretary of War and the Japanese Prime Minister, Katsura Taro that Japan realised that there would be no opposition to its occupying Korea and finally annexed it in 1910. The Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1905 was that the U.S. would approve Japan's domination of Korea in return for assurance that Japan would not challenge the U.S. colonial domination of the Philippines. The Koreans saw this as their first betrayal by the U.S. and considered the division of Korea as the second betrayal.

More than anything else, what this period shows is that Korean interests were to a large extent to be completely subordinated to those of larger powers. In some ways, that situation persists, although North Korea appears to be trying to alter the paradigm. Meanwhile, the Korean liberation movement had divided into two loose coalitions of revolutionaries, neither of which had a firm underground base in Korea. The Marxist movement rallied around political leaders in China, Manchuria and the Soviet Union. The Nationalists found safe haven in nationalist
China and the U.S. In this manner also, the foreign powers played a role and were actively involved.

With the official line drawn along the 38th Parallel to accept the Japanese surrender, the U.S. backed Republic of Korea was proclaimed on August 15, 1948. The Soviet backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea was proclaimed on September 9, 1948. The armies of the two powers then went back home, handing over the two nations to their respective regimes they had created. The North was headed by Kim Il-Sung, a Korean guerrilla commander who had fought under the Soviet army. In the South the U.S. supported Syngman Rhee who had been educated in the U.S. and had lived in exile during the Japanese occupation of Korea. The U.S. was reluctant to get involved militarily on the Asian mainland. Its interest in East Asia was limited to containing the spread of communism. The need to prevent a communist takeover in Asia was used by the U.S. Defence Department to justify to the Congress its foreign assistance programme (Oliver 1978: 121-122). Its interest in Asia was also in trying to get the Chinese Nationalists and Communists to work together. The U.S. was hoping that Chiang Kai-Shek, the Nationalist leader would be able to deal with China's problem. However, the Nationalists were driven out of the mainland in 1949.

The communists in the North were better entrenched and more in control than were the nationalists in the South. In fact, Rhee and General Hodge were in direct hostile confrontation throughout the period, each blaming the other for the impasse regarding establishing a Korean government. At one point in June 1947 Rhee, despite his deep-seated anti-communism was even considering accepting it (Communism) as a solution more desirable than having Korea divided on ideological grounds. In a letter that he wrote to Col. Ben C. Limb, his closest aide in the Korean Commission, he said, “...the dual occupation of Korea is far worse than the occupation of Japan- hateful though that was......What America promised to Korea and what America has done to Korea are miles apart..... Perhaps at long last the Korean people must try the new experiment of trying to make themselves comfortably at home in the Russian ideological and political camp..... this might be a better modus vivendi than our nation can find in any other way” (Oliver 1978: 111). Had this letter not fallen into the hands of the U.S. Military Government
censors, and if President Rhee had truly worked towards that end the country might have remained united under the communist flag. But, unfortunately that was not to be so. The two powers were engaged in an ideological warfare in which ‘Korea was the shrimp caught in the fight between two whales’. The situation was well summed up by Gregory Henderson, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer and noted Korean scholar when he wrote, “No division of a nation in the present world is so astonishing in its origin as the division of Korea; none is so unrelated to conditions or sentiment within the nation itself at the time the division was effected; none is to this day so unexplained; in none does blunder and planning oversight appear to have played so large a role....” (Oberdorfer 2001: 7).

After the death of Franklin Roosevelt in April 1945 there was a marked shift in U.S. involvement in Asia. Influenced by his experiences during World War II, Roosevelt’s successor, Harry Truman, considered military power to be of great importance. He also took the decision to use atomic bombs against Japan, partly to end the war quickly and partly, through exhibiting its power, to restrain the Soviets in their effort to dominate Eastern Europe. Simultaneously, through his policies such as the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and setting up of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation etc, he worked towards economic improvement and strengthening of non-communist governments. He concentrated mainly on Europe where the Soviet influence was growing too dangerously for U.S. comfort.

The Soviet Union, too, moved into Korea only towards the end of World War II when it declared a war on Japan and sent its troops into Manchuria and northern Korea. This led the U.S. to take note of the military implications of this and it got involved in the affairs of Korea reflexively with no clear planning.

The Korean War:
Recently published Soviet and American materials reveal that the South was responsible for most of the skirmishes in 1949 than the North (Cumings 1997: 247). The reason was that the South Korean Army under Syngman Rhee had grown much bigger than the North Korean Army. Therefore there were a number of border skirmishes throughout 1949. However, neither North Korea nor the
Soviet Union or the U.S. was in favour of a war as both sides were still struggling with a whole succession of post-World War II crisis. So it did not develop into one very quickly.

Kim Il-Sung was emboldened by some of the successes of their attack during the border fights and also encouraged by the backing from both Stalin and Mao Zedong. He started planning for a major assault (Cumings 1997: 253). The success of the Chinese Communists as also the American reluctance to get involved militarily on the Asian mainland, coupled with North Korea's own ambitions about South Korea, encouraged it further (Steele, 2000). Whatever the motivations, on June 25, 1950 the North Korean Army artillery and mortar opened fire on South Korean Army south of the 38th Parallel. Soon afterwards there were tank attacks at all posts along the Parallel. At 11 am North Korea announced a formal declaration of war, claiming that South Korean forces on the Ongjin Peninsula in the west coast had attacked North Korea in the Haeju area and that their declaration was in response to the South Korean attack (Slavinsky, Chullbaum 1991: 35).

South Korea dismissed this as bogus (Oliver 1978: 277-279). There has been plenty of work done subsequently on the origins of the war (Cumings 1981; Stone 1952; Gupta 1972; Friedman and Selden 1971). The Soviet-Chinese-North Korean conspiracy theory has been discussed in great detail (Hinton 1966: 27; Schulman 1963: 41). In the later years there have also been revisionist interpretations of the Korean War where it is argued that the United States impelled or induced North Korea to attack (Jo, Chullbaum 1991: 258). Broadly, the arguments go as follows. Where the former is concerned, it is said that Kim Il-Sung initiated the planning for the Korean War and Stalin and Mao Zedong were initially reluctant to support him but he was able to persuade both Stalin and Mao Zedong to see the advantages of a unified Korea. Thus all three got involved in the war (Hinton 1966: 27). Within this there is a school of thought which believes that Kim Il-Sung hastened the invasion mainly because of “an internal factional challenge

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1 In a speech to the National Press Club in January 1950, Dean Acheson, Secretary of State for Truman, while talking about America's Asian defense perimeter mentioned that South Korea was out of it. According to his speech, keeping Japan anti-Communist was the most important part of American security concerns in Asia.
from his most significant rival (Pak Hon Yong) for control of the ruling Workers’ Party in the North” (Harrison 2002: xiii). Where the revisionist interpretation is concerned, there is one school of thought (Cumings 1981) that believes that the United States induced North Korea to attack through provocative actions and yet another set of scholars, although few, who argue that the United States and South Korea actually initiated the war (Gupta 1972).

Following the North Korean attack the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of North Korean forces to the north of the 38th Parallel. When Truman was notified of the invasion he met the State Department and the Defense Department officials. He was told that Moscow had a hand in the attack. His administration was already being criticised for having ‘lost’ China (Acheson 1969: 355-358). He, therefore, authorized General Douglas MacArthur to send ammunition and equipment to prevent the loss of Seoul and to send a survey party to Korea to study the situation and determine how best to help.

On June 29 1950, a North Korean force entered Seoul in the early afternoon and street fighting ensued. By midnight Seoul was in North Korean hands. The North Korean troops then crossed the Han River in the Kimpo area and took the airfield. On June 30, MacArthur received permission to employ U.S. ground support forces and to carry the war into North Korea and in the waters offshore but to stay well clear of the Manchurian and Soviet borders. Thus the Korean War was joined in earnest. (It needs to be added here that the operational control that the U.S. acquired over the South Korean forces in July 1950 continued until 1994 when it was forced by South Korean nationalists to relinquish its 'peacetime' operational control) (The Korea Times, 4 November 1993: 1).

The North Koreans had the implicit backing of the Soviet Union even though it did not involve itself in direct combat saying it was a civil war in Korea. But there are scholars who believe that the Soviet Union hoped to achieve, through the victory by the North Koreans, a victory over the capitalists and the forming of a united powerful socialist country on the Korean peninsula (Krushchev,
Chullbaum, 1991: 62). More recent sources state that though until 1949 and early 1950 Stalin was hesitant of provoking the U.S. by effecting an offensive against South Korea, but by April 1950 he was ready to support North Korea because of the changed international situation (Weathersby, Moon, Westad, Khang 2001: 165-167).§ But, equally, he also did not want to precipitate a direct clash between the two powers (Jo, Chullbaum 1991: 266).

Probably that is why, by the time the North Korean army reached Pusan, the port city about 250 miles from Seoul, Stalin started getting cold feet about leaving evidence of his involvement. He recalled all Soviet advisors (Krushchev, Chullbaum 1991: 64). Soon, though not as result of the Soviet recall of advisors, the North Korean forces found themselves overstretched. With the landing of the South Korean forces at Chemulpo in Pusan, their fate in the south was completely sealed. This was a major turning point in the war because according to some Soviet scholars, had the North Korean forces received the support of one, or at most two, tank corps they could have captured Pusan. Had that happened the U.S. would not have intervened (Krushchev, Chullbaum 1991: 65). Again, in that event, Korea would have remained united, albeit in Communist hands. U.S. forces landed at Inchon on September 15, 1950 and recaptured Seoul on September 28. They then moved north past the 38th parallel, which had by then come to be established as the demarcation line.

**China's Intervention:**

Meanwhile, China, which had stationed its troops along the border but had not initiated active participation, issued warnings to the U.S. not to cross the border. Zhou En-lai sent a warning to the U.S. through the Indian Ambassador to China that if American forces crossed the 38th Parallel then China would intervene (Zhai, Chullbaum 1991: 183; Whiting 1960). But American forces, nevertheless, crossed

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§ The changed situation was the victory of the Chinese Communist Party par se because this also meant that it would free Chinese troops, if needed, to intervene in Korea. Also, because of the fact that the US did not fight to protect the nationalists in China, Stalin presumed that it would not fight for South Korea.
the Parallel on October 7, 1950. On October 8, Chairman Mao issued the order for Chinese People's Volunteer Army (PVA) to fight American imperialism.

The reason for sending the forces in the name of People's Volunteer Army and not People's liberation Army was that even though it knew that the UN forces were commanded by U.S. generals and were in effect U.S. forces, it did not want to officially declare war on the other UN members (Chullbaum, Chullbaum 1991: 223).** The involvement of China committed 2.5 million combat troops to the war; 115,000 were killed and 221,000 were wounded (Harrison 2002: 310). It was this intervention that secured China's hold over North Korea and started the conflict between China and the U.S.

To the North Koreans this intervention by the Chinese at a time when Kim Il-Sung was trying to reunify the peninsula is seen as an intervention to support Korean reunification while the American intervention was seen as one to keep Korea divided (Harrison 2002: 8). This has had a great psychological impact on the North Korean psyche vis-à-vis their perception of these two countries. There are again, some scholars who feel that if China had not intervened the two Koreas might have been reunified but this time under the U.S. banner (Ilpyong J. Kim, Doug Joong Kim 1994: 251).

China's entry into the Korean War was precisely to prevent this - an American-sponsored Korea facing it across the Yalu River. China feared that Chinese Nationalists might return through this route and its own security would be threatened. However, according to Cumings, this concern of defense of the border was only secondary to the feeling of reciprocity that they felt towards the North

** On 7th November 1950 North Korea formally announced that Chinese Volunteers had participated together with North Korea in the war. On 11th November, the Beijing government's diplomatic spokesman, while making it clear that Chinese people were fighting on the Korean peninsula and that Beijing government bore no formal responsibility for it, went on to give instances in the world history where people from various countries had participated as volunteers in various wars and therefore the expression of Chinese people's will is right and reasonable in this case too. Thus the Chinese government was formally recognising the participation of Communist Volunteer forces in the war.
Koreans for their sacrifices during the Chinese revolution and the anti-Japanese resistance (Cumings 1997: 284). Yet another concern, apparently of Zhou Enlai, was the southern Manchuria's power supply, which was generated from hydroelectric plants in North Korea (Chen 1994).

By December 1950, the situation had become so tense that President Truman feared it would develop into World War III. He is said to have threatened to use even the atomic bomb if necessary and Stalin was, apparently, even ready to allow the U.S. to occupy all of Korea (Cumings 1997: 289-290). The Chinese, however, were not ready to give up so easily, perhaps because of Chinese leaders' underestimation of nuclear bombs (Zhai, Chullbaum: 1991: 192). By spring 1951 the fighting stabilized along the lines that today mark the Korean DMZ. After another two years of bloody fighting the war finally ended with an Armistice on July 27, 1953. Meanwhile, everything in the north and central Korea had been completely devastated. It is worth noting here that "it was the U.S. threat to 'use any weapon necessary' to end the war that broke the stalemate in the 1953 armistice negotiations" (Harrison 2002: 197).

The impact of this on a leader like Kim Il-Sung cannot be underestimated. As a result, though there had been a number of scenarios under which Korea could have remained united yet Korea had been divided in two. Since then the two Koreas have been at daggers drawn. South Korea, for reasons that are well known, has become a major economic power in the region, with a flourishing democracy. It is a member of the OECD. North Korea, in contrast, remains poor and undemocratic. Its leadership consists of one family, first Kim Il-Sung and, since 1994, his son, Kim Jong-II.

The central pre-occupation of the North Korean leadership has been to remain in power. One element of this strategy has been to make North Korea immune from attack. The declaration by North Korean leadership at the fifth plenum of the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee held on December 10-14, 1962 reveals a major turning point in its military policy. It declared that strengthening of its national defence was of utmost importance and it was willing
to do it even at the cost of economic development (Rodong Sinmun, 16 December 1962: 1). A key ingredient of this strategy has been the development of nuclear weapons, for North Korea has calculated that even one nuclear weapon guarantees its security completely. The North Korean nuclear programme, which it says is for both civil purpose as well as a weapons related one, has to be viewed in this light.

"Atoms for Peace and Atoms for War are like Siamese twins", and it is impossible to separate them in most cases (Peterson 2004). However, given U.S. non-proliferation policies, it has become an issue of great international concern in the last decade. North Korea’s capability to persevere with its weapons and missile programme, despite all odds, has become a focal point of attention. The country has also made the issue the backbone of its foreign policy. So much so that in 2003 it claimed that it is “entitled to possess not only nuclear weapons but other types of weapons more powerful than them in defence of its sovereignty” (Appendix VI). North Korea’s nuclear weapons now occupy the first place among the various controversies emanating from the region. Only if this problem is settled will some of the worst tensions affecting the Northeast Asian region be resolved.

U.S. Nuclear Posturing:

After the Chinese military intervention in the Korean War in late November 1950, the U.S. got worried about losing South Korea and made a series of implied and direct nuclear threats. According to Selig Harrison some declassified documents have revealed that in “’Operation Hudson Harbor’” B-29 bombers went so far as to drop dummy atomic bombs on Pyongyang during what they called “’simulated practice runs’” in late 1951 (Harrison 2002: 197). North Korea is sure to have felt the lack of nuclear capabilities to be a potentially fatal weakness at that point in time. In fact, the Chinese thinking at that period in time of justifying nuclear weapons in the hands of the socialists for self-defense (Peking Review 1963 cited in Drifte, Goldblat 1985: 46) would have not only encouraged Kim Il-Sung to start thinking of possessing it but would have also assured it of Chinese support.

The agreement under the armistice signed at the end of the war was that no new weapons would be introduced in the peninsula. The Neutral Nations Supervisory
Commission was the monitoring agency for the agreement. This agency was disbanded by the beginning of 1958. That very year the U.S. deployed a variety of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea saying that North Korea had violated many terms of the armistice and had been indulging in provocative actions across the DMZ, which included Honest John, Lance and Nike-Hercules missiles (Harrison 2002: 197). Then there were proclamations by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles about using nuclear weapons in response to conventional aggression anywhere. Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also made a statement that the U.S. would be ready to use atomic weapons if needed to stop any renewed Korean aggression (Mazaar 1995: 17-21; Harrison 2002: 197). Thus North Korea became “the sole nuclear aspirant in the developing world to face an overt nuclear threat from a superpower” (Spector and Smith 1991: 9). This further convinced Kim Il-Sung to embark upon his own nuclear weapons programme and it is true that his concept of military independence under the Juche concept truly started as 'Jawi' or 'self-defence' because it felt greatly threatened by U.S. belligerence. Thus seen in the light of these facts, North Korea’s perception of its security environment or its quest for nuclear weapons may not seem so irrational.

As for its nuclear programme, North Korea began to develop its nuclear sector only in the late 1980s. This was in response to the many critical changes taking place in the international arena, as also within North Korea (Rodong Sinmun, 1 January 1992, 1993: 1, 2; Pyongyang Times, 1 January 1992, 2 January 1993: 1-3). For purposes of analysis, it is best to look at the region in terms of the bilateral relationships, and how these interacted with one another. It is also worth bearing in mind that, from the very start, the North and South struggle has been one for legitimacy. Each half has been trying in its own way to gain international recognition as the 'sole or true Korea'. South Korea has done it successfully through economic development and in the face of this South Korean success, the North Korean regime has had to justify its raison d'etre, even to its own population before trying to gain international recognition. It realised that it could consolidate

The New Year Addresses of President Kim Il Sung in 1992 and 1993 at the joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, the Central People's Committee and the Administration Council of the DPRK are quite revealing of his views, priorities, policies or stance likely to be adopted in the coming year.
its power within the country only by being distinct from the South and Kim Il-Sung found the concept of 'Juche' (Park 1996) extremely useful."

*The Soviet Connection:*

The bonds of strategic partnership that had been built up between the Soviet Union and North Korea during the Korean War as a common struggle against 'imperialism' were legally sanctified by the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance signed by the two countries in 1961. This was also a hurried response by North Korea to the coup that had taken place in South Korea in May 1961 with support from the U.S. (Chang-Hui Kim 1995: 132-133). But for a number of reasons the relationship went through periods of estrangement and Kim Il-Sung came to believe that he could not rely on the Soviet Union either for a security guarantee or for economic and military aid. After all, even as far as back as 1950, during the war, when he was about to take Pusan, Stalin had abandoned him.

One of the major issues between the USSR and North Korea was the quarrel between China and the USSR and North Korea's attitude to it. To begin with Kim Il-Sung tried to take a neutral stance and signed mutual defence treaties with both countries. But events made him tilt more towards China subsequently. For one, Kim Il-Sung was angry with the Soviet Union that it had tried to interfere in its domestic politics in 1956 when pro-Soviet factions challenged his leadership (Mazaar 1995: 22). He was also disillusioned with the way the Soviet Union handled the Cuban missile crisis and its unwillingness to take on the U.S. military power in Cuba as well as in Taiwan. When Kim openly alluded to these, Premier Khrushchev cancelled all aid to North Korea (Chung 1976: 76-77). Then, after a brief patch-up during Kosygin's time, the relationship deteriorated again in late

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Juche ideology or the ideology of self-reliance, propounded by late president Kim Il-Sung, is the central guideline for North Korea's domestic and foreign policies. Its core concept is independence and sovereignty. It was based on the principle of national unity as well as the principle of national independence or self-reliance. To promote the principle of national unity he resorted to the idea of anti-foreign intervention or 'anti-imperialism' and sovereignty. It condemns South Korea for having sold itself out to the imperialist U.S. and being so heavily dependent on it. Its principle of self-reliance has been mainly for military self-defense though initially it was to include economic self-sufficiency as well. However, the latter it has not been able to adhere to as is apparent from its appeal for food aid and fuel to the international community.
1960s, when North Korea took the USS 'Pueblo' and its crew hostage and also shot down a U.S. reconnaissance plane. This was the time when the Soviet Union was trying to establish détente with the U.S. and was not going to let North Korea spoil it. Once again, North Korea found economic aid reduced. All this only made Kim Il-Sung more determined to become self-reliant.

The other point at issue was ideological. The Juche Socialism that Kim Il-Sung was propounding was very different from the Marxist-Leninist philosophy practised in the Soviet Union. Unlike Marx, who believed that social and economic conditions shape human beings and that the structural contradictions that arise during economic development can be got rid of only by establishing communism in which there would be no competing classes, Kim Il-sung believed that "man is the center of the universe, needing no motivation other than his innate desire to work to the maximum and contribute to society" (Oh and Hassig 2000: 19). He thus adapted Marxist socialism to Korean conditions and called it Juche socialism. This largely explains why, despite the fact that the North Korean State has not been able to fulfil its side of the social contract, the populace has been conditioned into thinking that they are truly patriotic only if they are driven from within to work unquestioningly for the State (to be taken to mean the Great Leader) ("Uidaehan Sooryoungnimmeul" 1994). The "ideologues from the CPSU Central Committee and the Politburo looked on with vexation as Kim Il-Sung became more and more of a 'Great Chief', while the Marxist-Leninist theory they held was diluted with Juche ideas -- double-dyed narrow-minded nationalism couched in unintelligible communist phraseology as the Pyongyang regime tried to definitely distance the DPRK from 'the socialist camp' " (Bouchkin, Doug-Joong Kim 1994: 307).

These uneasy relations continued through the 1970s. Indeed, North Korea ceased to be an ally of the USSR in all but name. Strangely, military co-operation between the two countries continued and even grew for a few years. But the differences kept growing and became more and more unbridgeable. Finally, with Mikhail Gorbachev coming to power in 1985 and with his adoption of perestroika, the foreign policy guidelines of the Soviet Union completely changed and became quite hostile to the Pyongyang regime. Kim Il-Sung, too, found perestroika to be
"a pain in the neck" (Bouchkin, Doug-Joong Kim 1994: 307). Eventually the Soviet Union collapsed and Kim Il-Sung became even more convinced, if that were possible, that at no cost were reforms to be undertaken in North Korea.

North Korea's Political Isolation:
The end of the Cold War made North Korea feel completely isolated and insecure. In 1988 Moscow had again reduced its military aid on the pretext that any arms supplies to North Korea might force the U.S. to take countermeasures by providing similar assistance to South Korea, thereby jeopardising North Korea's security and increasing tensions in the Far East (Bouchkin, Doug-Joong Kim 1994: 310). This was a complete let-down, especially having come soon after the assurances given by Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eduard Shevardnadze of the military commitment to the DPRK in the joint communiqué issued at the end of his visit that very year. The same sentiments were voiced by China when it found the Soviet-North Korea military interaction intensifying soon after Gorbachev came to power. The Soviet Union also rejected North Korea's attempts to strengthen links between the defence ministries of the two countries. Furthermore, Russian and Chinese demands for hard currency payments in 1991-92 for oil and other items that North Korea imported drastically hurt the North Korean economy (Rhee 1992: 57-59).

All this led Kim Il-Sung to conclude that he could no longer rely on Soviet Union to either guarantee North Korea's security or provide the military and economic aid it needed to maintain the balance of forces on the Korean peninsula (Bazhanova, Moltz and Mansourov 2000: 127-137). Consequently, he also felt the need to look for alternative sources of earning foreign exchange. The export of missiles and nuclear technology seemed to him a possible option and he pursued it with vigour. One of the buyers was Pakistan, which obtained magnetic rings for its reactors and the Nodong missiles from it (Sanger 2002a).

During the latter half of the 1980s as the Soviet Union distanced itself from North Korea, it softened its stand towards South Korea. Though this was in keeping with its own changing policy, it was also in response to South Korean President Chun
Doo-Hwan's 'Nordpolitik' or 'Bukbang Jeongchek' President Chun's new foreign policy was designed to engage all Communist nations of the world, including Pyongyang. This was despite the fact that the Soviet Union and North Korea had been responsible for two acts of violence against South Korean in the fall of 1983. On September 1, 1983, a Soviet combat fighter had shot down a South Korean civilian passenger Boeing 747 that had mistakenly flown into Soviet airspace, killing all on board. In October of the same year North Korean commandos exploded a bomb in Rangoon where Chun's government ministers had gathered for a ceremony, killing half of South Korea's cabinet ministers.

South Korea claimed that the objective behind its 'Nordpolitik' was to ensure safe and full participation at the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988 (Michishita 2003: 187-191). However, there seemed to be yet another objective it hoped to achieve, which was less apparent but equally important. It would seem that from the events that followed that South Korea, which had made great strides in the economic field, was seeking new markets for its goods in the Communist bloc (Lee, Moon, Westad, Kahng 2001: 433-436). Therefore, the commercial ties it established with the Soviet Union and China set South Korea on the path of great expansion of its foreign trade with these countries. At the same time it was also, perhaps, trying to gain through international recognition the stature of being the sole, legitimate government on the peninsula (Quinones, Park and Kim 2001: 30-31). The reduction of tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 1980s had turned the situation completely in favour of South Korea.

The Soviet Union decided to grant diplomatic recognition to South Korea in September 1990. This certainly enhanced, on the one hand, South Korea's economic and diplomatic standing in the international arena vis-à-vis that of the North and on the other, North Korea's sense of insecurity. In fact, on hearing the news about Soviet decision to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea,

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\[\text{This was in imitation of Chancellor Willy Brandt's 'Ostpolitik' or 'Eastern Politics' which was aimed at reducing tensions between the two Germanies by establishing cooperative relationship. 'Nordpolitik' or Northern Politics was aimed at reaching out to North Korea and later it extended to include normalisation of relations with PRC and the Soviet Union. The later version of this was President Kim Dae-Jung's 'Sunshine Policy'.}\]
North Korean Foreign Minister Kim Yong Nam is said to have threatened, amongst other things, to create nuclear weapons (Oberdorfer, 2001: 216).

_North Korea and China:_

In the 1960s, North Korea had exploited the conflict between the Soviet Union and China to its advantage. It had concluded Treaties of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in 1961 with both the Soviet Union as well as China and was able to obtain economic and military commitment from both. However, the various permutations of bilateral relations between these three nations had taken many twists and turns since then. After the Cuban crisis, when the North Korea-Russia relationship deteriorated, the former drew closer to China. But when its relations with Moscow started improving after Brezhnev took over in 1964, relations with Beijing began to deteriorate. Nevertheless, North Korea kept constantly trying to balance its relations with the two powers and at the same time trying to consolidate an independent position for itself in international relations. To show its independence from the Soviet Union and China, North Korea campaigned for membership to the NAM and was admitted to it in August 1975. Kim Il Sung used this forum to popularize his Juche philosophy which appealed to the NAM members. However, partly because of the terrorist activities that North Korea indulged in and partly because of the lack of political clout of NAM he could not capitalise on its military, political or economic power as a substitute for his reduced relations with China or the Soviet Union.

This however, was also the time when Kim Il-Sung adopted the policy of fortifying the entire nation and arming the entire country. His speech given at the 7th Commencement of Kim Il-Sung Military University on October 5, 1963 is quite revealing for understanding even his later defence policies.

The whole country must be fortified. We have no nuclear bomb. But we can stand against any enemy who have atom bombs..... Our country has favourable terrain conditions. We have many high hills. We must make tunnels everywhere. We must fortify the whole of the country.... Not only the frontline but also the rear, the second and third lines.... And reinforce our air and maritime defences. We must also build many underground plants (Kim Il-Sung Works 1984: 381-382).
There are two points to note here. The first is that it had decided to fortify itself on all sides, including the rear, which meant that even if it did not feel threatened by either China or the Soviet Union, it certainly felt that it could not rely on either China or the Soviet Union to come to its defence. The second is that it had even then decided on underground structures that would be hard to discover or target. The nuclear plants it has are mainly underground and were, therefore not discovered easily by the intelligence agencies.

A point that needs to be noted here is that it was during this phase that North Korea’s economic development took a beating as large scale expenditure were undertaken on defence. Following this decision of fortifying itself, North Korea increased the number of its infantry division along the DMZ and started making efforts towards either producing or assembling weapons system like Type 62/63 Chinese-designed field guns, 122mm Model 1938 field artillery, 122mm BM-11 multiple rocket launchers etc. However, it still depended on the Soviet Union for modern weapon systems. It acquired Free Rocket Over Ground (FROG) -5 battlefield support rockets and SA-2 surface to air missiles from the Soviet Union. Later it also acquired SSC-2b coastal-defence cruise missiles and MiG-21 fighters, amongst other such weapons system, all from the Soviet Union, which gave it a decisive edge over South Korea (Michishita 2003: 51-55, 84; Bermudez 1999: 6-8). However in the process it has worked up such huge debts that, even now, neither can it repay Russia nor does it intend to.

In the 1970s the U.S.-China relations started improving. The opening of the 'Beijing Channel' is well known. Today, even if there are many differences between China and the U.S., their interests in the Korean peninsula converge at least as far as maintaining regional stability is concerned. As Scott Snyder says, they are clear about the "‘three no's'" on the Korean Peninsula "no nukes, no war and no collapse of North Korea" (Snyder, Park and Kim 2001: 123). With these developments between the U.S. and China, North Korea felt it could no longer expect any military assistance from China either. And the growing rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing at the end of 1980s made it difficult for North Korea to exploit the USSR-China conflict any more. The normalization of
relations between China and Russia in the early 1990s convinced North Korea more than ever that it had to develop its own resources.

_South Korea, U.S. and Japan:_

Another international development that contributed greatly to North Korea's desire to strengthen its military was the dispatch of South Korean forces to Vietnam in 1965. North Korea felt that it might have to face the same fate as Vietnam and therefore needed to strengthen its defences (Kim Il-Sung 1972: 472-473). It also anticipated stronger U.S.-South Korea relations in the future because of the favour South Korea had gained by dispatching its army. At the same time it was a good opportunity for North Korea to build up its defences without attracting too much of either U.S. or South Korean attention while they were engaged in Vietnam (Oh and Hassig 2000: 51).

The strengthening of U.S.-Japan security relations in the late 1960s also worsened North Korea's fear psychosis. Nixon had announced a new security policy for Asia, wherein he wanted his allies in Asia to take larger responsibility for their own security. He expected Japan to contribute more towards the security in the region. This resulted in the Nixon-Sato Joint declaration of November 1969. Subsequently Prime Minister Sato declared that South Korea's security was essential to Japan (Lee 1985: 60-73). With Japan's influence growing in the region North Korea feared that history might repeat itself.

Even though Japan desired cordial relations with North Korea in order to stabilize the region and North Korea needed Japanese capital and technology for its ailing economy, yet their relationship was caught in a Cold War like situation where North Korea viewed Japan as an unrepentant colonial aggressor and more than that as an ally of its arch enemy the U.S. Moreover, North Korea has not been able to build a bilateral relationship with Japan that is devoid of the South Korea, U.S. strings attached to it. For instance, Japan imposed sanctions on North Korea because North Korean agents bombed the South Korean cabinet visiting Rangoon in 1983. These sanctions were then lifted in 1985 but reinstated in 1987 when two North Korean agents blew up a Korean Airlines passenger plane.
However, in 1990 when the representatives of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, Japan's Socialist Party and Pyongyang's Workers' Party issued a communiqué, "to resolve the abnormal situation existing between the two countries and establish diplomatic relations at an early date" apparently, Japan was constrained in implementing it (Doug-Joong Kim 1994: 509). Both South Korea and the U.S. had communicated to Japan their concerns that this normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea would deprive South Korea and the U.S. of leverage to force North Korea to engage in a political and economic opening (Oh and Hassig 2000: 161). Japan, then in deference to the feelings of South Korea promised to keep it appraised of progress in Japan-DPRK relations (Oh and Hassig 2000: 162). Again, when Japan provided food aid to Pyongyang in 1995 and 1996, they did so with the approval of South Korea. Thus, Japan-DPRK relations could not move ahead freely. Such Japan-South Korea-U.S. alliance, in the absence of any such relationship between North Korea and the Soviet Union or China only heightened Kim Il-Sung's discomfort.

North Korea and South Korea
Following the withdrawal of the Seventh Infantry Division which consisted of about 20,000 U.S. troops from South Korea in 1971 North Korea's relations with both South Korea and the U.S. started improving. Following South Korean President Park Chung Hee's announcement that South Korea would not oppose North Korea's entry into the UN, Kim Il-Sung too called for the elimination of military confrontation and for many-sided collaboration and exchange between the two countries. With the U.S., he called for the conclusion of a bilateral peace agreement. However, this feeling of bonhomie was not going to last long. Quite unexpectedly in 1974, North Korea attempted to assassinate President Park Chung-Hee following his adoption of the Yushin reforms of the constitution that extended his tenure indefinitely (Downs 1999: 190). This resulted in a precipitous deterioration in the relation between the two countries. This was yet another instance when North Korea's behaviour seemed most unpredictable to the world. However, the only logical explanation for this untimely attack seems that Kim Il-Sung always harboured hopes of reunifying the peninsula and was, therefore, against anything that he perceived might stand in the way - the consolidation of power by President Park through the amended constitution, in this case.
Having consolidated his position politically within the country Kim Il-Sung had decided to strengthen the country’s national defence capabilities (Rodong Sinmun, 16 December 1962: 1). Thus North Korea started spending a large percentage of its GDP on defence right from the start. But South Korea until the mid-1970s did not make any effort to improve its defence capabilities. It was heavily dependent on U.S. military aid and assistance for all operation and maintenance costs. It was only after the North Korean guerrilla attack on the Blue House — the South Korean President’s residence which killed the First Lady — that President Park Chung Hee sought to build an independent national defence force and an indigenous defence industry (Ki-Tak Lee 1988: 278-290; Moon, Muthiah Alagappa 1999: 266-267). The U.S. also agreed to support South Korea's long-term defence modernization programme. This was more out of concern that it might otherwise lose its hold completely over it (Gukbang Gunsa Yeonguso 1998: 232-233). In March 1969 the first U.S.-ROK combined military exercise Focus Retina was conducted in which 2,500 U.S. troops were dispatched to Korea. It was in effect a warning to North Korea, which had been indulging in provocative actions (Michishita 2003: 60).

North Korea, which had set about fortifying the whole nation and arming its people in the 1960s, kept on expanding its military in the 1970s as well. At the end of the decade though South Korea’s modernization effort had begun to close the gap, the North Korean military was still superior in air power and ground forces (Atta and Nations 1982: 26). Even so, in the 1980s North Korea was still worried about the superiority of the U.S.-ROK forces and set about creating two distinct forces -- a large mobile active force to carry out offensive operations against them and an extensive reserve force to defend North Korea (Lee 1988: 424). Therefore, clearly, it was not until the 1980s that North Korea started thinking of a military strategy for offensive purposes. Its mobile forces were redeployed closer to the DMZ.

*** Kim Il-Sung had declared in the fifth plenum of the WPK Central Committee held on December 10-14, 1962 that strengthening national defense was of utmost importance and had to be done even at the cost of economic development.
The development of North Korea's ballistic missiles too began in the 1980s. After Kim Il-Sung's visit to the Soviet Union in May 1984, following which an agreement was concluded, North Korea received some SA-3b and SA-5 SAMs (Joo and Kwak 2001: 299). It received some modern equipment from China as well. Yet its artillery was outdated compared to the South's. South Korea too for the first time incorporated into its strategy the offensive concept and soon the U.S.-ROK side established conventional superiority over North Korea (Gukbangbu 1994: 33-37).

*North Korea's Nuclear Programme:*

Kim Il Sung found that though he had increased the conventional military forces from 785,000 military personnel in 1984 to 1.1 million in 1992, North Korea still lagged behind South Korea in military strength (Bermudez 1998). It is at this juncture that he decided to pursue the nuclear option, which would be the cheapest and yet provide a powerful deterrent to counter South Korea's superiority in conventional weapons (Bazhanova, Moltz and Mansourov 2000: 132-133). It is during this period that North Korea is suspected of having produced and diverted plutonium for one or two nuclear weapons. In adopting this approach, he behaved no differently from other countries with similar apprehensions and threat perceptions.

South Korea was also able to modernise its defence as well as spend larger amounts on it because of the economic strides it had made in the 1970s under the authoritarian rule of Park Chung Hee. North Korea, on the other hand, even though it had a centrally controlled socialist command economy, lacked the vision to mobilise the citizens for centrally determined tasks other than defence. Besides defence equipment from the Soviet Union and China, it had also been importing large amount of turnkey factories, capital equipment and other machinery from Western Europe and Japan. But in the absence of systemic reform, this did not bring in the economic success it expected. Instead, North Korea found itself in default on a large portion of its foreign loans. It soon came to realise the usefulness of nuclear weapons, both in terms of bridging the gap in conventional weapons as well as in earning the much needed foreign exchange.
In fact, the recent revelation of the clandestine nuclear programme that Seoul had been conducting in the 1980s throws new light on yet another aspect of North Korea's motivations to possess nuclear weapons. It has become apparent that South Korea had conducted chemical uranium enrichment program from 1979-81, separated Plutonium in 1982 had manufactured Uranium munitions from 1983-87 (Park, Park and Kim 2001: 92; Kang, Hayes, Bin, Suzuki and Tanter 2005: 40). It is highly unlikely that North Korea's Intelligence based in South Korea would have been unaware of it. This certainly would have motivated North Korea to possess enrichment capacities of its own.

The 1980s was also the period when Kim Il Sung, wanted to show to the world that North Korea could hold its own in the face of adverse international pressure from the U.S., South Korea, China, Russia and Japan to dismantle and discontinue its nuclear and missile programme (Yoo, Doug-Joong Kim 1994: 17-20), in much the same way as it does now. Thus, these external influences, which in effect were only changes in the international policies of the countries surrounding North Korea and had nothing to do with North Korea per se, instead of motivating Kim Il-Sung to find solutions through dialogue drove him to seek nuclear weapons.

As long as the U.S.-USSR Cold War remained intact, the two Koreas dealt with each other within that framework. Neither of them truly entertained the idea of developing, or at any rate, deploying missiles because they were prevented from doing so by their external backers. However, with the end of the Cold War, the situation suddenly changed drastically for North Korea. South Korean forces, with the continued backing of the full arsenal of the U.S. once again became a major threat (Bazhanova, Moltz and Mansourov 2000: 133). The North Koreans rapidly moved to make the best of the 'risky situation' ('uigi', which is denoted by Chinese characters) by applying their Juche-style handling of the situation by exploring defensive and offensive options.

Domestic reasons:
It was not just external reasons that led North Korea up the nuclear road. There were strong and pressing domestic reasons as well. The foremost was the government’s need to appear strong and in control to its own population. But there
were the usual dynastic reasons as well. In 1980 Kim Il-Sung openly designated Kim Jong-II, his son by his first wife as his successor by publicly naming him at the Sixth Congress of the Workers' Party to the Presidium of the Politburo, the Secretariat of the Central Committee and the Military Commission (Cumings 1997: 414; Vantage Point, March 1979: 33). In the years that followed party newspapers sang praises of the 'Great Leader' (Kim Il-Sung) and the 'Dear Leader' (Kim Jong-II) (Cumings 1997: 416-419).

North Korea was facing severe economic difficulties due to the floods of 1995 and 1996, the famine that followed and the energy crisis. According to the Ministry of Unification of South Korea source, which has been cited by Oh and Hassig (2000), the GNP had declined by 55 percent from an already low $23 billion from 1990 to 1998. Its GDP began to fall drastically by -3.0 percent in 1991 to -7.6 percent in 1992 and -5.4 percent in 1993. Its grain production had fallen from 5.8 million tons in 1989 to 3.9 million tons in 1993 (Andrianov, Moltz and Mansourov 2000: 41-43). So when the floods ravaged the country in 1995 and 1996 it was ill-equipped to face the crisis.

Foreign trade declined by 70 percent as the country's economy shrunk because of losing trade relations with the former socialist economies. The country's foreign debt, which to begin with was grossly in default, amounted to 96 percent of the GNP. A point to note is that except for the ammunition factories, all other industries were running at 25 percent capacity (Oh and Hassig 2000: 42). Even by the Second Seven-Year Plan period (1978-84) it was Kim Jong II who was taking the major economic decisions. One of the themes of this Plan was frugality, taking it to the extent of "Let's eat two meals a day" kind of slogan by the end of the decade. In fact, the situation got so out of hand that in December 1993 for the first time the KWP Central Committee in its official communique admitted failure, though they blamed it to "international events and the acute situation created in Korea" (Oh and Hassig 2000: 52-53).

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*** Around then Kim Jong II came to be referred as 'the party center" and people alleged their loyalty to him.

::: Cumings has quoted extensively about this from various sources.
In such a situation merely naming Kim Jong Il as the heir did not ensure party loyalty. That, too, was something Kim Il-Sung had to ensure. So he had to find ways of enhancing Kim Jong-Il's personal prestige, both within and outside Korea. Handing over the nuclear weapons programme to him seemed like an excellent proposition to Kim Il-Sung. This set the stage for the first hereditary transfer of power in the history of communist regime (Mazaar 1995: 31).

North Korea's ruling elite was quick to realise the leverage its nuclear weapons would provide with the U.S. because they had discerned the high priority placed on nuclear issue in Washington, based on the message delivered by the U.S. in the Kim-Kanter meeting of January 1992 (Snyder 1999: 70). North Korea soon realised how it could use the nuclear weapons as a tool to attract the attention of the U.S. and use its nuclear and missile programme as a 'bargaining tool' to gain substantive concessions from the U.S. to overcome its severe economic difficulties. The fact that this would also help divert the attention of the domestic populace away from the domestic economic crisis would also certainly have been part of the calculation.

Besides, from experience North Korea had also found that even in the face of the sanctions imposed by the U.S. it could export its missile technology to earn the much-needed hard currency needed for the survival of the regime - the recent revelations of its dealings as part of the A.Q. Khan network notwithstanding. According to a North Korean official quoted by Lee and Cho (2000:138), North Korea was at one point earning about one billion dollars per annum by selling missiles. Even recently North Korea has been providing nuclear related technical assistance to the military government in Myanmar, which is not bound by the constraints and regulations of the NPT. It is believed that Myanmar had offered to pay North Korea $2 million in December 2003 for a preliminary survey of technical assistance in nuclear field and supply of initial equipment (Mansourov 2004: 23).

In sum, it is fair to conclude that there were many factors, and not just security concerns, that impelled North Korea to pursue a nuclear weapons programme; and to understand it, the levels of analysis, as propounded by Kenneth Waltz, will
have to be all three- the persona of Kim Il-Sung, the nature of the North Korean state as well as the nature of the international system (Burchill 2001: 16).

That brings us to the next question- how was North Korea able to get away with its nuclear weapons programme despite the U.S. pursuing its non-proliferation policy so ardently. The nuclear weapons programme was first discovered in 1993. Until 2002 the issue was dealt with mainly between the U.S. and North Korea. As a part of its nuclear non-proliferation policy the U.S. sought to dissuade North Korea from going ahead with its nuclear ambitions. But since 2002 China, Russia, Japan and South Korea have also become involved. Many alternatives, including financial and other aid packages, have been tried. Towards this end in 1994, an accord, called the Agreed Framework Accord (AF) was also signed. But since 2002, the Accord started fraying at the edges leading to its collapse within a year and the region is back to where it started.

The U.S. negotiators had hoped that the Accord would serve as a framework, not only to freeze North Korea’s then existing nuclear programme and reduce tensions in the region but also as a means to denuclearize the peninsula, improve North-South relations, draw North Korea out of its isolation and normalise relations between the U.S. and North Korea. But even though the Accord has been in existence for more than a decade very little has been achieved towards this end. North Korean nuclear ventures are no longer just a bilateral issue. As far as the primary objective of the Accord is concerned, neither has North Korea frozen its nuclear programme, nor has the threat posed by it or the tensions due to it reduced. If anything, the situation has only worsened. Issues in the AF and its implementation have actually set in motion a series of new tensions and disagreements between the parties concerned. And these continue to haunt the Six-Party talks till date.