

RECONSTITUTING KOREAN SECURITY

A P O L I C Y P R I M E R



EDITED BY HAZEL SMITH

Reconstituting Korean security: A policy primer

Edited by Hazel Smith



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1

Reconstituting Korean security dilemmas

Hazel Smith

The conventional picture of Northeast Asian security is of stark national security threats caused by the alleged menacing behaviour of a highly militarized, nuclear-armed Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea).¹ Not only does this picture obscure the profound human security crisis facing many North Koreans but it offers a skewed, partial and distorted perspective. The conventional perspective thus contributes to the prevalence and circulation of a fundamentally flawed conventional wisdom about what constitutes the security crises for Northeast Asia and, importantly, shapes the policy solutions adopted to deal with those crises. The conventional approach precludes fruitful policy choices that could help to resolve the multidimensional Korean security crisis that is at the heart of short-, medium- and long-term regional stability in Northeast Asia.

This book offers a new analysis based upon an understanding of security as multidimensional and builds that analysis on a historical contextualization of the Korean security crises of the early twenty-first century – summarized in Chapter 2 by Bruce Cumings but also used as a reference point by all the contributors. The message is that “history matters!” The premise of this book, however, is not to underestimate the hard security issues of missiles and nuclear proliferation, which is why an important chapter by Gary Samore and Adam Ward (Chapter 3) outlines and analyses North Korean military capacities. Unlike conventional security analyses, which adopt only a state-centric perspective and do not consider the population as an appropriate security referent, this book also

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recognizes that, for most people in the region, economic security is of paramount importance for their everyday lives. Little understood through the conventional security analyses prism, it is the ever-present food security and economic insecurity for the North Korean population and the state that significantly shape the government's domestic and foreign politics. Chapter 4 by Bradley Babson and Chapter 5 by Hazel Smith therefore address economic security and food security, respectively.

The book is also based on the assumption that there is more than one important perspective on Northeast Asian security and that these various perspectives need to be understood as both legitimate and grounded in sometimes diverse interests. These interests are explored separately in chapters on United States policy by Selig Harrison (Chapter 6), South Korean policy by Suk Lee (Chapter 7), Chinese policy by Ren Xiao (Chapter 8), Japanese policy by Gavan McCormack (Chapter 9), and Russian policy by Georgy Bulychev (Chapter 10). It is often forgotten that worldwide concern over instability on the Korean peninsula has seen the involvement of players other than near neighbours and the United States. This book therefore further analyses the continuing involvement of the European Union (EU) in the Korean crisis in Chapter 11 by Maria Castillo Fernandez and charts the small but significant involvement by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Chapter 12 by John Ciorciari.

Conventional security discourses

Security debates these days are often categorized in mutually exclusive terms as concerning either national security or human security.² National security analysts and policy-makers worry about territorial integrity and the military defence of state borders. They regard "security" as the domain of sovereign states. The international is inherently conflictual and in the end states must rely on their own resources to defend themselves and protect their citizens. Security theorists as disparate as Hans Morgenthau, who argued for the concentration of national power such as to defend the national interest, and Kenneth Waltz, who argued that a bipolar balance of power provided stability in the international system, had in common their ruling out of the analytical equation the idea that the security of the individual had much to do with the security of the state and regional and international relations.³

Human security analysts, on the other hand, argue that, for most states, security no longer means only the protection of borders against invasion.⁴ Security must also mean protection against social and economic instability caused by disruption from outside territorial borders. Human se-

curity analysts feel that in this globalizing world of porous borders and easy travel we should be more concerned about transborder threats to individual well-being, not just the threat of military invasion.⁵ Transborder threats may come, for example, from economic downturns, humanitarian and environmental disasters, or transnational crime. Human security perspectives normally also imply a sense that one state can no longer – if it ever could – resolve such problems on its own. Asian bird flu, for instance, is not a problem just for Thailand or Viet Nam or even just for Asia. Human security analysts prefer therefore to respond to human security threats by way of regional and/or global institutions. These institutions offer multilateral solutions designed, in the main, to be implemented through cooperation not coercion.

National security and human security analysts have not been very good at incorporating each other's perspectives such as to offer multisectoral analysis. There is nothing in logic or in practice, however, to prevent a national/human security nexus as the basis for analysis and plenty to recommend it in terms of an increased ability to appreciate the complexity of contemporary security crises. National security concerns in terms of the potential use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or terrorism against civilians in fact constitute a threat to life and a threat to survival, the most basic of human security concerns. By contrast, there are few who would argue that simple territorial stability, if also accompanied by the abrogation of basic political and economic rights, offers any kind of meaningful national security to citizens, to the regime that rules over them or to neighbouring countries, which must deal with legal and illegal migration and all manner of negative and unpredictable cross-border spillover effects.

National and human security discourses can also be reconciled through policy choices that push for multinational solutions to global problems. After all, even in the hardest of security cases when military intervention is mooted, most states (including those often conceived of as diehard unilateralists) value multilateral solutions – whether this is through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or through UN and regional peace-keeping forces. This is why the United States has sought to achieve multilateral backing for every international intervention it has made since the Second World War and why China has insisted that only multilateral (preferably UN-sanctioned) interventions are legal.

The prevalence and influence of the conventional security discourse

The dominant international security debate about Northeast Asia focuses on North Korea as the source of most of the region's troubles.⁶ The dis-

course is on WMD, including ballistic missiles and nuclear armaments, and on military threats by North Korea against its neighbours. It is commonly believed that there remains the ever-present threat of war caused by an irrational state and government in the DPRK. If human security concerns are mentioned in the context of Northeast Asia, they are invariably discussed in regard only to North Korea's human rights violations and as evidence of a mad or bad government with which it is impossible to engage in dialogue.⁷ Humanitarian concerns are discussed in the context of the food crisis in North Korea and the consequent inability of the government to feed its people.⁸ Transnational crime and trafficking in women also appear on the agenda of the region's media through the prism of alleged North Korean misdemeanours.

The conventional security discourse on and in Northeast Asia views North Korea as the source of regional security dilemmas that are defined and understood via military parameters. Seen in this way, human insecurity is a direct consequence of the militarization of the DPRK and its government's political intransigence and antiquated economic policies. The implication is that, once the DPRK military problem is resolved such that the DPRK no longer poses a security threat to the region, then human security problems for North Koreans and neighbouring populations will automatically be solved. Human security threats are not, within this conventional security picture, understood as a common problem for all of Northeast Asia – transcending borders and requiring common and cooperative solutions. Neither does the conventional security discourse assign blame to other actors that have been active in relations with the DPRK; thus, it is unusual to see policy prescriptions recommending changes in foreign policy behaviour among the DPRK's international interlocutors as well as in the DPRK.

Conventional security talk is pessimistic about the possibilities of achieving multilateral or cooperative solutions to the perceived security dilemma of Northeast Asia. Northeast Asia has been known for its comparative absence of regional organizations, although in the decade of the 2000s an exponential growth took place in the number of regional institutions that East Asian states joined and participated in.⁹ Recent years have seen some promotion of the idea of a Northeast Asian community, but there remains no appetite for an EU-type integration venture in East Asia – even in the distant future. The conventional wisdom is that it is difficult to identify common interests and culture such as to place regional integration on the agenda for any Northeast Asian state. Nor is Northeast Asia home to even a loose association of states analogous to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which operates by putting aside ideological and economic disparity in order to formulate common approaches to shared concerns.¹⁰

The dominant or conventional security discourse is influential globally, informing the foreign policies of major states – including the United States, Japan and all Western states from EU members to Australia and New Zealand. Its analysis permeates ASEAN members even if these states do not share the policy options of isolation and containment that have sometimes flowed from the dominant analysis. ASEAN prefers its own distinct method of conflict resolution and negotiation to achieve elite consensus and cooperative solutions. The dominant approach is by no means universal, however, though it tends to obscure the very varied regional perspectives on Northeast Asian security.

The dominant security discourse on Korean security dilemmas also obscures complex underlying intra-regional security dynamics. In China, for instance, the major Northeast Asian security debate is not about North Korea but about the perceived threat to the region from Taiwanese independence claims. Other concerns highlighted throughout the region, although barely mentioned in the Western media, are the extant territorial conflicts, regional rivalries and ideological differences between Northeast Asia's major states – China, Russia, Japan and both Koreas. The bitterness engendered by the Japanese colonial period of the first half of the twentieth century is still prevalent and a significant factor in domestic politics in China and both Koreas. Ideological differences between communist China and capitalist Japan still play a part in fear, suspicion and mistrust between the two peoples. Nationalist sentiments also motivate Chinese, Japanese, Korean and to a lesser extent Russian irredentist claims in the region.

The conventional approach tells part of the truth but it does so in such a way as to obscure other important truths for those concerned with Northeast Asia. Nuclear proliferation by the DPRK is a clear and present danger to North Korea's own people and to the region because of the risk of war and nuclear accidents; conversely, unpacking and resolving DPRK human security concerns may hold the key to dialogue on military issues. The two sides of the security coin are indivisible.

Conventional approaches reduce knowledge about complex security problems to a "one cause fits all" diagnosis that demonizes the DPRK and makes it almost impossible to conceive of negotiating, let alone reaching any agreement, with such an irrational state. Conventional knowledge about the DPRK also presents worst-case scenarios as factual accounts. Worst-case scenarios are of course appropriate for military planners because it is their duty to plan for such scenarios. It is when worst-case scenarios are used by politicians as a substitute for factual analysis that we risk repeating the mistakes that led to the Iraq war in 2003, but this time in Korea.¹¹ There was a massive failure of intelligence in Iraq, partly because of the inability to distinguish between ideology

and analysis, between aspiration and fact. The lessons of the Iraq war and the subsequent intelligence investigations and reorganization in the United States show among other things that dominant discourses that are not founded on sober analysis and well-substantiated claims do anything but provide wise guidance for policy-makers. Instead they exaggerate and skew data in such a way as to aggravate – rather than merely analyse – security tensions.

Countering the conventional assumptions

A reconstitution of the conventional wisdom should be the aim – to force a belated recognition that the current security policies of major states are informed in important ways by a dangerously deficient understanding of North Korean realities and are therefore built on deeply problematic foundations. Buried within the dominant discourse are two powerful assumptions: first, the DPRK is commonly portrayed as a militarily powerful country, as was Saddam Hussein's Iraq; second, the DPRK remains on the United States' list of countries with links with terrorism. The first of these assumptions is more prominent than the second, although some right-wing Japanese organizations proclaim that the DPRK is a terrorist state because of its historical activities.

The DPRK is not a militarily strong power

It may seem obvious, even logical, that the DPRK, which has suffered well-recorded economic devastation for over 15 years and as a consequence almost total industrial infrastructural collapse, would have little in the way of functioning military hardware or a very fearsome army. Nevertheless, the conventional wisdom is that the DPRK has a formidable arsenal, ready to be unleashed on all comers, from Tokyo to Alaska with South Korea in between. Table 1.1 starkly reveals the actual capacity of the DPRK military.

The DPRK annual defence budget is dwarfed by that of its neighbours, at US\$2 billion in 2005 compared with Japan's US\$45 billion and South Korea's US\$21 billion. In addition, per capita spending on its huge armed forces has to cover food, clothing, housing and health supplies, as well as every aspect of what would normally come from a civilian infrastructure in a developed state – telecommunications, transport, food supplies and agricultural production, and industrial production for everything from weapons to clothing. This is because the social infrastructure barely functions and the civilian industrial fabric has all but disappeared since the economic meltdown of the 1990s. Additionally the data in Table 1.1 as-

Table 1.1 Defence budgets of the parties to the Six-Party Talks, 2004 and 2005

	Population (million)	Defence budget (US\$ billion), 2004	Defence budget (US\$ billion), 2005
DPRK	23	1.8	2.0
Russia	143	15.0	19.0
South Korea	49	16.3	20.7
China	1,306	25.0	29.5
Japan	127	45.1	44.7
United States	295	490.0	505.0

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2006*, London: Routledge/IISS, 2006.

sume a formal exchange rate that in practice has been replaced by market rates since at least the mid-1990s. In 2006 the market rate for the *won* was conservatively 2,000 per US dollar – compared with the official exchange rate of 150. Taking this conservative market rate as the actual rate, DPRK per capita expenditure on its soldiers in 2006 was actually around US\$1 a year. This expenditure is not enough to make for a powerful army.

The incapacity of the North Korean army is an important reason why the DPRK tried to build a nuclear weapon. Its nuclear test in October 2006 demonstrated that it could use nuclear weapons as a deterrent and did not have to rely on decrepit military infrastructure and its poorly paid and malnourished armed forces. Relatively cheap investment in nuclear fission means that the DPRK would not have to find billions of dollars to support its hungry and economically unproductive army.

No serious military analyst anywhere in the world views the DPRK as an offensive military threat to its neighbours or to any other state. This is partly because of the weak military capacity of the DPRK and partly because of the lack of a military strategy that argues for either offensive attack against its neighbours or pre-emptive defence. However, the possession of one or more nuclear weapons does make the DPRK a more dangerous place and exacerbates regional security dilemmas – there is no democratic control over the nuclear programme; it is probably being managed in a highly inefficient and risky manner; and there are many incentives for freelance initiatives in terms of the potential for smuggling fissile material.

The DPRK has no links with global terrorism

Despite the DPRK's involvement historically in terrorist attacks against South Koreans (for example, the Rangoon bombing of South Korean

politicians in 1983, its alleged blowing up of a South Korean airliner in 1987 and its abduction of 13 Japanese civilians in the 1970s and early 1980s), it does not have any recent or current connections with global terrorism. Its dramatically improved relationship with South Korea since the June 2000 summit in Pyongyang (when North and South Korean leaders met for the first time since the end of the Korean war in 1953) and its dependence on the South for economic and humanitarian assistance are also likely to preclude such activities against the South. Similarly Kim Jong Il, the DPRK's head of state, has made an intensive effort to improve relations with Japan – resulting in two visits by former prime minister Koizumi to the DPRK, and agreements to return Japanese hijackers residing in Pyongyang since the 1970s along with their families, and to return Japanese abductees and their families. The DPRK's non-involvement in terrorist activities was acknowledged by the Clinton administration, which was in the process of taking the DPRK off its list of states that sponsor terrorism before it went out of office in 2001.

The real military threat from and to the DPRK

The military threat from the DPRK is that, if it were attacked (even in the form of a “surgical strike” or a “limited” bombing campaign against its nuclear or other facilities), it would retaliate militarily. Weak military capacity would not prevent retaliatory military action by the DPRK against South Korea, where some 30,000 US troops are stationed. Seoul, with its population of around 25 million, is only about 50 km from the Korean border.

It is the DPRK's mobilization capacity – not its military hardware – that could potentially cause devastation if war broke out on the peninsula. A determined march south by a mobilized North Korean population, even in the face of undoubtedly punishing bombing from US and South Korean forces, would result in human and economic catastrophe for South Korea. As the Rwandan genocide demonstrated, it is not necessary to possess sophisticated weapons to kill half a million people in two or three weeks. On the other hand, even the DPRK government does not know if a mobilized people and army would continue to fight if war broke out.

The population of North Korea is for the most part hungry and poor, and it blames the party and government officials, not the United States, for the country's economic crisis. Nor does it view South Korea as the enemy. Large sections of the population now know that, contrary to what they were told by their education system and their media, South Korea is a rich country and life chances are better in the South than in the

North. The North Korean population might decide that the nationalist Korean project that is the essential foundation of the “*Juche*” philosophy of self-reliance could easily be satisfied by integration with South Korea.

War is not therefore a policy option for the DPRK government. Rather than mobilizing the people, North Korean policy-makers know that military conflict might provide the catalyst to fatally undermine the current DPRK regime.

Hidden threats to regional security

Proliferation of nuclear technology does cause a threat to regional security and will need to be treated as a priority for international negotiators. Other, less recognized causes of tension in the region arise from serious but often ignored threats to regional security from the economic devastation faced by the North Korean population since the early 1990s and the actual and potential spillover into neighbouring countries of the negative and harmful aspects of the rapid growth of unregulated primitive capitalism in the DPRK since the 1990s. Human (in)security analysis can illuminate these hidden factors and by doing so challenge conventional analysis of what should constitute policy-makers’ only concerns in the DPRK.

National security issues also look different from the perspective of non-dominant discourses. From the perspective of Russia, China and South Korea, for instance, as subsequent chapters in this book indicate, one important fear is the risk to the region from any unilateral US action in Korea.

Markets and poverty

The economic crisis that hit the DPRK with the loss of concessionary markets, cheap oil and technology transfers from the ex-communist states with the end of the Cold War is well known.¹² What is less reported is the consequent marketization – without political liberalization – that has taken place in the DPRK since the early 1990s.¹³ After the food crisis of the 1990s, when nearly 1 million people died of starvation and malnutrition, the state was no longer able to deliver food or any other economic and social goods.¹⁴ The remaining 21 million people survived through recourse to the primitive market that developed to fill the economic allocation and distribution vacuum.

The DPRK is now a nation of small and large business people. The state no longer provides enough for any member of the population to survive without individual entrepreneurship. Yet, at the same time, the state has not moved to create a regulatory framework to shape the work-

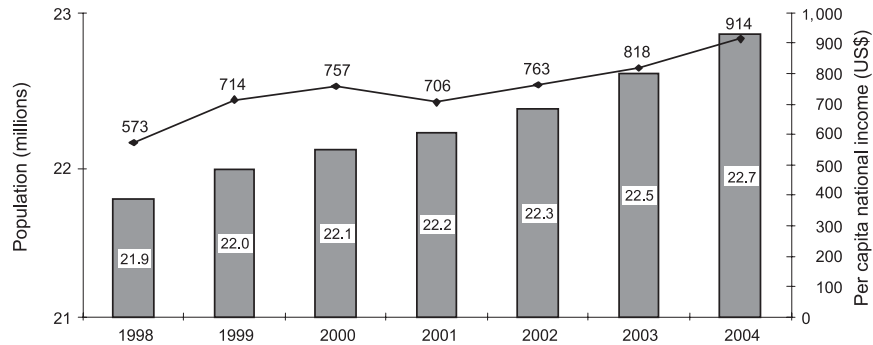


Figure 1.1 DPRK population and per capita national income, 1998–2004.
 Source: Bank of Korea, reproduced in Korea Economic Institute, *North Korea's Economy: Economic Data*, Washington, DC, June 2006.

ings of this mass of private economic activity. Thus there is little distinction between what is legal and what is illegal, what is legitimate and what is illegitimate. Corruption in this climate is simply a judgement made in terms of personal ethics. Everything is permissible because the legal system does not recognize – except in the very broad and basic legislation provided by the July 2002 “economic reform” – that the foundations of the economic structure have been transformed.

Much of the population lives in poverty, which is visible nationwide, in Pyongyang and the provinces; in urban and rural areas; in the mountains and in the farming localities. Figure 1.1 shows that annual per capita income has been at poverty levels for a least a decade. In qualitative terms this means that a child growing to adulthood in today's DPRK will have had a lifetime's experience of food shortages; intermittent hunger; inadequate medical and health care; little access to effective medicines when sick; irregular electricity and water supplies; bitter cold winters without adequate clothing or heating; half-time education because the (mainly women) teachers take frequent absences from work to look for food for their families; inadequate educational materials; and little hope from the experiences of their families and friends that much will change when they enter the workforce.

The demographic statistics listed in Table 1.2 give another crude indicator of growing endemic poverty in the DPRK. According to these Unicef figures, which are likely to be underestimated given that they must be agreed with the government before they can be published, the crude death rate – the annual number of deaths per 1,000 people – increased from 8 in 1990 to 11 in 2004. During the same period the crude birth rate – the annual number of live births per 1,000 of the population –

Table 1.2 DPRK demographic indicators

Population annual growth rate, 1970–1990 (%)	1.6
Population annual growth rate, 1990–2004 (%)	0.9
Crude death rate, 1970	9
Crude death rate, 1990	8
Crude death rate, 2004	11
Crude birth rate, 1970	33
Crude birth rate, 1990	21
Crude birth rate, 2004	16
Life expectancy, 1970	61
Life expectancy, 1990	65
Life expectancy, 2004	63
Total fertility rate, 2004 (%)	2
% of population urbanized, 2004	61
Average annual growth rate of urban population, 1970–1990 (%)	1.9
Average annual growth rate of urban population, 1990–2004 (%)	1.3

Source: Unicef website, <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/korea_statistics.html> (accessed 8 February 2007).

decreased from 21 to 16. The birth rate did not decrease for the same reasons as in rich countries, when women can choose more easily whether or not to have children. It decreased because women's health had, nationwide, deteriorated to the extent that they could not bring a pregnancy successfully to term and also because women were choosing not to have children because they did not have the means to care for them.

Inequality

Soaring inflation, high unemployment and underemployment, and continuing food and goods shortages mean that those social groups and individuals without access to the benefits of the market remain food insecure whereas those who can take advantage of the new economy are visibly better off. The nouveau riche are not super-rich as for instance are the nouveau riche of the transition countries of Eastern Europe. They do not have access to large amounts of money but they can afford good food, maybe a second-hand Japanese car, a bicycle, a DVD player, medicines and to visit restaurants. Their significance is that they continue to live in the same apartment blocks as their poorer neighbours and they are ostentatiously better off than most.

This visible inequality based on differential access to consumption goods is something new. The old upper class of the Kim family and their cohorts never engaged in conspicuous consumption and preferred to guard their wealth and privacy behind the closed walls of secluded villas.

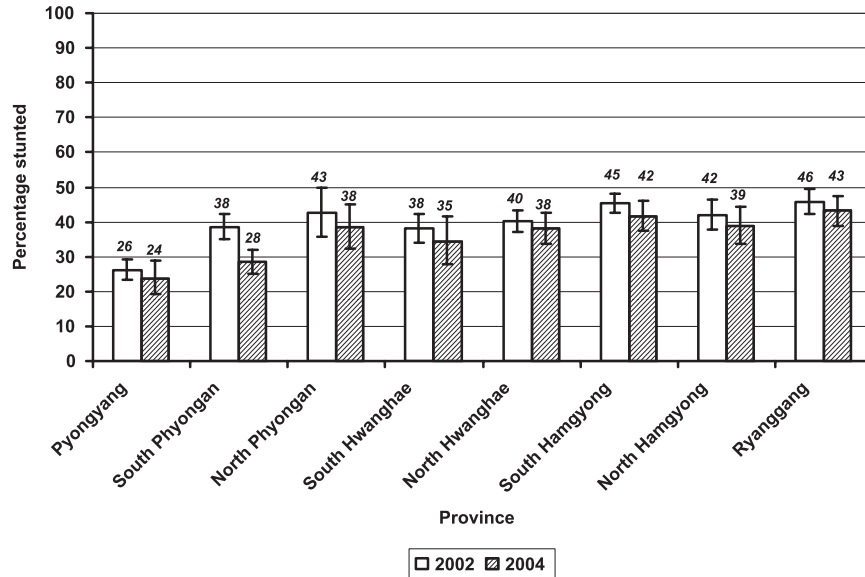


Figure 1.2 The prevalence of stunting (low height-for-age) for children under 72 months in DPRK Nutrition Assessments of 2002 and 2004.

Source: Figures derived from DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics and Institute of Child Nutrition, “DPRK 2004 Nutrition Assessment: Report of Survey Results”, Pyongyang, mimeo, 2005.

In the old system, senior and mid-level officials might be better off economically than their neighbours and have higher status but they did not in the main have access to significantly different goods because the DPRK did not produce quality consumption goods and it was extremely difficult and politically dangerous to possess goods from abroad.

Inequalities are also visible in food accessibility across geographical regions. Figure 1.2 gives data from the 2004 nutrition survey on stunting among children under 6 years of age. The figure shows that, although children’s nutritional status improved in every province between 2002 and 2004, children from Pyongyang were substantially better off than children from the mountainous provinces of the north-east, home to the country’s densely populated and economically devastated industrial and mining towns.

A contrast can be made between parents’ ambitions for their children before and since the economic crisis of the 1990s. In twentieth-century DPRK, parents wanted their children to join the army or to gain a good party job because this was the way to secure income, assets and privileges. In today’s DPRK, parents want their children to avoid the military,

the security forces and the party. This is because most of the hundreds of thousands of middle- and lower-ranked bureaucrats struggle to feed their families and live in poverty. Instead, parents want to save a little capital to start small family businesses – and aspire to emulate the successes of the traders who have made money from the new market economy and whose nouveau riche lifestyle is ostentatiously visible throughout the country.

Cross-border illegality and petty criminality

One consequence of the DPRK's human security crisis is, as one North Korean residing in China told me in March 2005, that "the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer". The social safety-net cherished under the Kim Il Sung development project has all but disappeared. Inequality and absolute poverty serve to keep the threat of starvation acute for probably the majority of North Koreans and propel various kinds of cross-border illegality: economic migration to China, trafficking in women, armed robbery and night-time theft, and smuggling.

The 30,000 or so North Koreans residing illegally in China are generally pushed into illegal migration by economic motives. Their actions are criminalized by both China and the DPRK, however, and they risk severe punishment on their return to the DPRK if they are considered to have been colluding with South Koreans and/or Christians in Yanbian, the border region that is home to China's Korean minority.¹⁵ Both groups are viewed by the North Korean authorities not as humanitarians, but as provocateurs whose major aim is to overturn the North Korean regime. Economic entrepreneurs make money out of trafficking girls and women as brides and prostitutes in north-east China – where single women are in short supply and where Chinese women are increasingly reluctant to enter into the hardships involved in rural living. So far, mainly small-scale cross-border operators have been responsible for the trafficking. Family, friends and local connections arrange the traffic – sometimes with the connivance of the women. One North Korean woman who had introduced another to a Chinese man told me in Yanbian in 2005 that "of course this is an insult to the woman and to the country [North Korea]. But it is better than living without food to eat."

Another consequence of the country's continuing inability to feed its people and provide meaningful economic opportunities for its population is the general rise in crime in the country and especially in the border area with China and Russia, which is particularly important for regional stability. Crime ranges from the nightly forays into China of North Koreans living near the border to steal food and supplies to the more sinister development of armed robberies on the Chinese side of the border.

North Korean soldiers, for instance, robbed a bank in the border town of Tumen in north-east China in 2004 and were caught by the Chinese police after they used the proceeds to buy and consume alcohol in China instead of immediately returning to the DPRK. Violent crime and property theft are carried out by small-scale operators and have not yet been linked to organized crime. However, their prevalence is causing concern among local Chinese authorities, because they have caused a sharp increase in personal insecurity for local Chinese and Chinese Koreans.

Finally, the DPRK's human security crisis and lack of internal regulation have generated widespread smuggling across the Chinese–North Korean border. Lumber is sold into China along with herbs and mushrooms. Smuggling is almost institutionalized, with North Korean local authorities and businesses as well as individuals routinely carrying out cross-border trade in ways that aim to avoid Chinese and North Korean taxation.

People-smuggling

Transnational organized criminal gangs have taken advantage of the DPRK's human security crisis in that it is Chinese “snakeheads” or people smugglers who transport North Koreans from China to Seoul. This is a market-generated activity where the snakeheads, who have the resources and contacts to make transnational operations between two and more countries possible, exchange their services with North Koreans who agree to pay a large part of the resettlement allowance they receive from the South Korean government once they are successfully located in Seoul. Incidentally there are clear gender dimensions to this transnational criminal market. The snakeheads prefer female clients because they consider that women are more likely to pay back the debt accrued. This may be the reason disproportionate numbers of women are turning up in Seoul among the latest waves of North Koreans who have actually reached South Korea.

The regional effects of technical meltdown

The lack of internal regulatory capacity in the DPRK is not confined to economic legislation. The DPRK has no systematic technical arrangements for what is known in engineering parlance as “quality assurance” in any of its industrial or energy sectors. The major train crash in the DPRK in February 2004 that killed dozens of schoolchildren was owing as much to the DPRK's inability to implement regularized safety procedures as to individual human error. This lack of capacity permeates all sectors. Its prevalence means that a nuclear accident is more likely than

not given the recent resuscitation of the DPRK's nuclear reactors.¹⁶ The effects of a nuclear accident could not be confined to the DPRK: South Korea, China, Russia and Japan would suffer the consequences. A nuclear accident is a much more likely cause of a regional nuclear crisis than the launch of a nuclear weapon.

The fear of US unilateralism

A major unspoken worry of all governments in the region is the reluctance of the United States to commit itself to achieving a diplomatic solution to the regional security crisis and the consequent fear of unilateral US military intervention in the DPRK. The governments of the region were not encouraged by the US decision at the Six-Party Talks to read prepared statements and its failure to use the opportunities for informal discussions with the North Koreans on the margins of the formal meetings. In other words, they were dismayed by the unwillingness of the United States to use the normal mechanisms of diplomacy whose very aim is to achieve agreement by way of compromise and trade-offs between conflicting parties that by definition do not share interests and values.

All the region's states fear military intervention by the United States on the peninsula. South Korea fears the annihilation of Seoul and the crippling of its economy, not to speak of the killing, maiming and devastation that would be suffered by millions of Koreans. China does not want a war on its borders – especially when it is making such profound efforts to develop its north-eastern provinces that border Korea. Neither China nor Russia relishes the prospect of being drawn into a hot conflict with the United States. Public opinion in both countries would be outraged if the United States even attempted a limited “surgical strike” against the North Koreans. Both countries have friendship treaties with the DPRK, and China is still formally committed to some form of active support of the DPRK in times of war. Even Japan, whose alliance with the United States forms the foundation of its foreign policy and its existence as a democratic state, has given strong signals to the United States that it prefers conflict resolution through negotiation, not confrontation.

The regional response

The DPRK's neighbours have been so concerned about the high-profile nuclear crisis and the consequent fear of US unilateralism that they have underestimated human insecurities as a cause of potential threats to re-

gional stability. Only China and to some extent South Korea have taken these new security threats seriously. China's approach has been to punish those caught engaged in criminality, as well as to step up its internal security surveillance procedures in order to try to identify North Koreans residing in China without papers. Once identified, they are sent back to the DPRK. Publicly, China has refused to cooperate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in setting up screening mechanisms to distinguish refugees from economic migrants. Instead it has insisted on a bilateral approach with North Korea and has reiterated its official position that all North Koreans in China are economic migrants.

Concurrent with the official harsh approach, China has also taken a more flexible approach to North Koreans seeking support in China. Despite the fact that it has deployed some 100,000 troops to the border area, it has not militarized the still porous and open 1,000 mile border. There are no fences, barbed wire, military emplacements or demarcation lines, except for the river that separates the two countries. This means that in practice China tolerates North Koreans coming over the border at night to obtain food from relatives or other sources. It has facilitated the transport to Seoul of North Koreans who invaded foreign embassies and consulates in Beijing and Shenyang. It has also discussed with non-governmental organizations how to regularize the status of the estimated 5,000 children born to mixed marriages between non-authorized resident North Koreans and Chinese citizens.

On the whole, however, regional actors have not taken seriously the potential threats to regional stability from the continuing structural impetus to growth in cross-border illegality and criminality arising from the DPRK human security crisis. Regional actors have not seriously addressed the potential consolidation of transnational criminal networks in the border areas of China, Russia and the DPRK. These subjects remain off the security agenda – partly because of the very fact that they contradict the established discourse, which is that North Korea is the cause of all the region's troubles.

The "common knowledge" security paradigms that argue for the fearsome nature of the North Korean military are so strong and strengthened by every kind of cultural and ideological reinforcement that it becomes almost impossible to "see" data that do not fit pre-existing perceptions. And, in many cases, keeping some subjects off the public agenda serves domestic political interests. For example, it is far easier to persuade the Japanese public to support changes in Japan's constitution to allow a more active role for Japanese military forces if the enemy can be shown as demented, irrational, nearby and of imminent threat. It would be much harder to justify such changes as part of conformity to the reformu-

lated Japanese–US strategic alliance, which requires more proactive participation from Japan in regional and global military activities.

Regional cooperation as policy solution

The conventional approach to regional security analysis argues that there is little commonality between the five major Northeast Asian states such as to build a regional security coordination mechanism. In fact, there are a number of ways in which Northeast Asians are economically and politically more institutionally bound together than ever before. Rapid Chinese economic growth provides the meshing factor – with Japan, South Korea and Russia looking for and obtaining trade, markets and investment relationships with China so as to boost their own economic fortunes. The “ASEAN plus 3” formula has brought Japan, China and South Korea together in a multilateral forum and all participants in the Six-Party Talks are members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).¹⁷ Five of the six – not including North Korea – are members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum. In addition, the talks themselves provide potential avenues of cooperation between the six parties and the possibility of building more institutionalized cooperation mechanisms in the future.

By misconceiving nascent regional cooperation, the conventional wisdom rules out consideration of what could be innovative but pragmatic solutions to the region’s security crisis. Multisectoral security problems require fine-tuned analysis. Such solutions also provide the possibility for trade-offs and bargaining across sectors and countries, such as to provide multilateral solutions to the multifaceted security dilemma of Northeast Asia today. The decision of the Six-Party Talks to convene working groups, for instance, could have provided an acceptable forum to all parties to discuss the controversial issues of not just nuclear weapons and missiles, but human rights and humanitarian issues as well as economic and development matters.

It would not be very difficult to envisage a process akin to the Helsinki “basket” diplomacy where security, economics and human rights issues were negotiated by the Cold War adversaries but progress in each was not directly linked to simultaneous progress in all. Thus incremental negotiations provided confidence-building exercises in themselves as well as substantive positive outcomes at the end of the process. An analogous approach is feasible for Northeast Asia by way of an extension of the Six-Party Talks. It will, however, require a rejection of uncausal analysis and the conventional wisdom, and an adoption of security analysis that

accepts the multidimensional nature of security threats in Northeast Asia and the subsequent possibilities of multilateral and multisectoral solutions.

Old and new security analyses

Facing the myths and realities of Northeast Asia's security dilemmas would bring advantages to policy-makers. The insecurity facing the North Korean government and its consequent decision to advertise possession of a nuclear deterrent (whether based on a fully functioning or partially functioning weapons capacity is almost irrelevant in this context) provide part of the security puzzle of Northeast Asia. Élite discourse, however, needs to recognize that focusing on the alleged military threat from North Korea to the exclusion of all other factors postpones the resolution of real security threats to regional stability and downplays other potentially dangerous conflicts between states and peoples in the region. Historical antagonisms are not disappearing and, because they have little purchase in inter-élite political discussion and are not the focus of many official attempts at conflict resolution, they are in many ways worsening.

Old security analysis masks the serious but multidimensional nature of North Korea's national security problems. Real security threats derive not from the DPRK as a military threat but from generalized human insecurities generated by the breakdown of economic structures within the DPRK and the resulting transborder spillover effects. Innovative security analysis should identify these new features of the regional socio-economic and political landscape in order to help policy-makers build common, more cooperative futures.

The contribution of this book

The contributors to this book identify the multifaceted and interrelated nature of the Korean security crises. The paradox is that progress on improving military security cannot be made without progress in economic and food security for the DPRK. This is because, as the contributors show, the top priority for the DPRK government is regime survival and that survival cannot be guaranteed by military means. Unless and until the DPRK government secures the means to rebuild its economy, and at the same time considers itself secure from external attack, it will continue to follow an isolationist policy that cannot deliver human security for its people or regional security for its neighbours. The task for policy-makers is to unravel this conundrum. The contributors show how that can be

done, offering well-informed analysis from established experts in the field and suggestions of how to break the policy impasse towards Korea.

The contributors were asked to take old and new security threats seriously but also to consider the policy ramifications of a reconstituted Korean security analysis so as to offer guidance for global policy-makers. Given the unresolved security crises on the peninsula and the day to day misery faced by many North Koreans, that task is manifestly still necessary.

Notes

1. This book is based on a 10-year research project that has resulted in a series of scholarly publications as well as a series of policy analyses for international organizations and specialist journals such as *Jane's Intelligence Monthly*. Those readers interested in following up sources and literature are recommended to peruse the extensive bibliography and detailed footnotes in Hazel Smith, *Hungry for Peace: International Security. Humanitarian Assistance and Social Change in North Korea*, Washington DC: USIP Press, 2005. Those interested in particular aspects of the issues mentioned here may wish to follow up detailed argumentation in my various publications listed in the bibliography to this book. Some of the specific argumentation for this chapter was first developed in Hazel Smith, "North East Asia's Regional Security Secrets: Re-envisioning the Korean Crisis", *Disarmament Forum*, No. 2, Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, pp. 45–54; translated into French as "Les Secrets de la sécurité régionale en Asie du Nord-Est", *Forum du désarmement*, No. 2, Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2005, pp. 47–56.
2. The focus of this chapter is on how the shaping of the security debate has been detrimental to policy analysis and policy choices on Korean security. Readers who wish to delve further into the theoretical alternatives shaping conventional security approaches should consult the useful Harald Müller, "Security Cooperation", in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (eds), *Handbook of International Relations*, London: Sage, 2005.
3. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th edn, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979.
4. For an overview of human security analysis, see Edward Newman, "Human Security and Constructivism", *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 2, No. 3, August 2001.
5. See United Nations Development Programme, "An Agenda for the Social Summit", in *Human Development Report 1994*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; available at <<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1994/en/>> (accessed 29 January 2007).
6. Books shaped by this perspective include serious scholarly work, policy analysis and the polemical. Examples of the first include Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb*, London: Macmillan, 1995; Marcus Noland, *Avoiding the Apocalypse – The Future of the Two Koreas*, Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, June 2000; and United Nations, "DPR Korea Common Country Assessment 2002", Pyongyang, mimeo, February 2003. Examples of the second include Michael O'Hanlon and Mike Mochizuki, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula: How to Deal with a Nuclear North Korea*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003; and

- Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1999. Examples of the last include Jasper Becker, *Rogue Regime: Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, and the rather hysterical Gordon Chang, *Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes on the World*, London: Random House, 2006.
7. For discussion, see Hazel Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor: Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea", *International Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 1, January 2000, pp. 111–132.
 8. For a critique, see Chapter 1 of Hazel Smith, *Hungry for Peace*.
 9. For discussion see Kyu-ryoon Kim, *Regional Cooperation in Asia: Suggestions for Future Development*, KINU report PA 06-12, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2006, available at <http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/>.
 10. See Chapter 12.
 11. Hazel Smith, "Intelligence Matters: Improving Intelligence on North Korea", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 2004, pp. 48–51.
 12. Humanitarian and Development Working Group, "DPR Korean Economic Reforms", 6 August 2002, available at <http://www.cankor.ca/issues/95.htm#1> (accessed 29 January 2007).
 13. Hazel Smith, "La Corée du Nord vers l'économie de marché: Faux et vrais dilemmes", *Critique Internationale* (Paris), April 2002, pp. 6–14.
 14. The most useful and thorough analysis of the famine of the 1990s and the chronic food shortages that have beset the DPRK throughout its history is Suk Lee, "Food Shortages and Economic Institutions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Economics, University of Warwick, UK, January 2003.
 15. Hazel Smith, "Asymmetric Nuisance Value: The Border in China–Democratic People's Republic of Korea Relations", in Timothy Hildebrandt (ed.), *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China–North Korea Relations*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Asia Program Special Report, September 2003, pp. 18–25; Hazel Smith, "Brownback's Bill Will Not Help North Koreans", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 2004, pp. 42–45; Hazel Smith, "North Koreans in China: Defining the Problems and Offering Some Solutions", in Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva (eds), *Crossing National Borders: Human Migration Issues in Northeast Asia*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005, pp. 165–190; Hazel Smith, "North Korean Migrants Pose Long-Term Challenge for China", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, June 2005, pp. 32–35.
 16. For detail, see Hazel Smith, "North Korean Nuclear Plant Poses Threat of Meltdown in North Korea", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 2005, pp. 24–27.
 17. See Chapter 12 for detail.

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Reconstituting Korean Security: A Policy Primer

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The classic national security concerns of nuclear proliferation and the production, sale and use of weapons of mass destruction cannot be addressed in the Korean peninsula without at the same time considering the implications and interrelationship of what are these days known as the human security issues of food, poverty and, perhaps more controversially, freedom. We agree that East Asia and the world are more dangerous with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the DPRK or North Korea) in possession of nuclear weapons. We also argue, however, that a comprehensive security analysis identifies many equally significant threats to regional security, such as the risk from industrial and nuclear accidents and the potential for transborder crime arising from the lack of legal and productive avenues for economic activity for North Korea's poverty-stricken citizens. This book shows that, in Korea, soft security issues are as important as hard security matters and that the latter cannot be understood, or its dilemmas unravelled, without a clear engagement with the former.

This book tackles Korean security dilemmas from the perspective of the various international actors, not just from the viewpoint of the major protagonists – the DPRK and the United States. We show that different states and international organizations have different and multiple interests in their relationships with the DPRK and with each other.

"This book should come as meat and drink to those who have been looking for a multidisciplinary, internationally oriented approach to the many problems that will arise when North Korea slowly emerges from its self-imposed isolation."

Donald P. Gregg, Chairman of the Board, The Korea Society, New York

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