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North Korea Poses Multiple Security Challenges
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The immediate security challenges posed by North Korea are formidable. These include nearly the full array of weapons of mass destruction: a plutonium-based nuclear weapons program now supplemented by uranium enrichment; the world's third largest chemical weapons arsenal, possibly biological weapons and a range of ballistic missiles that may be able to deliver these weapons to South Korea and Japan. The threat from these weapons is not just direct. North Korea has threatened to transfer nuclear weapons technology, as indeed it already has, along with missiles and other arms.

North Korea's lethal attacks in 2010 were vivid reminders of the conventional military threat and the potential for resumed conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Although unable to feed its people, North Korea remains highly armed, determined to seize advantage through asymmetric capabilities, and ready to fire first. North Korea is the most militarized country on earth, with the world's fourth largest army and biggest special forces. Although its economic decline and enhanced capabilities in South Korea make any option to invade seem less credible today than in the past, the North has many ways to inflict harm without invading. Electronic warfare is among the other forms of asymmetric capabilities that make Seoul feel vulnerable.

Meanwhile, North Korea has engaged in diverse forms of state-sponsored crime, including the kidnapping of foreign nationals, trafficking in narcotics and many other forms of contraband, and the counterfeiting of foreign currency. This criminality and the refugee flows, human trafficking and other complications arising from the regime's mistreatment of its own people pose additional security challenges for North Korea's neighbors and the wider international community. It is a moot point whether the Kim regime is more of a menace to its own subjects or the wider world. Its provocative behavior increases the risk that eventually somebody, whether within or outside, will be goaded to retaliate.

The threats that North Korea presents to the outside world are inextricably linked to its domestic situation. Without foreign assistance and a structural overhaul, the North has no realistic prospect of sustainable development. With political control and regime protection its overriding concerns, however, the leadership has been unwilling to undertake the bold structural reforms and transparency measures necessary to resuscitate the economy, or to give up its nuclear-weapons program in exchange for the foreign assistance and trade that could rescue the nation from its poverty. Instead, Kim Jong-il has turned to the military, designating a 'military first' policy as the regime's guiding ideology.

The dynastic succession now unfolding in Pyongyang and the uncertainties this entails exacerbate the potential for conflict. The succession so far appears to be going smoothly. However, Kim Jong-un, the young designated successor, will face severe disadvantages because of his lack of experience, his fragile power base, the political constraints on economic reform, and the military's role in politics. In almost all respects, the external and internal conditions are less favorable for this second-generation succession than for the first dynastic transfer after the death of regime founder Kim Il-sung in 1994. This could make North Korea an even more dangerous nation, more inclined to engage in further military provocations, to cling to its weapons of mass destruction and to offer them for sale to any would-be buyer. The Kim family will have to rely heavily on physical power exercised by the military and the state-security apparatus in order to ensure a successful succession. In pursuit of the goal of becoming a 'strong and prosperous great nation' by next year, such military capabilities are all that the regime can summon.

Pyongyang has made frequent references to using its nuclear weapons, which are portrayed as essential to deterring an attack. But the weapons largely serve a political purpose. Any actual offensive use of nuclear weapons would lead to annihilation. North Korea perceives its nuclear weapons as a way of ensuring its prestige and influence on the international stage and of bolstering the regime's internal legitimacy. It no longer refers to the possibility of relinquishing its nuclear assets in return for political and economic concessions. It appears that Pyongyang perceives its nuclear weapons as a permanent feature.

The missile program serves a similar political purpose. North Korea has established one of the world's largest ballistic-missile arsenals, exported such missiles to many countries, and conducted provocative tests of longer-range systems and space launchers that could be converted into long-range missiles. It is very likely, however, that North Korea has historically relied on foreign sources for its supply of *Hwasong*, *Nodong*, *Musudan* and KN-02 missiles. If unsanctioned supply channels have been shut down or sufficiently attenuated, then North Korea may no longer be able to export missiles in large numbers. It would also be unable to expand its missile forces appreciably. Surprises are always possible. North Korean leaders might be willing to accept tremendous risk and deploy a missile before it is fully developed. Prematurely fielding missiles such as the *Musudan* will not provide North Korea with a reliable capability. But if the unproven systems are deployed in ways that can be

detected by Pyongyang's adversaries, they may have value for political and deterrence purposes.

North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons further complicates an intricate and dangerous situation in the event of a disputatious collapse. The nightmare scenario would be if ROK intervention in the North, perhaps including its US ally in an urgent quest for 'loose nukes' were perceived as hostile by Beijing. It is vital, if politically difficult, that the ROK, the US, and China plan trilaterally and discreetly in advance to prevent this.

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