

# Strategic Culture and the North Korean Nuclear Crisis: Conceptual Challenges and Policy Opportunities

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The prospect of a nuclear capable North Korea has seen the strategic crisis on the Korean peninsula take on an additional layer of complexity and potentially catastrophic lethality. Recent analysis tends to focus only on the period since the Korean War and consequently pays little attention to historical and cultural factors, which inform the context in which the North Korean (and the South as well for that matter) elites operate. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate how an appreciation of traditional strategic culture and the broader history in which the crisis is situated can enhance our understanding of the motivations for, and functions of, this nuclear capability.

## Introduction

Over the last decade, the prospect of a nuclear capable North Korea has seen the strategic crisis on the Korean peninsula take on an additional layer of complexity and potentially catastrophic lethality for nations in the region. For the most part, recent analysis focuses only on the period since the Korean War and consequently pays little attention to historical and cultural factors, which inform the context in which the North Korean (and the South as well for that matter) elites operate. Consequently, Pyongyang is still the subject of Cold War-era caricatures, which are far from constructive and do little to improve the chances of establishing a sustainable and desirable resolution to the crisis. This article is an attempt to demonstrate how even a very rough appreciation of traditional strategic culture and the broader history in which the crisis is situated can illuminate our understanding of the motivations and functions of this nuclear capability. By doing so, just as Jack Snyder pointed out in relation to Soviet nuclear strategy, it will be possible to understand some critical aspects of North Korea's approach to the use of armed force not as the actions of some 'generic, rational man',<sup>1</sup> but in the light of Korea's distinctive strategic culture, thereby putting, as Bernard Brodie advocated, 'good anthropology and sociology' into practice.<sup>2</sup>

The article will be presented in three parts. The first section situates the concept of strategic culture within one of the least contested discourses in

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<sup>1</sup> A Macmillan, K Booth and R Trood, 'Strategic Culture', in K Booth and R Trood, (eds), *Strategic Cultures in the Asia Pacific*, St. Martins Press, New York, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> C Gray, 'Strategic Culture as Context: the first generation of theory strikes back', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25, 1999, p. 51.

strategic thought – that of Clausewitz and his strategic analogy of the trinity. I will show how strategic culture can be used to afford a greater understanding of his '*wunderliche Dreifaltigkeit*,' or 'remarkable trinity'. This is necessary as the very concept of strategic culture is often regarded as existing in the conceptual margins of the discourse of strategy. There are some good reasons for caution. First, there are problems with defining the bounds of the concept of strategic culture itself, though this does not hinder the currency of other similarly tricky concepts such as terrorism. Second, with regard to actually using the concept in the practice of strategy, there is the very real risk of treating strategic culture as somehow prescriptive. The first issue shall be dealt with briefly in due course, but on the second I want to make an important clarification from the start. This article calls for a greater appreciation of the cultural factors that inform strategic decision-making. It does not suggest that the culture of a strategic actor should be treated as a determinate of future decision-making. However, greater awareness, or reflective self-awareness, of the complex interplay of influences on strategic decision-making will provide greater clarity to our analysis of past actions while enabling greater flexibility for the determination of those in the future. Herein lies the utility of this concept.

The second section will then provide a brief analysis of traditional strategic culture in the context of the Korean peninsula. In particular, this section looks at such factors as Korea's geography and its limited natural resources and its historic management of great power relations. Emphasis is then given to more recent events on the peninsula and North Korea's response to its changing position relative to its powerful neighbours China and Russia. Finally, the third section, with this context in mind, offers a number of interpretations regarding the motivations for and functions of North Korea's nuclear weapons program that take Korean strategic culture into account.

### **Strategic Culture and the Clausewitzian Trinity**

To Clausewitz, war, and by implication strategy, could not be seen in isolation from the political purposes for which the masters of policy mobilized the machines of war in the first place. However, while political goals were the supreme consideration Clausewitz was clear that this did not 'imply that the political aim is a tyrant'.<sup>3</sup> Crucial to understanding the dynamics of the strategy that a state could bring to bear in pursuit of its policies, and the character of the resulting conflict itself, was an understanding of the continuum which connected strategy and politics and, by implication, strategy itself. For Clausewitz, '[war was] not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass (total resistance would be no war at all), but always the collision of two living forces'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, war had to be seen in its

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<sup>3</sup> C von Clausewitz, *On War*, Everyman's Library, Toronto and London, 1993, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> P Paret, 'Clausewitz', in P Paret, (ed), *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1986, p. 199.

fundamentally non-linear form; as a 'paradoxical trinity, composed of violence, hatred and enmity'.<sup>5</sup> Roughly corresponding to the people, the commander and army, and the government respectively, the interplay of these ostensibly separate and yet interconnected forces was seen as being analogous to the movement of an object between three magnets, each pulling the object in its own direction.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, rather than merely the sum of these parts, war was 'the dynamic set of patterns that was created in the space between and around the contestants'.<sup>7</sup>

This trinitarian framework was further complicated in reality by the specific context of strategic relations. The more rational, or at least calculated, political aims of a war would elicit different reactions 'from different peoples, and even from the same peoples at different times';<sup>8</sup> political aims and any response to them would inevitably be driven and compounded by psychological forces.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as war was a "total phenomenon" it would be both unrealistic and dangerous to ignore any one part of the trinity or the context in which it existed.<sup>10</sup> It is in the context of the Clausewitzian trinity that the concept of strategic culture becomes important.

While the concept is regularly contested, in contrast to some quantitative and less contentious qualitative approaches, Colin Gray puts forward a useful definition. To Gray, strategic culture consists of:

[T]he persisting (though not eternal) socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operation, that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience.<sup>11</sup>

Underpinning the concept is the assumption that strategic communities behave in a manner which is both shaped by, and indicative of, a particular culture, even when performing in a manner which is not preferred or even completely alien.<sup>12</sup> Some of the limitations with this assumption will be dealt with later. For the moment, however, strategic culture will be used both as a 'perceptual lens'<sup>13</sup> through which the makers of policy approach strategy and as a powerful context in which strategy operates.

Like the trinity, strategic culture is relevant across three interdependent levels: the government; the armed forces; and the society or people to which

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<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz, p. 101. On the Trinitarian vision, see A Beyerchen, 'Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War', in *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 3, (Winter 1992-3), p. 69, and M Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Globalized Era*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 21; and J Weltman, *World Politics and the Evolution of War*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1995. pp. 59-60

<sup>6</sup> Beyerchen, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. See also Weltman, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz, pp. 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> Beyerchen, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Gray, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 63-4.

<sup>13</sup> Macmillan, Booth and Trood, p. 5.

the culture is ascribed.<sup>14</sup> At the level of government, strategic culture may influence what interests, objectives and values are pursued, and the consideration of which means will be justified in the pursuit of policy. Similarly, within the armed forces, culture will both influence and be apparent in such matters as training, doctrine and the characteristics of deployment, while in society, strategic culture may be apparent in public attitudes to the use of armed force and the execution of strategic policy generally. While it would be erroneous to suggest that the concepts of strategic culture and the Clausewitzian trinity are synonymous, it is useful to see the interaction of the parts of the trinity as both the cause and effect of strategic culture. Strategic culture, therefore, has both a shaping and an interpretive function in relation to the nation's approach to strategy and its experience of, and response to, conflict. Understanding the influence of strategic culture, therefore, has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the trinity itself and the context in which it operates.

### North Korea and Strategic Culture

Korean strategic culture is heavily influenced by the country's distinctive geography and history. Jutting southwards from the northeast corner of China, the Korean peninsula is strategically located on a geographic intersection between China, Russia and Japan. Over the centuries, Korea has been particularly prone to invasion, as well as being regularly used as a 'stepping stone to the Asian mainland'.<sup>15</sup> While the notoriously mountainous terrain has traditionally provided a natural defensive advantage, historical limitations on Korea's ability to direct significant manpower into the military has on many occasions, contributed to the country's vulnerability to foreign invasion, particularly via the more accessible western flank.<sup>16</sup> Historically then, given these limitations, Korea's vulnerability was managed by an emphasis on diplomacy and the courting of its more powerful neighbours, in particular China,<sup>17</sup> and more recently the Soviet Union. In spite of this emphasis, (or perhaps because of it), Korea was subjected to some nine hundred invasions over the last five thousand years.<sup>18</sup>

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a particularly traumatic chapter in this history. The period from 1910 to 1945 saw the peninsula fall under Japanese imperial rule. By the end of the war in the Pacific and the defeat of Imperial Japan, the anti-Japanese resistance in Korea had already established functioning government and an administrative apparatus

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<sup>14</sup> C Meyer, *Theorising European Strategic Culture: Between Convergence and the Persistence of National Diversity*, CEPS Working Document No. 204, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, June 2004, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> K Choi, 'Korea: a Tradition of Peace – the Danger of War', in K Booth and R Trood, (eds), *Strategic Cultures in the Asia Pacific*, St. Martins Press, New York, 1999, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

throughout North and South Korea. Between 1945 and 1950, however, this indigenous government was effectively and forcefully suppressed by a US-backed government, which had taken into its ranks those who had formerly collaborated with Japanese forces. Possibly 100,000 died in this operation over a five-year period.<sup>19</sup> The Korean War (1950-53), as the culminating event of this struggle, took an even more massive toll on the Korean people with some 4,500,000 deaths while much of the country was devastated by the conflict.<sup>20</sup> While the cease-fire between North Korea and the United Nations forces has mostly held for the last fifty-odd years, the North has periodically been subject to the threat of US conventional and nuclear strikes, most recently under the rubric of 'pre-emption'. Such threats have taken on more meaning over the last fifteen years since the end of the Cold War. The loss of Soviet patronage at the end of the Cold War and the increasing disparity between the North and South Korean economies contributed to increased threat perceptions in the North.<sup>21</sup> In this context, the North Korean elite has increasingly, and understandably, focused on ensuring its basic economic and political survival.

The North's preoccupation with basic survival has seen the evolution of an approach to strategy that is ostensibly dominated by the notion of *juche*, or self-reliance,<sup>22</sup> in military and economic affairs. Militarism has appeared to take on the focus of the affairs of state. However, both *juche* and militarism have their historical precedents. Historically, invasions of the peninsula were often followed by militaristic 'never again clubs' that saw their subjugation to militarily stronger invaders as the direct consequence of an under-resourced military. In response, these groups advocated the need for more robust defence at the expense of other crucial areas of economic activity. However, history also demonstrates that periods of militarism were usually followed by a reversion to preferred methods of diplomacy which placed less strain on the country's limited resources.<sup>23</sup> However, in the period during and since the Korean War, North Korean militarism has adopted a more overtly offensive dimension,<sup>24</sup> with the emphasis on deep strike and deterrent

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<sup>19</sup> N Chomsky, *Understanding Power: the Indispensable Chomsky*, Peter Mitchell and John Schoeffel (eds.), Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2003, p. 303.

<sup>20</sup> M Leitenberg, *Deaths in Wars and Conflicts between 1945 and 2000*, Cornell University Peace Studies Program Occasional Paper No. 29, July 2003, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> V Cha, 'Hawk Engagement and Preventive Diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula', *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 1, Summer 2002, p. 49, and International Crisis Group (ICG), *North Korea: a Phased Negotiation Strategy*, ICG Asia Report No. 61, Washington/Brussels, 1 August 2003, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> On *juche* see, H Park, 'North Korean Perceptions of Self and Others: Implications and Policy Choices', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 4, Winter 2000/2001, pp. 505-6.

<sup>23</sup> Choi, p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> See Cha, 'Hawk Engagement and Preventive Diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula', p. 52, and H Hodge, 'North Korea's Military Strategy', *Parameters*, Spring 2003, p. 74.

capabilities, including of course a possible nuclear arsenal,<sup>25</sup> and a focus on the denial of pre-emptive strikes.<sup>26</sup>

An important question to ask is whether the trauma of the twentieth century and the ascension of an apparently offensive rather than defensive militaristic culture should be seen as having a lasting influence on Korean Strategic culture, specifically as it pertains to the North. Hodge explains the shift to militarism as being inspired by the anti-Japanese guerilla ethos, which was promoted by Kim Il Sung as the only legitimate basis on which to reconstitute a unified Korea.<sup>27</sup> The importance of conflict and war were also underscored by Kim Il Jung's socialist ideological models in which 'conflict did not require a solution; it was the solution to political problems'.<sup>28</sup> The central place of conflict and militarism generally came to dominate not just strategic culture but political culture as well,<sup>29</sup> while providing the *raison d'être* for all state activity.<sup>30</sup>

By as early as 1960, however, some years after the failed attempt to unify Korea forcefully, there were signs of renewed recognition by the North Korean elite of the need to combine both military and diplomatic instruments to achieve reunification. Under the banner of the 'Three Fronts' strategy, this grand strategy would emphasize the importance of a powerful military-industrial base, alongside the need to undermine the US-South Korean alliance, and the use of insurgency and conventional military means to unify the peninsula.<sup>31</sup> The present state of North Korea and the US alliance with South Korea is a clear indication of the failure of this strategy, though the story might be somewhat different if Soviet patronage had remained. At the same time, however, it is useful to view the current North Korean nuclear and missile proliferation crisis in the light of this broader approach to strategy, which can be seen to have clear resonances with the traditional diplomatic preferences of traditional Korean strategic culture.

## The Nuclear Dimension

Initially with Soviet assistance, North Korea has utilized nuclear technology since the late 1950's.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1990s, however, it became evident to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that North Korea had attempted to hide two nuclear waste sites and had separated more weapons-grade plutonium than it had previously declared, raising concerns about a possible North Korean nuclear weapons program.<sup>33</sup> The negotiation of the *Agreed*

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<sup>25</sup> Hodge, p. 73.

<sup>26</sup> Choi, p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> Hodge, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>32</sup> ICG, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> ICG, p. 6.

*Framework* by the US and North Korea, signed in October 1994, at least slowed the pace of Pyongyang's nuclear program significantly. However, over the last three years, since being confronted in 2002 over secret uranium enrichment activities, North Korea has reiterated its claim to the right to develop nuclear weapons in order to protect itself from US aggression.<sup>34</sup>

The defensive argument for the acquisition of nuclear weapons stands up, from the North Korean perspective at any rate, especially considering the shifting balance of powers against the North over the past fifteen years and the openly hostile declarations of the United States in recent years. Along with the loss of its superpower patron in the early 1990's, North Korea has also witnessed the rapid degradation and ultimate annihilation of the once powerful Iraqi military in two Gulf wars, examples which have demonstrated the overwhelming lethality of new generation weapons systems over legacy platforms carried over since the Cold War.<sup>35</sup> During the presidencies of both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, North Korea has also been the subject of vacillating US policy statements. Policies of engagement, such as those pursued under the *Agreed Framework*, have been countered by allusions to regime change,<sup>36</sup> while even the *Agreed Framework* was seen to make Pyongyang more vulnerable to US strikes.<sup>37</sup> Since 2001, White House 'Hawks' have raised the temperature for Pyongyang with a series of both general and targeted statements including: the inclusion of North Korea in the so-called 'Axis of Evil'; the declaration of the 'Bush Doctrine' of pre-emption and regime change; and the inclusion of North Korea on the exclusive target list of the 2002 *Nuclear Posture Review*.<sup>38</sup> While none has amounted to any actual US aggression against North Korea, each development has surely increased the credibility of North Korean fears thus making it more difficult for any disarmament process to get off the ground.

From another angle, however, the potential of a nuclear arsenal has provided the North Korean leadership with a very much-enhanced ability to capture the attention of those it wishes to engage both diplomatically and economically.<sup>39</sup> Diplomatically, nuclear rhetoric has been used as its tool of choice in its 'wedge-driving' strategy to influence the balance of forces against it, most notably by exploiting the differing threat perceptions of South Korea and the US.<sup>40</sup> Fear of nuclear weapons has provided the lynchpin for a strategy of 'calculated irrationality'<sup>41</sup> or 'strategic deception'.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly

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<sup>34</sup> ICG, pp. 12-3, and E Olsen, 'The Goals of North Korean Brinkmanship,' *Strategic Insights*, vol 3, no. 3, March 2004, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> R Karniol, 'Rational Rogue', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 10 July 2002, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> R Litwak, 'Non-proliferation and the Dilemmas of Regime Change', *Survival*, vol.45, no. 4, Winter 2003/2004, p 8.

<sup>37</sup> Hodge, p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> D Kang, 'The Avoidable Crisis in North Korea', *Orbis*, Summer 2003, p. 505.

<sup>39</sup> Olsen, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Olsen, p. 3.

Olsen notes the tendency for China and South Korea to have a better understanding of North Korean 'sabre rattling' and posturing. Unlike many Western analysts who typically emphasize the image of an offensive, irrational and belligerent North Korea, Chinese and South Korean analysts are more likely to appreciate Pyongyang's behaviour as arising from its general state of fear and insecurity.<sup>43</sup>

North Korea's use of nuclear bargaining to manipulate great power relations can be seen as a continuation of traditional Korean strategic culture.<sup>44</sup> While being incredibly risky, this bargaining strategy has the potential to reverse Korea's traditional place in the hierarchy of regional geopolitical relations. In particular, such a view emphasizes how both the threat of nuclear weapons and the North Korean missile program have been used as leverage to receive much needed foreign aid, which can also be presented to the North's domestic constituency as 'tribute', thereby enabling the rhetoric of *juche* to continue.<sup>45</sup> The non-binding bargain entered into with the US under the *Agreed Framework* was designed to provide considerable economic benefits to North Korea, including half a million tons of fuel oil and two 'proliferation-resistant' light-water reactors, which would be provided via the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO).<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, even before there were major signs of the agreement stalling, Pyongyang used the construction of a massive underground site, which could have been used for nuclear weapons programs, to bargain for a further half a million tons of food aid.<sup>47</sup> Critically, by gaining aid through such arrangements, Pyongyang has been able to avoid making humiliating pleas for humanitarian assistance<sup>48</sup> at the same time as facilitating the temporary inversion of Korea's traditional tribute-giving status, to that of a powerful tribute-receiver.

Significantly, while assisting in attempts to maintain an appearance of self-sufficiency and delaying the need for North Korea to open up to global economic forces,<sup>49</sup> nuclear bargaining has increasingly coincided with measured, if somewhat reluctant, steps toward domestic economic reform.<sup>50</sup> These reforms have been more than matched by increasing international diplomatic relations,<sup>51</sup> further reinforcing a perceptible shift away from pure militarism toward a more traditional and diplomatically focused approach to

<sup>42</sup> N Eberstadt, 'The Most Dangerous Country', *The National Interest*, vol. 57, 1999, pp. 46-7.

<sup>43</sup> Olsen, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Choi, p. 94.

<sup>45</sup> Eberstadt, pp. 51-2. Note that Hodge, p. 70, sees Pyongyang's increasing dependence on aid as leading to the loss of control, and thus against the goals of *juche*.

<sup>46</sup> Eberstadt, p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> K-A Park, 'North Korea's Defensive Power and US-North Korea Relations', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 4, Winter 2000/01, pp. 537, and Eberstadt, pp. 51-2. Eberstadt also points out that at the time, DPRK was the largest recipient of US aid. Compare with Hodge who sees aid as loosing control, p. 70. See also Cha, p. 63 ff., on coercive bargaining.

<sup>48</sup> Park, 'North Korean Perceptions of Self and Others', p. 510.

<sup>49</sup> Eberstadt, p. 51.

<sup>50</sup> Kang, pp. 501-3.

<sup>51</sup> V Cha and D Kang, 'The Korea Crisis', *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2003, p. 26.

strategic affairs. One of the more symbolic efforts toward normalizing North/South relations has been the redevelopment of the Kyongui Railway, which required the clearing of landmines from a section of the De-Militarized Zone, and the commencement of a four-lane highway linking the eastern corridor between the two Koreas.<sup>52</sup> Three special economic zones, including the Sinuiji Special Administrative Region,<sup>53</sup> have also been established near the Northern border with China to take advantage of lucrative cross-border tourism and investment. The establishment of such zones has required the introduction of a raft of reforms to existing laws on foreign investment, tax and land tenure. While certainly limited, such reforms are becoming increasingly difficult, not to mention costly, to reverse.<sup>54</sup>

Even from a cursory glance, it is evident that the North's approach to the use of armed force and the manipulation of its real and perceived military power in recent years have been most Clausewitzian. This is true insofar as North Korea's potential to use force has been used overtly as an instrument of policy, to ensure the North's political and economic survival in the midst of what it considers an increasingly challenging and even hostile strategic environment. For Pyongyang, the spectre of a nuclear arsenal has given real teeth to the North's economic and diplomatic efforts. This use of power, this way of approaching strategy, appears to be consistent with traditional Korean strategic culture, which as already noted, placed great emphasis on robust defence and active diplomacy. At the same time though, the acquisition of such powerful deterrent capabilities can be seen as providing a very real opportunity to change the course and pattern of Korean history, and by implication, North Korean strategic culture as well, by providing the state with the ability to indefinitely deter future invasions. While providing means for blackmail or tough-handed diplomacy, which is clearly dangerous, the nuclear capability might actually make it possible for less-militaristic tendencies to prevail. At the same time, however, it may also force other states, namely the US, to deal with it in a manner which places more overt emphasis on diplomatic and economic means, which could have the result of decreasing levels of insecurity and tension on the peninsula.

## **Conclusion**

The value of the strategic culture lies not in the concept itself but in what the concept is able to bring to bear in our efforts to develop well founded strategies. If, in spite of semantic vagaries, the concept of strategic culture succeeds in improving the resolution of the strategic dilemmas we face, and in the generation of better informed strategic policy, it is worth making the effort to take strategic culture into account. To do otherwise would be to risk

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<sup>52</sup> Cha and Kang, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Kang, p. 502.

<sup>54</sup> Cha and Kang, p. 23, and Kang, p. 501.

that one element that has been essential to strategy for millennia – knowledge of the enemy and the context in which strategy operates.

Looking at how the concept of strategic culture may illuminate particular aspects of the crisis on the Korean Peninsula has had the converse effect of highlighting aspects of the concept of strategic culture itself. One of the big questions is that of time. What sort of timeframe is necessary and relevant in the current crisis and how should we account for fluctuations in possible cultural preferences within a given time period, even if these fluctuations are to some degree predictable? More important perhaps, and more in keeping with the inclusive purposes of the concept itself, it is necessary to see any one period in its larger chronological context, while recognizing the potential for change. Crucial then, will be an understanding of not only underlying ideological and behavioural preferences, if they may be reasonably isolated, but a nuanced understanding of how shifts in the expression of strategic culture are articulated and, ultimately, influenced. Such understanding and utilization of hindsight may then be used to stimulate changes that are conducive to international security and the stability of relations with the state(s) or actor(s) in question. In this way, an appreciation of the relevant aspects of strategic culture, while being neither a predictive nor prescriptive tool, in our kit of strategic concepts, may assist in providing a guide for policy makers, especially when faced with strategic challenges that have clearly taken on a significant historical magnitude of their own. The crisis on the Korean peninsula clearly falls into this category. That said, actual decisions about how to engage an actor such as North Korea must and will always be made in real time, but a better understanding of the context in which the challenge is situated may open our eyes to new possibilities and new, and hopefully more desirable, courses of action.

Using strategic culture to look at the North Korean situation reinforces, among other things, the need to view the current crisis within a broader historical context. In a very real sense, the North/South division and American threats of pre-emptive strike are not new, except in the scale of destruction assured if either side steps over the 'trip-wire'. Moreover, the pattern of behaviour, in both its militaristic and diplomatic phases, should be seen as being more in keeping with traditional tendencies than not. Critically also, the current nuclear situation reinforces the need to consider how domestic economic and political factors may also influence the use of force, a fundamental consideration within Clausewitz's trinity. The concept of strategic culture is particularly well suited to accommodating such considerations, especially when these factors have traditionally limited the country's ability to rely heavily on the use of armed force over a long period. From this perspective, the acquisition of nuclear capabilities may, in the long-run, allow for a decline in the emphasis on massive conventional military capabilities which have proved so costly to the economy.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> ICG, p. 3.

What is suggested here is that a nuclear North Korea does not mean *sui generis* that it is more dangerous. Of course, if Pyongyang is treated as being more dangerous by the US and others, and if overt hostility is the result, military or otherwise, then it may indeed become so. However, if the nuclear capability is seen as an insurance policy, then, unless provoked, this capability may provide North Korea with that added degree of security self-reliance which has been so difficult to elicit from its traditional foes. This added degree of security should prompt all concerned to develop more creative initiatives that are designed to improve strategic relations in East Asia, rather than lead us down a path toward nuclear or conventional conflict on the peninsula, scenarios that most are keen to avoid. It is in this scenario that one can envisage the possibility, remote as it might seem now, of a reduced reliance on massed conventional forces along the DMZ, and of radically improved relations between North Korea and its East Asian neighbours.

We are a long way from seeing any fall-off in conventional capabilities. However, the signs are there that a more comprehensive engagement with North Korea is possible, especially once its security fears are taken into account. This is not to suggest that North Korea is the only one threatened here, clearly it is not. However, addressing Pyongyang's security fears will be fundamental to any real progress on the peninsula.<sup>56</sup> Of course, the Hawke reply is, in the words of the United States' Vice President Dick Cheney: 'We don't negotiate with evil, we defeat it'.<sup>57</sup> It is difficult to see, however, how the interests of any of the major players would be served by seeking to force the country into catastrophic failure, or by launching a sustained military operation against them unless it was a response to an invasion of South Korea or a missile attack against Japan. And as much as we prefer to ignore the fact, no one actually needs to like the leadership in Pyongyang. Throughout history there are innumerable examples of strategic goals being met through peaceful relations with sometimes unsavoury regimes. Ultimately all that really matters is that the relationship with the country serves the interests of those involved and it is to this end that taking the idea of strategic culture seriously may offer some genuine opportunities for policy.

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<sup>56</sup> Kang, p. 509.

<sup>57</sup> I Daalder, 'Only Real Negotiations Can Test North Korea', *American Progress*, 24 Feb. 2004, <http://www.americanprogress.org/site/pp.asp?c=biJRJ8OVF&b=34769>, viewed on 10 Oct. 2005.