

The End of the Kim Dynasty and the U.S.-North Korea Accord

By Kamiya Fuji

From the Japanese perspective, more than a few dubious points are included in the agreement reached last October between the United States and North Korea to curb the latter's nuclear program. Both the U.S. and North Korea seem happy with the timing and substance of the agreement, but the bilateral accord does contain a number of unconvincing areas. Yet the Japanese government expresses support and cooperation for the accord, a move I find totally incomprehensible.

Below, is an outline of the main doubts I harbor regarding the Washington-Pyongyang nuclear accord. The United States conducted important negotiations and concluded an important agreement with North Korea even though Pyongyang has failed to name a successor to the late supreme leader Kim Il Sung. Suppose Russian President Boris Yeltsin met with an untoward incident. Could the United States conclude an important agreement with Russia without his successor being named? If Washington is to follow diplomatic convention and the legitimate procedures required under international law, it should have completed the agreement, as a matter of course, only after Kim Il Sung's successor had formally taken office.

Two agreements had already been concluded between North Korea on the one hand and the United States and South Korea on the other through the good offices of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter just before Kim Il Sung's death.

One is an agreement between the two Koreas concerning the holding of the first summit meeting between their leaders. The other is related to resumption of the suspended negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea on nuclear issues.

As the posts of North Korean state president and Workers Party chief had been, abnormally, left vacant for a long time, South Korea had good reason to

postpone the summit and to watch the situation. On the contrary, the U.S. went so far as to sign an important agreement after resuming high-level negotiations instead of postponing them, which I think would have been the natural course for the U.S. to follow.

By the end of December 1994, Kim Il Sung had been dead for nearly half a year. It is undoubtedly unusual for an independent country to be left without a head of state for such a long time. On what legitimate basis does the U.S. regard such an important intergovernmental agreement concluded under such conditions?

Kim Jong Il had been considered the undisputed candidate to take over the two key posts in the aftermath of his father's death. The younger Kim's succession was a policy line adopted by Pyongyang more than 20 years ago and repeatedly trumpeted, domestically and globally. This scenario seemed to be almost unchallengeable.

For as many as 20 years I have contended that North Korean leaders must focus on Kim Jong Il's eventual succession because they themselves were not sure of that possibility. But Kim Il Sung's sudden death at first led me to believe that Kim Jr. would succeed his father as intended, though his regime would not be stable and not last long. Faced with such a grave emergency, the North Korean leadership had to show to the world the unity and solidarity of the country. Subsequent developments made it clear, however, that even this view was an overestimation of Kim Jong Il.

Still, a majority of would-be Japanese specialists on Korean issues believe in the indisputability of Kim Jong Il's succession. They are hardly likely to change their view that the process of succession from the dead "King" to the "Crown Prince" is on track. Seeing the posts of state president and party chief unfilled by Kim Jong Il even after Kim Il Sung's funeral, these "specialists" then repeated the plausible, but ground-

less, predictions that the succession would take place on August 15 (anniversary of the country's liberation from Japanese rule), September 9 (independence day), October 10 (anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party and the 100th day after Kim Il Sung's death when mourning ended), all rather too late even if it had materialized after the funeral. Even after their predictions proved incorrect, the "experts" refused to acknowledge the abnormality of the absence of a top leader of state and the party, contending that Kim Jong Il would emerge as top leader before an anxiously waiting people on the occasion of a Workers Party Central Committee and Supreme People's Congress session in December, thus showing that these specialists truly deserve their title.

I can speculate, in various ways, on rumors about Kim Jong Il's illness, a power struggle inside the Kim dynasty, or conflicts among leaders over policy. But I want to refrain from commenting on such rumors in this column. Instead, I will only elaborate on my view that North Korea has been far from stable and highly unusual since Kim Il Sung's passing.

Changing world order

The U.S. has closed its eyes concerning the current abnormality of the Pyongyang government since the senior Kim's death, and has concluded a nuclear agreement with the incapacitated country. I deem the U.S. attitude unconvincing. In deciding to conclude the nuclear accord with North Korea, how did the U.S. judge the present state of and future prospect of that country?

The U.S. did not hold full negotiations either with Japan or South Korea on the nuclear accord and acted almost unilaterally. Unilateralism has been a traditional vice of U.S. diplomacy, a country which has often dispensed with full prior negotiations with its allies or friendly countries on matters of com-

mon interest.

For the first 20 years after World War II, the U.S. practically reigned as the sole superpower of the world. The Soviet Union was deemed another superpower, but came nowhere near equaling the U.S., a situation clearly demonstrated at the time of the Cuban crisis of 1962. There was logic in U.S. unilateralism as long as the country maintained its almighty power.

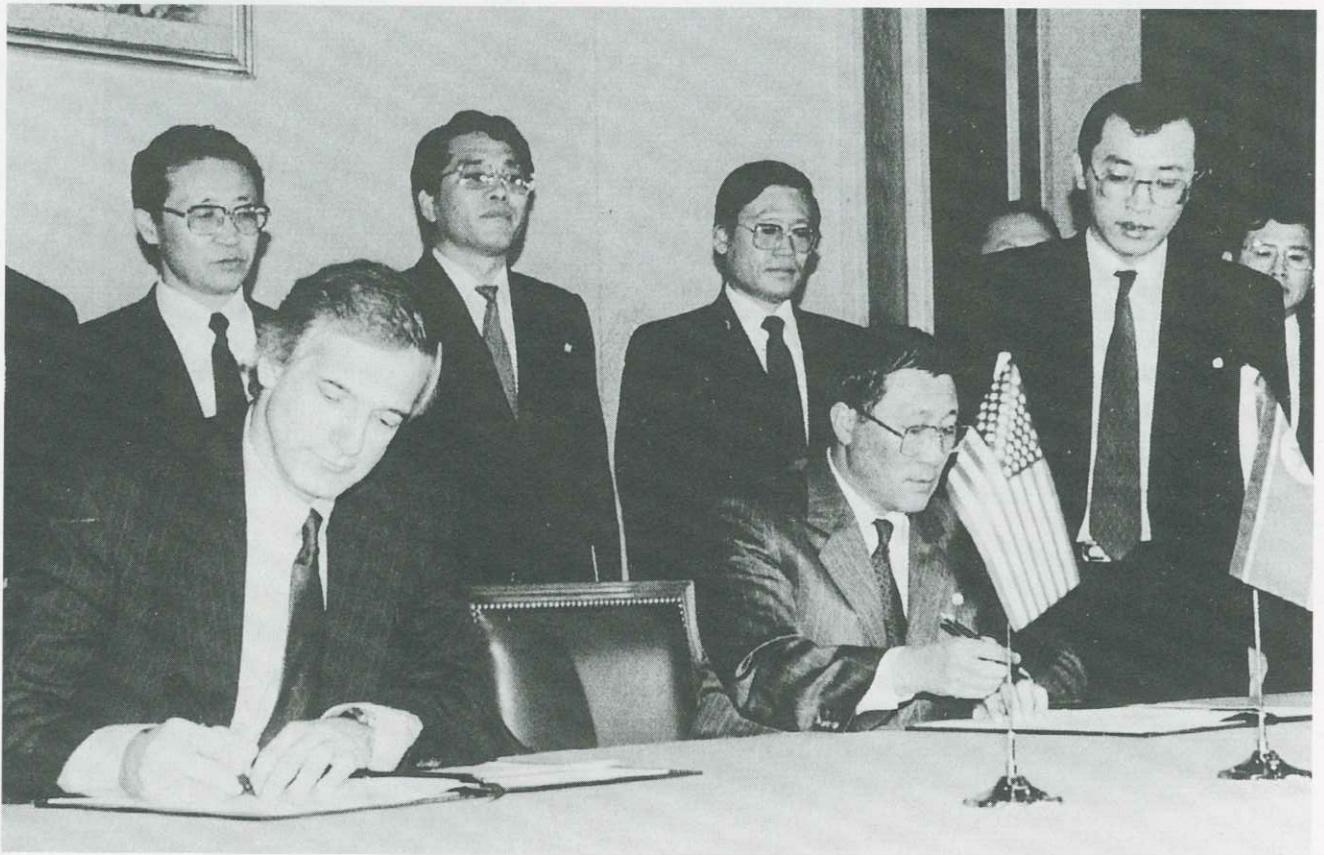
However, America has gradually lost its international clout. It could protect South Korea during the Korean War, in which it unilaterally intervened. The Vietnam War, another war the U.S. was unilaterally involved in, ended in failure, with the U.S. being unable to protect the South Vietnamese government. The U.S. once again demonstrated its overwhelming military might in the Gulf War. On this occasion, however,

the U.S. was cautious to avoid unilateral action throughout and resorted to military action only after the United Nations Security Council adopted a dozen resolutions supporting U.S. moves.

Today, the U.S. no longer possesses enough power to justify its unilateralness. Nevertheless, the U.S. practically disregarded Japan and South Korea in deciding to strike the nuclear deal with North Korea. Furthermore, the U.S., as I will explain in detail later, unilaterally promised North Korea to arrange for the replacement of North Korea's graphite-cooled nuclear reactors, which have the potential to produce nuclear weapons, with a more costly light-water reactor that is less suitable for producing such weapons. On top of this, the U.S. intends to organize an international consortium called the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO), in

which Japan and South Korea will play key roles. KEDO is to pay the \$4 billion to be required for the installation of the new reactor. I cannot help being astonished by such an egoistic attitude. But the Japanese and South Korean governments have expressed their readiness to cooperate with the project instead of taking exception to it as they should.

South Korean President Kim Youngsam justifiably voiced severe criticism of the U.S. move in an interview carried in the October 17 issue of *The New York Times* shortly after the nuclear accord was reached, but he did not go further than that. Criticism was hardly voiced by the Japanese government. I am in the dark about how the U.S. government persuaded the two governments, secretly, to endorse the U.S. action, a big question still left unanswered.



U.S. negotiator Robert Gallucci and North Korea's First Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sok-ju sign an agreement in Geneva designed to resolve nuclear issues and improve relations between the two countries.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

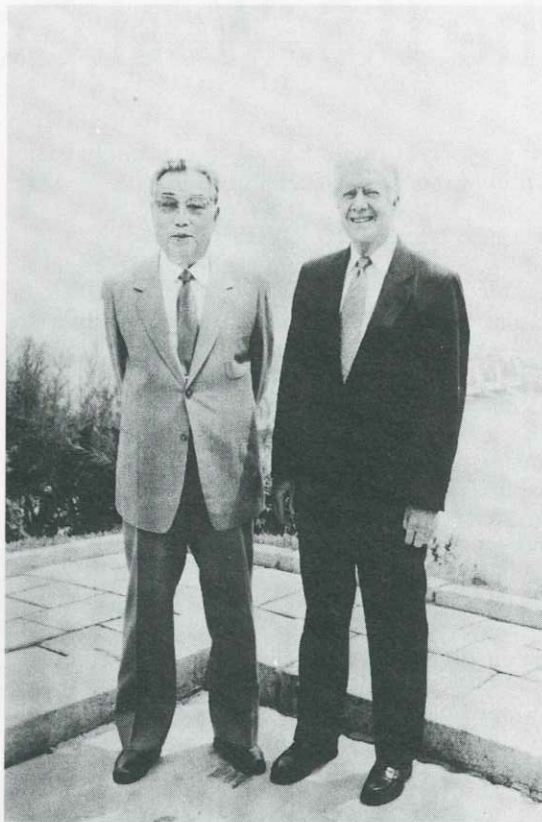
IAEA—Independent or cat's paw?

Another point I would like to raise is what give-and-take deal was struck between Washington and Pyongyang. It seems to me that the ultimate U.S. purpose, in essence, was to ensure the continuation of the current setup based on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), under which the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China are allowed to possess nuclear weapons. As a new post-Cold War world order is yet to emerge in a visible form, the U.S. desires to maintain its world leadership and, accordingly, considers continuation of the NPT nuclear monopoly as the most important basis for continued U.S. leadership in the world. Though the NPT setup is upheld by five countries, it amounts to a U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons. The U.S. apparently judged that it might as well give North Korea the maximum concession conceivable at the present time to ensure the NPT.

It seems as if the U.S. has won assurance from North Korea to remain a party to the NPT and to abandon nuclear development, but there is no assurance North Korea will do so. Even if North Korea fully implements the pledge, the process will be undertaken in stages over a long period of time, until 2003. This time frame means that the U.S. guarantees the existence of North Korea as a state over a 10-year period from 1994.

North Korea under Kim Il Sung's dictatorship was a unique country based on a closed national structure supporting a trinity of 1) the revolutionary dogma known as *juche*, 2) the Confucian tradition of subservience to paternalistic rule, and 3) the charisma of the "Great Leader Kim Il Sung." This state structure has been accumulating fatigue rapidly in recent years, suggesting that North Korea can hardly remain a stable country whether or not Kim Jong Il formally takes office as his father's successor.

In the now defunct Soviet Union, de-Stalinization followed the dictator's demise. Mao Zedong's death gave way to the liquidation of the legacy of Mao.



President Kim Il Sung's death immediately followed former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's trip to North Korea. High-level nuclear talks continue in the absence of a North Korean head of state.

Similarly, Kim Il Sung's death will inevitably trigger a movement in North Korea to discard the late dictator's policy line. Such a development is a historically proven law inherent in a long-standing dictatorship.

Even if Kim Jong Il manages to succeed his father on a seemingly stable basis, his days will be numbered. Judging from the fact that the transfer of power to Kim Jong Il is not proceeding as smoothly as originally intended despite 20 years of spadework, the ultimate fate of the Kim Dynasty could be more unstable than generally imagined. The North Korean economy has remained stagnant and confused for more than 20 years and has deteriorated to such an extent that even the late absolute dictator in December 1993 acknowledged the failure of his country's seven-year plan. The current state of North Korea can be likened to a

Photo: Kyodo News Service

country unable to enthrone the crown prince after the king's death. Giving such a politically and economically complicated country a grace period of 10 years for survival is dubious even if the U.S. considers the maintenance of the NPT setup as its absolute goal.

Throughout the entire period of the Cold War, the U.S. stuck a severe posture against the former Soviet Union. Therefore it is incomprehensible why the U.S. now has taken such an accommodating attitude toward North Korea, which it designated a "terrorist country" similar to Libya and Iran.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's attitude toward North Korea is also incomprehensible. The nuclear dispute originated from North Korea's repeated refusal to allow IAEA special inspection of two unreported nuclear facilities. As these facilities substantiate North Korea's nuclear achievements, Japan and South Korea must have viewed these reactors seriously.

As chief U.S. negotiator Robert Gallucci explained, the U.S. agreed that the IAEA would postpone its inspection for five years, until the light-water type reactor is introduced to North Korea. Even if the IAEA had decided that the excessive U.S. concession was unavoidable, the organization should have endorsed the accord only on the condition that the concession be preceded by completion of the inspection. The IAEA will not be able to retain its trust and authority if it just blindly follows U.S. policy.

Kamiya Fuji, is a professor at Toyo Eiwa Women's University, a member of the Science Council of Japan and a Distinguished Advisor to the Sakura Institute of Research.