The Mouse that Keeps Roaring: The United States, China, and Solving the North Korean Challenge

By Paul Carroll

Abstract—North Korea poses serious international security risks that have increased since it demonstrated a nuclear weapons capacity in 2006. Nations like China and South Korea have clear interests and vulnerabilities vis-à-vis North Korea, as does the United States; these relationships are based on historical and geopolitical factors that will endure. But each nation also has different priorities with respect to North Korea and the threats it poses. This leads to different policy approaches toward Pyongyang that preclude resolving the threats. Until common ground and more coordinated approaches can be agreed upon and implemented among China, the United States, and South Korea, there is little hope that achieving stability and a nuclear weapons-free North Korea will be realized.

Say what you will about North Korea. It’s “backwards,” impoverished, isolated, led by an enigmatic, secretive leader, or even that it is “the land of no smiles” where people live a life on the edge of survival. To varying degrees, these negative descriptions are true. It’s hard to escape the stark reality that a nation of some twenty-three million people with reasonably rich mineral and agricultural resources produces less than one-tenth the economic output measured in GDP than the state of Pennsylvania—roughly the same size but with half the population. It’s also easy to understand why media attention is paid to North Korea. In an increasingly interconnected world and a 24/7

Paul Carroll is the Program Director at the Ploughshares Fund where he directs Ploughshares’ grantmaking designed to reduce the risks from nuclear weapons worldwide. Carroll has traveled to North Korea on two separate nongovernmental delegations to discuss security issues with DPRK officials. He holds a Masters of Public Policy with a concentration in national security studies from the University of Maryland.
news cycle, Pyongyang has succeeded in keeping its twenty-three million people completely isolated from outside information, communication and interaction with people. Anachronisms like that make headlines.

North Korea’s country profile would typically relegate it to impotent and powerless failed state status. Instead, North Korea is on a very short list of the most pressing international security challenges. It captures the attention of global behemoths like China, fast-growing regional powers like the Republic of Korea (ROK, commonly know as South Korea), established economic powerhouses like Japan, and of course the United States, the sole-remaining superpower. Why is this? And what can we do to reduce the risks it presents? There are several reasons why the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), as North Korea is officially called, has significance seemingly out of proportion to its size and economic strength. This article will consider three of them—its history, its nuclear capability, and its geopolitics.

North Korea’s existence is a historical accident, but one that places it between two of the world’s dominant political and economic systems. On one border is China, on the other is South Korea and by extension the United States. China’s main security concern with North Korea is keeping it from utter collapse. The United States’ dominant concern is the North’s nuclear program and the potential it has to proliferate. Both are legitimate concerns and both must be resolved. The United States cannot accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, nor can China tolerate its abrupt demise. Neither country, however, has developed a consistent and effective strategy to successfully address these threats, nor have they sufficiently partnered toward a mutual solution.

Both the United States and China have been thoroughly engaged with North Korea, but the nature of that engagement has been flawed. For China, its default position has been to provide aid and political cover when most of the rest of the world is turning the screws in response to misbehavior. China ultimately provides enough food and other assistance to keep the regime in power and the state intact. But that is all it has done. The United States has also paid plenty of attention to the DPRK. But that attention has almost always been punitive: unilateral or UN-sponsored sanctions as a reaction to provocative actions taken by the North. Neither China’s propping up nor the United States’ beating down is sufficient to achieve the security aims each has with respect to Pyongyang. Both China and the United States must use a blend of carrots and sticks to entice and persuade North Korea to move in the directions required to ensure a stable, economically viable state whose security concerns do not require it to maintain a nuclear stockpile. This means that China must be more willing to support multilateral sanctions when warranted, and the United States must be more inclined to consider dialogue and bilateral initiatives with Pyongyang. Neither path is easy, and both countries face internal political constraints. Nonetheless, it is the only way to potentially silence the North Korean roar.

**Historical Hangovers**

The first reason that North Korea captivates the agendas of the United States and regional nations is history. China, South Korea, Japan and the United States continue to
be involved with Pyongyang because of ties forged more than sixty years ago during the Korean War (1950–1953). That brutal conflict saw more than two million killed and was emblematic of the Cold War “proxy” battles. It pitted North Korea and its Soviet and Chinese communist sponsors against South Korea and its American protector. The aftermath sealed in blood the divided status of North and South Korea leftover from World War II. Over the decades, Soviet and Chinese commitments to North Korea became solidified, if waxing and waning due to broader trends within both of those nations. Likewise, US commitments to the ROK were cemented in written agreements and with the presence of US soldiers.

Today, the divided nation exists with a heavily militarized stance and no final arbitration of the war. There is still only an Armistice Agreement, no final peace treaty. Meanwhile, the United States has firm security commitments, including nuclear extended deterrence, to Japan and South Korea that keep it engaged in the region—not to mention close to 30,000 active-duty US military forces on the ground in South Korea. President Obama’s March 2012 visit to the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on the margins of an international nuclear security summit hosted by Seoul underscores the historical legacy of US ties to the peninsula. The war ended in 1953; the president was born in 1961. Yet his presence in South Korea without a visible acknowledgement of the continued threat from the North would have been a political and diplomatic faux pas.

Economic ties are equally as strong. South Korea is the United States’ seventh largest trading partner, and the exchange between the two economies is nearly $90 billion annually. The United States and South Korea recently finalized a Free Trade Agreement that culminated years of negotiations, sometimes with tense moments over fairness issues, but ultimately signified that the US-ROK relationship is among the closest and most significant to Washington. China, meanwhile, has for better or worse tied itself to North Korea through the blood it shed during the war and since then through direct support to its military, economy, and leadership. While estimates vary on the total amount of food assistance and material support China provides to Pyongyang, all agree that China is by far the largest sponsor of the state. What was once purely aid has evolved in recent years into more of a commercial trade arrangement, as Beijing tries to transform North Korea into a market economy model. While the relationship with Beijing has changed over the years, and was particularly strained during the Great Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and again during the post-Soviet decade of the 1990s, China is nonetheless co-dependent with the North as it maintains ties that ensure that its small neighbor state survives. This co-dependency, however, should not be mistaken for equality: China’s actions and behavior vis-à-vis North Korea are not based on sentimental notions of communist allegiance or moralistic grounds, but represent a purely realpolitik approach. Beijing undertakes actions and policies toward the North that further its own interests, pure and simple. China lost many lives during the Korean War in order to keep the United States and the South away from its border. It continues to desire and defend that buffer. However imbalanced the relationship may be, it is not one that China can walk away from for somewhat parallel reasons to the United States relationship with South Korea—a historical legacy that has evolved over the decades but remains a core security priority.
The Bomb

The second reason the United States pays attention to North Korea is, of course, because it has nuclear weapons. In late May 2006, the world was alerted to the fact that North Korea had conducted what appeared to be an underground nuclear test. While the explosion was considered a dud — or more accurately a “fizzle” — by informed observers, it nonetheless conferred on the DPRK the status of a de facto nuclear weapons state.

There are three main reasons this is threatening to international security. The first is the risk of a regional war “going nuclear.” The two Koreas already have a tense standoff that is militarized and subject to accident and miscalculation. The chances that an inadvertent skirmish escalates into a broader war now mean the very real prospect of the use of nuclear weapons. The second is that a nuclear North invites neighboring countries to reconsider their nuclear abstinence. What will continue to keep South Korea and Japan from developing their own arsenal? For now, it is US security and nuclear guarantees, but voices in Seoul and Tokyo sporadically call for more independence in security policy. Nuclear weapons could be seen to achieve that. Finally, the risks from nuclear proliferation and terrorism are now increased. Pyongyang has a track record of illegal activities from counterfeiting to drug smuggling to transfer of missile and even nuclear know-how — almost anything for hard currency. Now, with two nuclear tests under its belt and a small and perhaps growing stockpile of nuclear material, it presents a much greater risk to the world because it has something to sell, and because of whom it may sell to.

North Korea’s admission into the nuclear club can be seen as an unfortunate failure of diplomacy. For decades prior to the test, North Korea had been constrained, persuaded, coerced and sometimes bargained with to confine any nuclear activity to purely civilian purposes — or at least not cross thresholds toward weapons. It was a non-nuclear weapons state party to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), signing on in 1985. Most recently, it had suspended plutonium reprocessing, the way to get bomb-usable material out of spent nuclear fuel rods, as part of a multi-party Agreed Framework that had lasted eight years. The Framework was negotiated at a time when there were clear and recognized “red lines” around the DPRK’s nuclear activities, and they were nearly crossed. The United States got very close to going to war in 1994 over the North’s moves toward extracting bomb-usable material from its existing nuclear reactor. It would have been a preventive war of nonproliferation akin to the invasion of Iraq nine years later. Instead, a negotiated settlement was arrived at that effectively limited North Korea’s activities and prevented a nuclear weapons capability for as long as the agreement’s terms were being met.

In the wake of 9/11, however, President Bush moved away from the bargain with Pyongyang — never popular with conservatives to begin with — and declared North Korea part of the “Axis of Evil” in his 2002 State of the Union address. It did not take long for Kim Jong Il to respond. Soon after US accusations of a secret uranium enrichment program in late 2002, the DPRK announced it was leaving the NPT. No
other nation had ever done so. Watching the US invasion of Iraq in early 2003 in order to prevent a nuclear weapons program under Saddam Hussein clearly demonstrated to Pyongyang that it could choose between Baghdad’s fate, or avoid it by acquiring the bomb. North Korea had enough spent nuclear fuel sitting at its facilities at Yongbyon to extract several bomb’s worth of plutonium. So it did just that. Barely three years later, Pyongyang joined the nuclear club, reversing decades of halting but nonetheless effective efforts to limit its nuclear status. A second test followed in 2009, only months after the inauguration of President Obama, who had made a point during his campaign of the benefits of reaching out to adversaries like North Korea and Iran. Almost as a pointed response, North Korea’s test made clear it was solidifying its nuclear status, not offering it up for abandonment.

North Korea’s nuclear tests quickly elevated its rank among US national security concerns. What had been an already tense situation simply from a conventional war perspective – either by intent or accident – had quickly become among the most pressing US national security challenges. The three risks described above – regional war, more state proliferation, and nuclear terrorism – were now real, not just theoretical. China also took notice. Now its chief worry, the collapse of North Korea, developed a “loose nukes” dimension, amplifying the threat. How could China or the world manage a collapsed state with unknown amounts and locations of nuclear materials? North Korea became the Northeast Asian version of Pakistan.

Since 2006, and especially after the second test in 2009, the nuclear weapons element of the North Korean dynamic has come to define the security concerns for the United States. It has, in fact, eclipsed every other element of the dynamic.

**The Real Estate Factor: Location, Location, Location.**

North Korea shares a nearly 870 mile long border with China, and provides a buffer between it and South Korea. This wedge position has put North Korea at the center of the action in the region throughout the Cold War and beyond. It separates China from South Korea, a close ally to the United States and a model of democratic and economic freedoms that poses a moral if not practical challenge to China. It also lies close to Japan, another close ally of the United States – close enough, in fact, that the North notoriously engaged in abductions of Japanese citizens who it imprisoned and reportedly used to help train its intelligence operatives in one of the more bizarre episodes of North Korean behavior.

We have already discussed the central focus on the nuclear program that the United States has maintained since North Korea became a *de facto* nuclear weapons state. It is critical to also understand the Chinese view of the threat posed by North Korea, and the differences China has with the United States, and by extension South Korea and Japan.

Is China concerned about Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons? The answer is yes, but the concern about the nuclear issue is secondary to China’s main focus on state failure. A coup or leadership struggle that expands into internal conflict, or a popular rebellion that leads to regime change, will inevitably send large numbers of refugees across the border into China. Also, the post-collapse scenario could mean that South Korea fills
the void. As mentioned, China fought hard to keep a buffer between it, South Korea, and the United States. It is loath to give that up today. North Korea’s nuclear weapons status adds to the threat posed by state collapse: the issue of loose nukes or weapons falling into the hands of those who would use them increases the stakes for China in this regard.

So what can we do about it?

Let’s review. Washington’s nightmare is a fully-capable nuclear North, particularly one that sells or transfers capability to others. Beijing’s greatest heartburn is a failed state on its border, particularly one that could leave a vacuum South Korea fills.

Solving “the security challenge” posed by North Korea, then, limits the range of responses that one considers. We need to ask how we can cooperatively solve the security challenges posed by North Korea. What can be done to enhance its stability and growth as a nation so that collapse becomes less likely? What can be done to genuinely make progress in freezing and eventually eliminating its nuclear weapons program? And ultimately, what can be done to bring Pyongyang into the community of nations that walks the talk on democratic institutions, transparency, free markets, and human rights?

The answer lies in moving the United States and Chinese approaches to North Korea toward a blend of both sticks and carrots, avoiding the Chinese default to throw a lifeline to prevent collapse and changing the US reflex to either punish or ignore. Each country needs to adopt some of the other’s approach, and apply this blend consistently. This requires that Beijing and Washington acknowledge the other’s legitimate security priorities and find common ground between them.

Addressing China’s Concern

Resolving China’s main concern vis-à-vis North Korea means helping the North evolve into a more self-reliant, economically stable nation that at the same time doesn’t too quickly or too radically become a challenge to China’s way of doing business. What Beijing doesn’t want is another South Korea right on its border or worse, a unified Korea that becomes a South Korea on steroids. But it also would benefit from a neighbor that doesn’t demand constant care and feeding and that puts Beijing in the awkward spot of defending or ignoring its provocations. How can North Korea be helped through a similar kind of reform as China? The goal should be an economically dynamic country with a growing middle class that is invested in more open markets and more political freedom, while maintaining a government and military authority that, at the end of the day, is still in control.

Recent evidence seems to indicate that China may be working to achieve just this. An article in the online journal 38North.org provides an excellent summary of what appears to be a sincere and well-thought out buildup of economic activity between China and North Korea. The article concludes that the activity indicates “a strategic decision (by China) about strengthening its bilateral relationship with the North and pushing Pyongyang towards market mechanisms.” Caution is warranted, of course.
There is a long track record of joint initiatives between North Korea and other nations that sought economic growth or development that failed to stick. The Kim family dynasty is, after all, extremely allergic to even marginal changes or hints at freedoms for its people. Nonetheless, China’s role as the North’s main benefactor and protector means the chances of such efforts succeeding are greater than those from other nations. And Beijing has the greatest stake in having them succeed.

The United States can assist in this regard. While directly supporting the DPRK’s economic reforms or market experiments is not feasible, US support for China’s policies can improve the chances for success. If American diplomats and policy were to clearly recognize China’s stake in North Korea, and indicate US understanding of and support for its influence there, it could go a long way toward moving Pyongyang toward modest economic reforms. This would at once reduce its dependence on China for a lifeline and build trust and confidence between Beijing and Washington on common goals.

The United States and the Nuclear Fixation

Since 2006, the US fixation vis-à-vis North Korea has been its nuclear weapons. What had been a serious security challenge stemming from the heavily militarized face-off along the DMZ and the risk of inadvertent war transformed into an obsession with a rogue nuclear state that could not be counted on for restraint or playing by the traditional nuclear club rules. United States policy toward North Korea—never really strategic or consistent to begin with—became even more crisis management in nature.

For the past six years, Washington has viewed the North Korean threat almost solely through the nuclear lens. This has neglected the broader array of issues that Pyongyang claims are in play: a peace process that formally resolves the end of the war; somehow resolving their view of a “US hostile policy;” and providing some avenues for moving out from under sanctions. Granted, sometimes Pyongyang lists grievances that are canards, but these core issues are legitimate and Pyongyang’s perceived security threats are what they act upon.

Since 2006—and in fact before that—it has not proven effective to respond to Pyongyang purely on the nuclear weapons issue. This has manifested itself in an action-reaction cycle that has been almost exclusively a provocation-punishment cycle, with occasional forays into deals that break down at the first encounter with dispute. A broader approach must be taken that includes but is not exclusive to the nuclear topic, incorporating a more consistent coordination with China and our allies in the region.

Dr. Siegfried Hecker of Stanford University has laid out what he believes the chief US goals regarding North Korea’s nuclear program should be—at least for the near term. In an article he published soon after the North showed him a fully built and seemingly operational uranium enrichment facility at the Yongbyon nuclear complex in late 2010, Hecker declared that the United States should seek “three no’s” in return for “one yes:” “No more bombs, no better bombs (which means no nuclear testing), and no export, in return for one yes—United States willingness to seriously address Pyongyang’s fundamental security concerns.” This formula makes good sense for the
near term. We need to find a way to freeze the North Korean nuclear capacity first so that we can make progress on broader security issues in the longer term. But US policy makers must not forget that an ultimate goal is a fourth “no”—no nuclear weapons capability for North Korea. Fixing solely on the nuclear issue is misguided and limits successful engagement, but we also must not lose sight that it is a central challenge that must be resolved.

Right now we cannot be sure that any of the “three no’s” is in force. In fact, quite the opposite is true. North Korea recently announced its intent to launch a satellite atop a large rocket, reneging on a deal in which it stated it would not do so. Despite some minor technical differences between a satellite launch and a missile-as-weapon, the knowledge gained from the planned launch applies to weapons know-how. There is also reason to believe that Pyongyang has more uranium enrichment facilities and that they may be running apace; Hecker in fact is increasingly convinced there must be others. Finally, there is little chance that illicit trade or sale of nuclear-relevant material or expertise would be completely detected let alone stopped by international rules and regimes. One need only be reminded of the nearly complete nuclear reactor in Syria destroyed by Israeli jets in 2007—built with the assistance of the DPRK—to realize that the North is willing to sell its nuclear knowledge and how easily it can get away with it.8

A New Kind of Engagement

As complex and multi-faceted as the North Korean challenge is, there is one common element to addressing it: engagement. Woody Allen provides some useful advice to the international security community on this point: if “ninety percent of life is showing up,” then it stands to reason that the lion’s share of making progress with North Korea is consistent presence. This means not only consistent interaction with China and Russia to coordinate on our divergent priorities, but also South Korea and Japan to present a united front to Pyongyang. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it means staying engaged with the DPRK even though we know there will be times—many times—when doing so is difficult at the least and barely tolerable at the worst. But simply being “engaged” is not enough. One could argue that both China and the United States—the key protagonists in the story—have been engaged quite heavily over the years. It is the nature of the engagement that must also change. The United States must broaden its diplomatic toolbox to include a blend of sticks and carrots, to apply pressure and punishment when warranted, but always offer an escape hatch as well. China, conversely, must evolve its response to include a willingness to apply negative pressure in addition to its rescue missions.

Waiting for the North Korean regime to collapse under the stress of United States and United Nations sanctions is not a wise policy.
China’s fundamental motivation is to prevent exactly that outcome. Those calling for tightening the screws to accelerate the process conveniently forget that similar calls were made to pressure China’s Mao Zedong in the 1960s, claiming that his demise was imminent. Mao lasted more than a decade after some had already written his political obituary. North Korea’s current leader, Kim Jong Un, is not yet thirty. If there is one thing all observers can agree on it is that the Kim family regime and its inner circle in Pyongyang has survival as its core motivation. Sanctions alone – no matter how severe – will not end their dynasty.

Those calling simply for engagement suffer the critique of being naïve and Pollyannaish, ignoring the intransigence and duplicity that the North has shown with nuclear tests, missile launches, counterfeiting operations, abductions, and similarly unacceptable behavior. Pyongyang has indeed done all these things. But there is far more promise for eventual change by engaging and negotiating with Pyongyang – and Beijing – than not. In fact, in testimony before Congress last year, Victor Cha, a former George W. Bush administration official with responsibility for North Korea policy, cited analysis he conducted that showed that since 1984 and extending through 2011, “Never once in the entire 27 year period was there a period in which the DPRK (engaged in provocative behavior) in the midst of negotiations involving the U.S.” His point was clear: although not perfect, the historical record shows that while the governments are interacting and negotiating, it calms the environment and helps prevent crises. During these relative periods of calm is when progress can be made on implementing concrete and comprehensive arrangements. The Agreed Framework, negotiated in 1994 at a time when tensions on the peninsula were high and the United States and North Korea were at the brink of war, is a clear example of how effective and durable negotiated settlements can be. Out of the crucible of brinksmanship the two governments negotiated and brokered a compromise that suspended North Korea’s nuclear weapons work in exchange for a package of aid that included nuclear power technology and assistance. In place through 2003, it effectively halted North Korea’s nuclear reactor operations and its spent fuel reprocessing – key pieces of a nuclear weapons program. Only after the Framework was de facto ended in late 2002, when the Bush Administration made clear it was not interested in continuing with the deal, did Pyongyang ramp up its nuclear bomb program again and, barely three and a half years later, detonate a nuclear bomb.

There is another compelling reason to stay engaged with North Korea even though it is often unpalatable to do so: the leadership transition. Since its birth, North Korea has only really known two leaders. Its founder, Kim Il Sung, ruled from 1948 until his death in 1994, and his son, Kim Jong Il, took over until his death in December 2011. As secretive and isolated as the DPRK was over those sixty-three years, we did at least enjoy a relative stability with respect to leadership and policies. There were provocations and bad surprises to be sure, but even though we knew little about the decision-making process inside the country, we did know who was in charge and what their fundamental motivations were. First and foremost was survival of the regime. Today, we are barely nine months into the third generation of the Kim dynasty with young Kim Jong Un. We had essentially no official interaction with Pyongyang since the beginning of 2009, and only began re-engaging late in 2011, on the eve of Kim
Unless and until the United States makes a commitment to sustained, patient, and long-term engagement with North Korea, we condemn ourselves to the patterns of the past. Jong Il’s death. Not only are we playing catch-up with several years of lost time in dialogue, but we are faced with a leadership transition that is completely opaque. There has been no lack of speculation by North Korea watchers about what official statement signals what, and whether the military is calling the shots or if there is division rather than cohesion among the top leaders. But at the end of the day it is just that, speculation. Unless and until the United States makes a commitment to sustained, patient, and long-term engagement with North Korea, we condemn ourselves to the patterns of the past: the peaks and valleys of hopeful agreements dashed by provocations that result in a cycle of tit-for-tat. The problem is, as Victor Cha also pointed out in his testimony, “... even a hawk must acknowledge that a long-term policy of sanctions and military exercises in the end may lead to war before they lead to a collapse of the regime (particularly if China continues to backstop Kim with food, hard currency, and energy).”

In other words, a diplomatic toolbox full of sticks and few or no carrots, and used only sporadically rather than constantly, runs a greater risk of a war on the peninsula. This outcome is the worst of all worlds, no matter if viewed from Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo or Washington. This is not to say that the United States, China, or our negotiating partners need acquiesce to whatever behavior the North exhibits. Penalties are a legitimate and necessary part of the mix. But episodes of misbehavior cause months or years-long gaps in dialogue. Those gaps allow the North to increase the trouble it can cause, creating a more difficult spiral from which to recover.

Conclusion

North Korea will continue to fight above its weight class with respect to the attention it gets from the United States and China. This is for understandable reasons of historical inertia, current alliances and commitments, and nuclear risks. It will also continue to confound resolution as long as Beijing and Washington fail to meet one another halfway and recognize the distinctions between their respective priorities. While both nations have rhetorically validated the other with respect to Pyongyang, diplomatically and in practice there has been little to provide optimism that they will work together to craft mutually satisfying approaches. But this is exactly what is needed.

Unless both China and the United States establish and pursue an engagement strategy that includes a blend of coercion and enticement, we will be stuck with the status quo: a nuclear hot spot free to operate between an immovable object and an irresistible force. Washington can figure ways to provide support to, or at least not impede, China’s efforts to evolve the North Korean economy into a more sustainable one. For its part, China can be more amenable to joint calls for penalties when warranted, and validate American and other regional states’ concerns over the nuclear issue.
Engagement is also required between Washington and Pyongyang but it must be elevated and pursued much more consistently and strategically. The blend of sticks and carrots is one prerequisite. Another is a broader arena of issues on which to relate. Though politically challenging, the long-range goal of addressing North Korea’s security concerns—the disease that caused the nuclear symptom—means establishing and maintaining a variety of channels of communication and negotiation. These can include continued cooperation on sporadic operations to recover US servicemen’s remains, a more permissive US visa policy that allows for North Koreans to travel here more readily, cooperative projects on matters like education, agriculture, and yes, even nuclear safety and space exploration. US diplomacy has to be patient, creative, and holistic. Pauses when provocations happen must be minimal. With this approach, we not only gather more understanding of Pyongyang, but build more trust and confidence. As these dynamics improve so, too, do the chances for successful agreements and the beginning of transforming the relationship. That transformation is fundamentally what is required before we can achieve an end to the nuclear program.

North Korea is a mouse that keeps the Chinese and American elephants scampering. But we have the tools to build a better mousetrap. It won’t be easy, but failing to do so may lead to a Second Korean War—this time with a nuclear roar.

– Judith Heistin Sabbaserved as Lead Editor for this article.

NOTES

2 Comparisons were derived using data from the CIA World Factbook, that puts North Korea’s annual economic output at roughly $40 billion; and data from the website Econpost.com showing recent GDP for Pennsylvania at roughly $440 billion.
3 See Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, The U.S.-South Korea Alliance, Jayshree Bajoria and Youkyung Lee; October 13, 2011
5 http://38north.org/2012/02/hgp021712/; “China’s Embrace of North Korea: The Curious Case of the Hwanggumumpyong Island Economic Zone.”
7 Scientist: North Korea likely has more nuclear facilities. By Paula Hancocks, CNN; updated 11:25 PM EDT, Thu March 22, 2012
8 The intelligence community concluded that the facility bombed by Israel in 2007 was in fact a nearly complete nuclear reactor that had been aided and abetted by North Korea. See Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Background Briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on Syria’s Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea’s Involvement, April 24, 2008, http://www.dni.gov/interviews/20080424_interview.pdf.
9 Testimony of Dr. Victor D. Cha, Professor of Georgetown University and Senior Adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 10, 2011, Before the United States House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, p. 5.
10 Ibid., p. 5.