Foreword

Paul Bracken

Framing a problem is half the battle. If you frame a problem correctly you can still get a wrong answer in your ultimate policy choice. But at least you'll be in the right ballpark. This distinction between problem framing and getting the right answer is overlooked in American security discourse and policy analysis. Strong forces push in the direction of "skip all of this problem framing stuff—just give me the answer."

For dealing with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear weapons, this tendency is expressed by jumping to a small set of answers at the outset. The problem is clear enough: North Korea is developing nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. Problem framing is skipped, with an unreflective leap to the answers. In this instance, there are essentially three answers: sanction Pyongyang economically until they give up their bombs. The second answer: get China to pressure them to give up the bomb. Third answer: get the United Nations to harshly sanction North Korea. Here, multilateral diplomacy gives cover to China and others to go along with the sanctions. Since they are multilateral and approved by the UN, they seem to be in the interest of mankind, good for global nuclear nonproliferation and arms control, and finally, they have the right spirit of cooperation. Thus, China won't feel it's unduly pressured by Washington. Rather, by going along with UN sanction against North Korea, China is strengthening the international community of nations opposed to nuclear war.

These three answers have two things in common. They describe a problem and jump to its solution. There is no consideration of alternative ways to frame the problem, or even to acknowledge that different frames have seriously different policy implications. What they also have in common is that all of them have been tried for many years. And none have worked. On the contrary, North Korea has accelerated its bomb program and built missiles and other delivery systems to land them on the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The North's hyperbolic rhetoric in response to all three "answers" further suggests that a policy change in Pyongyang isn't likely any time soon.

Repeatedly cycling over these three solutions to the North Korean nuclear problem masks a fundamental question. Is reversing North Korea's nuclear weapons effort the real problem in the first place? Is it what we should be focusing on? Maybe there's another issue or problem that we don't see for a number of reasons. It's difficult to reframe a problem in a fundamental way because problem frames are quite "sticky." Once you get in one, it's hard to get out. Thus, to those who advance the answer that Washington needs to pressure Beijing to crack down on North Korea the further escalation to break trade with China is clear enough. It stays "in the frame" so to speak, only requiring a double down effort to implement it.

This tendency to stay in the frame ("embargo China's exports to the United States until they're forced to crack down on Pyongyang") is why the American policy debate around North Korea is so tedious. Sticky frames lead to a "same old, same old" effect that is deadening, whether it's getting China to crack down on North Korea, or another round of pointless UN sanctions. The whole exercise is repetitive. And ineffective.

So a good question is how to break out of this bad, repetitive movie. This report offers a way. While it's hard for Americans to break out of the cycle, it's easy if we take a different perspective, a different framework. Taking a Russian view does this, automatically. Because whatever one can say about Russian views on anything these days, we can say this. They are different—and more, they are calculated, unsentimental, and politically incorrect. Each of these is a useful tonic to American strategic thinking of recent years.

The great value of this report is that it reframes the North Korea issue away from *answer finding* to *problem framing*. It does this by looking at the North Korean nuclear issue from a **Russian** viewpoint. This inevitably brings out different features of the problem, ones that are usually unrecognized in the standard American formulation. The key innovation here is that by breaking away from the traditional American view of the North Korean nuclear problem, different issues and problems surface. This report is an exercise in pattern breaking because you can't look at North Korea through Russian eyes and not discover a lot of new things that are missed by American-based answers. This breakthrough by itself makes an important contribution to the policy analysis around the North Korean nuclear issue.

This is a major accomplishment, and the report should be considered in such terms. It doesn't come up with answers that would disarm North Korea. Does anyone still believe such answers are out there? Probably not.

Looking at things through Russian eyes makes a large contribution that's rare and useful. It raises the level of discussion about an exceedingly important challenge to world order that isn't going to go away. Each chapter in this report converges to this conclusion: that the most plausible outcome is that nothing is likely to work in the short term. Therefore, North Korea will become a nuclear weapon state. Even as this is against some—or all—of the national interests of the major powers, it's the most likely outcome of current and historical trends.

This report is important because it looks at North Korea in this context. I think this is a real achievement because we better start thinking about a changed security structure in Asia. It's refreshing to read a different "take" on North Korea other than the American one.

This project raises the level of discussion on what everyone agrees is a complex subject. It's complex, as authors emphasize, because there are so many actors. This is very different from the Cold War. There were multiple actors then but, broadly speaking, there was a simplification: consider what Washington and Moscow say and ignore the others. All of the chapters in this report make clear than we can no longer do this. Moscow, Washington, Beijing, Seoul, Pyongyang, and Tokyo all matter.

Artyom Lukin and Georgy Toloraya illustrate this point in their geopolitical analysis of North Korea's nuclear effort. They focus attention on what I believe are the key issues behind American concern over North Korea getting the bomb, but they're issues that rarely surface in the American debate. The most likely outcome of a North Korean nuclear weapon effort isn't an attack on South Korea. Rather, it's a political development, such as the large scale rearmament of Japan, and, closely related, a new arms race in Northeast Asia. They point out that both of these would undercut Russia's interests since both would impact Moscow's own nuclear deterrent.

This insight seems quite plausible and raises the question of why it almost never comes up in the United States. North Korea as a nuclear weapon state would undermine U.S. interests for the same reasons. Washington doesn't want a more independent Japan or a new arms race in Asia. The United States has been in a good position in Asia since the end of the Cold War. China and Japan are historic rivals. One consequence is that American leadership has separated the two giants. As an outsider, Washington keeps the two from returning to historical antipathies. That has been good for all parties, except the North Korea regime.

Taking a Russian perspective then, as this report does, highlights how North Korea as a nuclear weapon state changes the fundamental structure of power in Asia. Their nuclear weapons program reflects larger power changes. Also, the uniqueness of Japan takes on a clarity it lacks when Tokyo is seen as an American ally that must be defended. In the Russian view, Japan is a superstate, but not a superpower. That is, Japan has the economic and technology base of power, but as yet, it hasn't taken the steps to be a superpower, one that translates this base into strategic power. It's the only country in the world like this. The interesting question raised in several chapters is whether or not this will continue. In the United States, it is assumed that it can and should continue and that the way to make sure it does is for the United States to get stronger in the region. The Russian view is to describe that this is a more complicated subject and to underscore that the last thing Moscow wants is both a rising China and a rearming Japan. Yet, as this report points out, both could develop out of a nuclear North Korea.

A Russian reframing of the North Korea nuclear problem further opens up a wide group of issues. Consider deterrence. Most American academic works on North Korea debate the eternal verities of the field: "Can North Korea be deterred, as the United States deterred the Soviet Union in the Cold War?" And a closely related verity: "Is Kim rational?" The conclusion will be that he is rational, and therefore, deterrable.

These are important questions, and they need to be asked. But here again, this report reframes the basic questions and points in a different direction. For it asks: "How does deterrence operate when the goal isn't to deter a nuclear or conventional attack, but rather to preserve, repair, or compensate for changes in a structural order that's undergoing basic change?" This is a very different question than deterrence theory poses. But if this report is an intellectual guide, and I think that it is, it's a more thought-provoking question that almost no one poses. I don't think it could ever come out of American strategic thinking, which is in an iron cage of nuclear nonproliferation and deterrence theory. But this shows the power of reframing a problem. From a Russian viewpoint, it is clear in all of the chapters that this structural issue, of how the United States can preserve a particular order in Asia, is the really interesting question.

So, here again, is the structural issue. The North Korean nuclear effort has brought about a new negotiating structure. Anyone who thinks this is a one-off forum that will be tossed aside after North Korea disarms should read this report because North Korea isn't likely to disarm. More, this new structure, with China and Russia in one camp, and the United States, Japan, Australia, and India in the other, is taking on a life of its own. Its very existence changes the geopolitical power order in Asia.

This report doesn't give "answers" as to what exactly we should do about North Korea. I would not want to brief it in the Pentagon where the audience would demand to know what can be done to get Pyongyang to give up their nuclear weapon program. But in another way, the report does give an answer. It says that North Korea isn't going to give up this program. And it says that this will lead to many geopolitical structural changes in Asia, most of which are not in the interest of Russia or the United States. Even more, it points to new largely unanalyzed issues, like how nuclear weapons function in this structural, rather than narrow deterrence, context. The report reframes how we think about North Korea and the long-term impacts of its nuclear weapons. This is quite a lot for a single report.

About the Author

Paul Bracken *is an FPRI Senior Fellow and a member of its Board of Advisors as well a Professor of Management and Political Science at Yale University. He is author of* The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces *(Yale University Press, 1983);* Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age *(HarperCollins, 1999); and* The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics *(Times Books, 2012). He is currently working on a book on stability in the second nuclear age.*