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## RESEARCH REPORTS

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### **"Asian Flashpoint: Security and the Korean Peninsula."**

Dept. of International Relations, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National Univ., Canberra ACT 0200 Australia. 188 pp. \$24.95

Editor: *Andrew Mack*

**I**s North Korea's apparent determination to develop nuclear weapons just a ploy to extract maximum U.S. concessions? Some analysts in government and the press have seemed to assume so. But as Kim Il Sung's regime keeps refusing to play its "nuclear card," despite the ready availability of U.S. concessions, observes Andrew Mack, a political scientist at Australian National University, in Canberra, it becomes more likely that Pyongyang views nuclear weapons "as a vital strategic asset that must be maintained at almost any cost." That would be very bad news indeed for the rest of the world.

No longer protected by the Soviet Union, North Korea has good reasons to want nuclear weapons, Mack points out in this collection of essays by a dozen scholars of various nationalities. They would serve Kim's regime as a deterrent to the threat implicit in the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" over South Korea, and also against South Korea's smaller but overwhelmingly superior conventional military.

North Korea today is "the most militarized, brutal, and undemocratic country in the world," observes Yale University's Paul Bracken, but the quality of its armed forces is low. They are badly trained, the command-and-control system is "primitive," and com-

manders lack good intelligence on the South. Kim's regime no longer seems to be thinking of trying to reunify the Korean peninsula, Bracken and others say; instead, it is worried about its own survival.

A nuclear North Korea not only would set back efforts to control nuclear proliferation, says Satoshi Morimoto, of Tokyo's Nomura Research Institute, but would pose a threat to Japan and other Asian countries. Even more worrisome, notes Mack, is the prospect that North Korea would sell weapons-grade plutonium, technology, or even nuclear arms themselves to the likes of Iraq, Libya, and Iran.

**N**orth Korea has been on the economic ropes since the demise of the Soviet Union, its principal trading partner. Its economy shrank in 1993 for the fourth year in a row, and its gross national product now is less than one-tenth that of South Korea (whose population of 46 million is twice North Korea's). Industrial production has dropped by as much as 40 percent, and food shortages have been reported. The population has been urged to get by on two meals a day.

The communist regime's demise would solve the nuclear problem. But its sudden collapse would be a problem for Seoul. Unification, observes Kyongsoo Lho, of the

Korean Institute of International Studies, "will entail enormous challenges even if it comes gradually."

Were North Korea to give up its nuclear-weapons program, Mack notes, trade, aid, and investment would flow its way. But what seems like an attractive prospect to outsiders may look like a danger to "Great Leader" Kim, now 82, and his son and heir apparent, "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il. As North Koreans in a more open economy learned about life in South Korea, "they would discover that they had been systematically lied to for decades," Mack says. In addition, reversing the North's economic decline would require a shift in economic—and eventually, political—power away from the state.

But if inducements are unlikely to work, neither are international economic sanctions, Mack says. Ordinary folk, not the regime, would bear their cost. And a military strike against Kim's nuclear facilities might not only fail, but might start a new Korean war.

Since the chances of keeping Korea nuclear-free seem slim, Mack suggests that the United States and South Korea try a desperate gambit: make unilateral concessions to Pyongyang in hopes of provoking a response. The concessions could be taken back, he points out, if no progress results.

## Youth Suicide Rates, 1950–90 (Per 100,000 persons)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
<b>Age 15-19</b>	2.7	3.6	5.9	8.5	11.1
Male	3.5	5.6	8.8	13.8	18.1
Female	1.8	1.6	2.9	3.0	3.7
<b>Age 20-24</b>	6.2	7.1	12.2	16.1	15.1
Male	9.3	11.5	19.2	26.8	25.7
Female	3.3	2.9	5.6	5.5	4.1
<b>Total, Age 15-24</b>	4.5	5.2	8.8	12.3	13.2
Male	6.5	8.2	13.5	20.2	22.0
Female	2.6	2.2	4.2	4.3	3.9

*Suicide among the young has increased sharply, reports the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (April 22, 1994). Although rates for young adults are substantially higher than for adolescents, most prevention programs are aimed at the latter.*

### “Between the Lines: Interpreting Welfare Rights.”

The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-2188. 344 pp. \$36.95 (cloth); \$16.95 (paper)

Author: R. Shep Melnick

From *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and beyond, the U.S. Supreme Court has boldly gone where presidents and legislators feared to tread. Although much less noticed, interpretations of federal statutes, particularly by the 800 lower federal courts, have also had a big impact.

Seeking to do good, says Brandeis University political scientist R. Shep Melnick, courts hearing cases on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, and education of the handicapped, have unilaterally readjusted the balance among the branches of the federal government and between Washington and the states. On occasion the courts

have undermined the very programs they sought to enlarge. In 1977, Congress was forced to revise the food stamp program because of growing costs and unpopularity—fueled in part by court rulings, including a Supreme Court decision requiring Washington to give food stamps to college students. The courts have irked even supporters of the programs. They “have the right to interpret the laws, not write them,” Representative Thomas Foley (D.-Wash.) complained in 1977, when he chaired the committee that oversees the food stamp program.

With respect to AFDC, lower courts have handed down “hundreds of decisions touching nearly every aspect of the program,” Melnick says. After

Congress in 1967 required states to try to establish the paternity of children of unwed AFDC mothers, many states decided to cut off benefits to women who refused to cooperate. Of 15 lower-court decisions on this issue, all but one invalidated state regulations (and it was soon reversed).

Federal judges, Melnick says, seem to have assumed that national views should prevail over state or local ones, and that social progress requires that eligibility and benefit levels reflect “actual need.” This may seem obvious in a judge’s chambers, Melnick says, but “reasonable, honest, and well-meaning men and women continue to disagree about which direction is forward.”