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International Crisis Management from a Personal Third-Party Perspective: A Case Study of the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis

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Abstract

With the deepening of globalization, international crises can transcend borders and spread worldwide, threatening the security and development of all humanity. Since the Cuban Missile Crisis, the theory of crisis management within international politics has gradually matured, leading to the emergence of crisis management models such as third-party intervention, as it has been said, "strategies may no longer exist in the future; instead, crisis management will take their place" [1]. At the same time, individuals acting as third parties have become important managers of international crises, with their strategies and autonomy influencing the course of crisis resolution. This paper uses the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis as a case study to summarize the modes of personal third-party intervention in crisis management and analyze how individuals effectively advanced the negotiation process.

Keywords: International Crisis Management, Personal Third-Party, First North Korean Nuclear Crisis, Jimmy Carter

Following the Cold War, various international crises have emerged frequently. The hostile confrontations among international actors have severely impacted the structure of the international system, increasing the risk of military conflicts [2] and even leading to wars [3]. The occurrence of international crises is also related to the strategies and perceptions of state decision-makers. When leaders have limited decision-making time and perceive that their values are under threat, they may believe that the situation will quickly escalate into confrontational behavior [4]. Even in the absence of actual conflict, decision-makers can perceive the emergence of a crisis through their interactions. Influenced by both macro and micro-level factors, international crises pose complex threats to the stability of the international community.

In response to this phenomenon, scholars have begun to introduce third-party involvement in international crisis management models. Oran Young argued that when the parties involved cannot resolve the crisis, the introduction of a third party can help address management issues within the crisis [5]. Howard Raiffa maintained that timely third-party intervention could create a constructive atmosphere conducive to consensus-building and ultimately resolving the crisis [6]. Increasingly, scholars have focused on how third parties participate in international crisis management, including the conditions for third-party involvement, behavior choices in crisis management, and how they influence negotiation processes. Liu Junbin distinguished between internal constraints and external factors affecting third-party actors, noting that third-party participation is limited by both their own conditions and those of the involved parties [7]. From the example of NATO mediating conflicts between Iceland and the United Kingdom, Zorzeta found that combining formal and informal mediation techniques often yielded better outcomes in third-party interventions [8]. Zhao Xusheng suggested that third countries participating in crisis management consider the expansion of their own interests as a factor in their involvement [9].

Some scholars have examined the identity and classification of third parties in international crisis management. Gregory Hoobler argued that it is essential to clarify the leading role and understand the role changes among the parties and participants in international crisis management [10]. Cheng Xiaoyong categorized third-party types in international nuclear crisis management [11]. Many scholars insist that a third party participating in international crisis management should adhere to the basic premise of objectivity and neutrality to positively contribute to crisis control. However, some scholars question this view. Li Xueting classified third parties into partisan roles, neutral roles, and marginal roles, arguing that these role positions determine the behavior of third-party forces in international conflicts [12]. Jin Yeub Kim argued that biased third-party interventions could reduce negotiation failures and conflict risks resulting from information asymmetry [13].

The above research has provided detailed studies on the nature and entry conditions of third-party actors. However, there is limited research on individuals acting as third-party mediators. Based on this foundation, this paper summarizes the modes of individual third-party involvement in international crisis management and conducts an empirical examination using the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis as a case study.

Modes of Personal Third-Party International Crisis Management

International crisis management refers to the formulation of appropriate measures by international actors during the emergence or outbreak of international conflicts, within a limited timeframe, to prevent the escalation of the crisis and ensure the protection of their interests by peaceful means. When international conflicts intensify beyond the

control of the parties involved, third parties may actively participate or be passively drawn into the conflict to help the disputing nations reach basic compromises and resolve the conflict. Thus, third-party intervention in international crisis management has become an important way to maintain global stability. As an essential element of international risk management, personal mediation as a third party warrants an analysis of the reasons, characteristics, and external limitations of its involvement.

(1) Reasons for Individual Involvement in Crisis Resolution

With the growing complexity of globalization, the negative externalities of international crises have become more prominent. Parties to a crisis can achieve their objectives at a cost lower than the social average, but such actions increase the costs borne by others; in other words, the initiators of a crisis may secure their interests at a lower cost while raising the security governance costs for other international actors. For example, a country's nuclear issue can easily spread to neighboring regions, causing regional panic and potentially evolving into a regional security crisis. International crises involve a diverse array of actors, including interested individuals, and pose a threat to the stability of the entire international community. Consequently, when an international crisis occurs, individual actors outside the parties involved may engage in mediation through various means, thereby initiating a management and negotiation process led by personal intervention.

(2) Characteristics of Individual Involvement in Crisis Management

Firstly, as primary agents of international crisis mediation, individuals who participate in international crisis management as third parties are often highly influential figures. This category includes leaders engaging in unofficial activities in a personal capacity, prominent former politicians, and leaders of unofficial political groups. Third-party individuals intervene in international crisis management in their personal capacities rather than as representatives of their countries. Thus, they can employ flexible means, such as utilizing specialized knowledge to offer solutions or leveraging personal political reputation to facilitate crisis resolution.

Secondly, the personal beliefs of third-party individuals have a significant impact on crisis resolution. The different motivations guiding third-party involvement in crisis resolution may lead them to adopt various negotiation strategies. For instance, some biased third parties may be more motivated than neutral third parties to participate in the management of international crises [14]. Therefore, crisis mediation based on personal beliefs is a bidirectional coordination process, in which the individual third party and the crisis-affected parties reach a mutual understanding through complex interactions of their respective beliefs and role perceptions. By altering the crisis parties' conceptual

understanding, expectations, specific coordination methods, and behaviors, individuals can shift the situation from a zero-sum struggle to "peaceful coexistence," preventing the spread of crisis risks and ensuring peace and stability at the regional and even global levels while safeguarding their own interests.

Thirdly, compared to formal negotiations, individuals can engage in more flexible mediation approaches. Special individuals do not participate in crisis management as state actors, which allows them to bypass the limitations of formal state negotiations. For example, due to the strained relations between the involved parties, traditional instrumental negotiation methods may often be insufficient for crisis management needs. The flexibility of individual third-party identities facilitates changes in negotiation style, creating a high-context negotiation environment through personalized interactions and setting the stage for advancing formal negotiations. Additionally, individuals can enhance the legitimacy of their involvement by obtaining commitments from states. For instance, a state may endow an individual with obligations and rights, thus making them a subject of international law. Consequently, personal third-party activities provide more formal or informal means of intervention in crisis management, thereby increasing their influence in this field.

(3) External Limitations of Individual Third-Party Involvement

Third-party international crisis management partly originates from the practice of dual-track diplomacy. Therefore, individual involvement essentially assists crisis parties in negotiations without the authority to impose negotiation outcomes. The parties involved also retain the right to select specific third parties to participate in crisis management negotiations. This establishes the basic thresholds for individual third-party participation in crisis management: (1) Individuals need to possess certain resources. When crisis parties find it difficult to resolve the crisis, individual mediators who are willing to participate need to provide critical resources to facilitate the resolution, making certain well-resourced individuals "key third parties" who play a more significant role than ordinary third parties in crisis negotiations. (2) The involvement of individual mediators requires the consent of the parties involved, allowing the crisis parties to screen potential third parties. Firstly, the parties will assess whether the individual is qualified to mediate, such as whether their personal credentials meet the parties' expectations. Secondly, they will evaluate whether third-party involvement can help achieve their interests, for instance, whether the third party can effectively manage nuclear crisis negotiations or help improve the nation's image. Crisis parties hope that mediators will play a role in international crisis mediation and also use this opportunity to demonstrate their respect for international norms, thereby gaining favorable international opinion and a stronger position in negotiations. Thirdly, the perception of the situation by the parties influences their acceptance of individual mediation. When crisis parties believe they cannot manage the crisis through direct negotiations, they may be more inclined to accept third-party

intervention to help achieve initial negotiation outcomes or provide effective solutions. The more the parties recognize the tension, the more likely they are to accept third-party management of the conflict.

Management of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis under Individual Third-Party Intervention

This section uses the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis as a case study to empirically examine the external limitations, driving forces, and characteristics of personal involvement in international mediation.

(1) Background

On March 3, 1994, the U.S.-North Korea interim agreement collapsed, causing a rapid deterioration of the situation on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea refused inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and withdrew from inter-Korean talks. The U.S. canceled the third round of negotiations with North Korea. By June 1994, the crisis had reached its peak, with the U.S. insisting that it would only consider improving bilateral relations if North Korea abandoned its nuclear ambitions. North Korea rejected this demand, calling for mutual concessions. Efforts to find a peaceful solution stalled due to the parties' hardened stances. For example, North Korea repeatedly stated that sanctions against it would be considered an act of war, while the U.S. government, influenced by public opinion, began planning military action against North Korea [15]. At this point, both the U.S. and North Korean governments were cautious about third-party mediation: North Korea rejected United Nations Security Council involvement, and numerous activists and media outlets who offered to mediate the U.S.-North Korean conflict were turned down by the U.S. government. Meanwhile, due to various reasons, relevant countries were unable to play a substantive role in third-party mediation. Jimmy Carter was one of the few individuals who could participate in managing this crisis as a third party [16].

Firstly, Carter's professional background qualified him to mediate the nuclear crisis. Not only was he a nuclear engineer, but he was also a former U.S. president who sought to reduce nuclear weapons globally. His expertise enabled him to understand the dangers posed by North Korea's nuclear program, and his status as a former president, along with the influence of the Carter Center, garnered North Korea's favor. Secondly, both the U.S. and North Korean governments tacitly accepted Carter's private mediation. Since 1991, Carter had received an invitation to visit North Korea, which the North Korean government viewed as a high-level gesture from the U.S., with Kim Il-sung placing great importance on Carter's visit. In contrast, North Korea refused to allow Senators Nunn and Lugar to visit as special envoys. Although some officials in the Clinton administration worried that Carter's visit could undermine the U.S.'s established

strategy, most members believed that Carter's visit would help North Korean leaders understand their predicament directly and advance the resolution of North Korea's nuclear proliferation issue. Ultimately, Clinton allowed Carter to visit North Korea in a private capacity, and the South Korean government, as a directly affected party, also agreed to the visit to reduce international pressure on North Korea.

(2) Carter's Mediation in North Korea

Carter maintained considerable autonomy in his mediation strategy. He believed that small groups within the U.S. and South Korean political systems exaggerated the nuclear crisis for their interests, and therefore, Carter was confident that the crisis could be resolved peacefully [16]. He also doubted the accuracy of U.S. intelligence on North Korean officials and their intentions, believing that U.S. perceptions of North Korea were misguided. Carter offered a different perspective from the Clinton administration, asserting that Kim Il-sung was North Korea's supreme authority. During a discussion with Lee Myung-bak on June 14, 1994, Carter presented three hypotheses about North Korea. First, he considered Kim Il-sung to be a wise national leader who would not allow himself to be perceived as a deceiver on the international stage. Second, Kim Il-sung was caught in a dilemma [16]. He did not want to be viewed as a liar by the international community, nor did he wish to take actions detrimental to North Korea. Third, he could not effectively communicate with Western leaders. Thus, Kim Il-sung may have viewed Carter's invitation to visit North Korea as a way to resolve the predicament. Given North Korea's economic difficulties and diplomatic isolation, Carter believed that considering the nation's security and trade circumstances, Kim Il-sung would choose to promote the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

At the same time, Carter felt that the Clinton administration's approach was insufficient to drive North Korea towards denuclearization, as North Korea sought respect while the U.S. strategy involved using UN sanctions to force North Korea to accept IAEA inspections of two undeclared facilities. The North Korean people interpreted the UN sanctions as a deliberate slight by the U.S. and other countries, aimed at reducing their nation to a "pariah state" and condemning their leader as an "international outlaw" [16]. This anger exacerbated the conflict between North Korea and the U.S. Carter believed that the key to negotiations was maintaining a good personal relationship with North Korean leader Kim Il-sung before discussing the management of the nuclear crisis. Therefore, during his visit, Carter displayed goodwill and offered nuclear crisis management suggestions that differed from the Clinton administration's approach to bridge the gap with North Korean leaders, positioning himself as a mediator committed to the peace of the Korean Peninsula and the dignity of the North Korean nation.

On June 15, 1994, Carter and his aide traveled to Pyongyang from the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea. During the welcome ceremony for Carter, both sides created a friendly atmosphere. Kim Yong-nam praised Carter for his understanding of North Korean issues during and after his presidency, stating that Carter was respected

by the North Korean people. Carter emphasized the significant misunderstandings in the international community about North Korea's nuclear stance, pointing out that Kim Il-sung had stated there was no nuclear weapons program in North Korea, would allow complete transparency, and would continue as a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Carter hoped Kim Il-sung would reaffirm these views. During the meeting, Kim Yong-nam expressed a tough stance, declaring that North Korea would resolve the reunification issue independently, had withdrawn from the IAEA due to perceived injustice, and dismissed sanctions as unimportant, asserting that the nuclear issue should be settled directly between the U.S. and North Korea. This response reinforced Carter's strategy of addressing the nuclear crisis through direct communication with Kim Il-sung.

On June 16, Carter formally met with Kim Il-sung. Speaking in a private capacity, Carter conveyed American goodwill: the U.S. wished for peaceful coexistence with North Korea, believed that different governmental systems should not hinder cooperation, and hoped that mutual understanding would lead to comprehensive, normalized diplomatic relations. Carter then discussed the nuclear program issue, summarizing the IAEA's inspection requirements and proposing that North Korea could continue its nuclear material reprocessing but must undergo inspections. Carter's position contrasted sharply with the Clinton administration's hardline stance. Some Pentagon officials believed the correct response was to confiscate North Korea's nuclear materials, but Carter's proposal intrigued Kim Il-sung, as he saw this compromise as a potential U.S. concession. Carter clarified the misunderstandings surrounding North Korea's commitment to nuclear inspections and urged against sanctions, expressing regret over the perceived unfair treatment of North Korea. His negotiation approach, which acknowledged Kim Il-sung's need for mutual trust and saved face, proved highly effective, prompting Kim Il-sung to discuss the details of a third round of talks. Carter explained Washington's and the UN's views on North Korea's nuclear program and U.S. policy towards South Korea. Kim Jong-il agreed, candidly admitting that the core issue between the U.S. and North Korea was a lack of trust. He appreciated Carter's efforts to foster bilateral friendship, reaffirmed North Korea's stance against developing nuclear weapons, and suggested that if the U.S. agreed to a third round of talks and provided a light-water reactor, North Korea would freeze all nuclear activities [17]. Additionally, North Korea agreed to remain in the NPT until the light-water reactor was built and hinted that the nuclear issue on the Peninsula could be resolved without the IAEA. Carter acted swiftly, securing an agreement acceptable to both parties and pledged to relay Kim Il-sung's proposals to Washington. He then clarified issues concerning third-country supply of the reactor, North Korea's status under the NPT, and the stay of IAEA inspectors.

Subsequently, Carter engaged in negotiations with North Korean officials, including Kang Sok-ju, on the management of the nuclear issue. The North Korean officials expressed satisfaction with the positive atmosphere created by Carter's talks with Kim Il-sung. Carter noted that given Kim Il-sung's public commitment to a lack of nuclear weapons development capabilities and intentions, the nuclear issue could be resolved peacefully. However, as Carter anticipated, some officials' exaggerated claims and hardline stances contributed to the escalation of the crisis. The North Korean First Vice

Foreign Minister and Foreign Minister maintained a tough approach towards the U.S., attributing existing problems to the Americans and suggesting that insisting on "special inspections" would bring the situation back to square one, attempting to retract Kim Il-sung's earlier commitment to transparency. Carter refuted these demands and accusations. He reiterated that Kim Il-sung had promised to discuss Peninsula denuclearization and mutual inspections between the North and South during the third round of talks and questioned whether the present officials intended to overturn Kim Il-sung's statements [16]. This action forced the dissenting officials to retract their objections and proceed with pragmatic discussions for solutions. To prevent further interference from other North Korean officials, Carter disclosed some details of the agreement with Kim Il-sung during a private interview with CNN that night. He stated that Kim Il-sung had agreed to allow IAEA inspectors to stay on site and permit monitoring equipment to continue "monitoring the recently removed fuel rods" [16]. Furthermore, Carter emphasized that both North Korea and the U.S. shared two common goals: first, transitioning the entire nuclear program from graphite reactors to light-water reactors with third-country support for reactor fuel, and second, achieving Peninsula denuclearization and seeking a formal statement affirming that North Korea would not possess nuclear weapons. North Korea aimed to resume the third round of talks without preconditions, resolving the nuclear issue peacefully through bilateral negotiations. Carter communicated this information to Washington, providing assurances for the Clinton administration's decision-making. During the interview, Carter expressed goodwill toward North Korea, affirming that Kim Il-sung's commitment was a significant step in easing the crisis and calling for the lifting of UN sanctions, which he argued would have no positive effect and only provoke North Korean resentment.

The CNN report had a significant impact, with China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly opposing sanctions against North Korea the following day and advising the Security Council not to intervene in the crisis management. International public opinion called for the U.S. and North Korea to reopen negotiations and peacefully resolve the nuclear crisis.

(3) Negotiations with the Clinton Administration

Due to Carter's high level of independence, he informed the world of his agreement with Kim Il-sung via CNN before reporting the details to the Clinton administration. Many senior officials expressed dissatisfaction with this approach. Firstly, the agreement Carter reached was inconsistent with the established U.S. policy, and its opponents perceived Carter as a special envoy of the Clinton administration, interpreting his public criticism of UN sanctions as a reflection of the administration's views, accusing it of weakness and incompetence. Secondly, officials believed that aside from ensuring the IAEA inspectors remained in North Korea, the agreement had achieved few tangible results. The deal also embarrassed the Clinton administration, with Bob Gallucci noting that Carter had put Clinton in an awkward position [18]. In response to these criticisms, the Clinton administration decided to maintain a hardline stance, insisting that North Korea's "freeze

of its nuclear program" must include "no nuclear reprocessing" and "no nuclear testing." Additionally, the administration demanded that the 5-megawatt reactor not undergo refueling and that North Korea commit to allowing IAEA inspectors and equipment to fulfill their oversight duties as prerequisites for a third round of talks [18]. As a response to the CNN report, the administration formally justified the need for the UN sanctions agreement. The U.S. government believed that these actions could counter the perception that Carter had changed government policy and could frame the agreement in a way favorable to the Clinton administration [19].

To alleviate Clinton's doubts about North Korea and intentions to sanction it, Carter actively adjusted his mediation approach, maintaining a good relationship with Clinton while clarifying certain principles. During his briefing with Secretary of State Robert Gallucci, Carter accepted Clinton's demands, promising to clarify in a private letter to Kim Il-sung that the "freeze" included "no reprocessing" and "no refueling" and invited Kang Sok-ju to participate in the July negotiations [18]. Carter also expressed regret for the CNN report but remained opposed to sanctions. At a subsequent press conference, apart from the disagreement over sanctions, Carter avoided making any remarks that could affect the consensus between him and the Clinton administration. On June 20, Carter wrote a letter to Kim Il-sung, recalling his pleasant days in North Korea, praising Kim's wisdom and leadership in resolving the crisis, and outlining multiple requests, including "no reprocessing," "no refueling," continued IAEA inspections, and ensuring that the Peninsula remained free from nuclear threats, while sincerely expressing his hope for peace [20].

Carter recognized that his visit had put the U.S. government under considerable political pressure, so on June 21, he wrote a lengthy letter to President Clinton attempting to mend the rift with the administration. In a friendly tone, Carter thanked the Clinton team for their support, apologized for the trouble caused, and summarized the mistakes made. Carter sought to explain his opposition to sanctions, arguing that not provoking Kim Il-sung was key to peacefully resolving the nuclear crisis. On June 22, Kim Il-sung responded to Gallucci's diplomatic note, sending the reply to Carter [21], agreeing to the three U.S. demands and expressing willingness to resume dialogue on July 6 (which was delayed due to Kim's death), hoping both sides could conduct the third round of talks without prejudice [22].

Ultimately, Clinton expressed satisfaction with Carter's mediation efforts, officially announcing on June 22 that he accepted the understanding reached by Carter and Kim Il-sung. He stated that North Korea had assured the U.S. government that the freeze would include refraining from refueling the reactor, halting fuel reprocessing, and allowing IAEA inspectors and monitoring equipment to remain on-site to verify the freeze. Clinton believed these conditions restored the foundation for bilateral talks and assured the U.S. would inform North Korea of the new round of negotiations in early July in Geneva.

At this point, the nuclear issue was formally transferred to negotiations between Pyongyang, Washington, and Geneva. Carter's visit to North Korea eased the nuclear war crisis on the Korean Peninsula in 1994, prompting the U.S. and North Korean governments to resume the negotiation process and accelerating the resolution of the nuclear crisis. Although Kim Il-sung's death disrupted the original negotiation schedule, Carter's mediation strategy provided valuable experience for the Clinton administration. The administration abandoned its high-pressure approach and expressed condolences to North Korea for Kim's death [19]. This gesture was well received by North Korea, which expressed willingness to resume negotiations in August. During this period, leveraging his good personal relationship with Kim Il-sung, Carter issued a statement to prevent the new North Korean leadership from overturning the understanding reached between him and Kim Il-sung [23]. In September 1994, the Agreed Framework was signed, effectively resolving the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis.

Conclusion

In the process of international crisis management, individual involvement requires meeting several conditions, such as fulfilling the needs of the parties involved and possessing influential resources. This paper analyzed the general model of individuals as third parties in global crisis management, using the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis as a case study for validation. The tacit approval from both the U.S. and North Korean governments and Carter's unique status provided the prerequisites for his mediation in the North Korean nuclear issue. Furthermore, the strategies employed by individuals in crisis management can significantly influence the ultimate resolution of the crisis. As a third-party mediator, Carter abandoned negotiation tactics that relied on hostility and tension to pressure the other side into making commitments. Instead, before addressing specific matters, he leveraged common ground between the parties to convey friendly messages to the highest leaders, fostering a positive relationship through empathy and rapport. For example, in his correspondence with the leaders of North Korea and the U.S., Carter did not hesitate to offer praise to the other side. This approach of goodwill helped build trust and a sense of belonging, encouraging the leaders to express opinions on how to restart the third round of talks and to make corresponding concessions. As a result, the U.S. and North Korean governments reached a basic consensus on resolving the nuclear issue under Carter's mediation, accelerating the signing of the Agreed Framework and ultimately leading to the resolution of the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis.

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