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The North Korean nuclear issue

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> 'Americans cannot forcibly disarm every nation that wants a doomsday arsenal. The continual waging of war will first isolate and then exhaust America and would not be acceptable to the rest of the world in any event.'
>
> Gordon Chang, *Nuclear Showdown*

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In his state of the union address in January 2002, president Bush described Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as the 'Axis of Evil' and declared these three states adversaries of the United States. In addition, he suggested that the they were 'seeking weapons of mass destruction', and thus posed a 'grave and growing danger' to the United States and the international community. Soon thereafter, Pyongyang announced its intention to restart work on nuclear reactors that had been closed since 1994. Spent fuel from the reactors could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials were expelled and North Korea announced its immediate withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The IAEA board of governors responded with a resolution, passed by 31 votes to none with two abstentions, declaring North Korea 'in non-compliance' with a safeguard agreement under the NPT. The United States invasion of Iraq, and growing tensions with Iran over that country's nuclear programme, have diverted attention away from North Korea's nuclear activities, but developments on the Korean peninsula remain a major concern for regional and global stability.

On 10 February 2005, North Korea announced its possession of nuclear weapons and its intention to enlarge its nuclear stockpile. The announcement was a response to what Pyongyang called the 'hostile policy of United States towards the DPRK' (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). The announcement was accompanied by an indefinite suspension of North Korea's participation in the Six-Party Talks,[1] suggesting that a return to the negotiating table would take place only when the conditions were right. At the same time, the statement reaffirmed North Korea's commitment to resolving the nuclear issue through negotiations, with the final goal as a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. The announcement thus confirmed Pyongyang's determination to maintain its nuclear option, while at the same time seeking to find a suitable negotiated settlement.

North Korea's post-2002 actions have mirrored the 1993–4 diplomatic crisis which led to an international agreement to provide energy to North Korea in exchange for a freeze in nuclear weapons development. In March 1993, the north indicated its intention to pull out of the NPT, but delayed withdrawal after the United States agreed to a high-level dialogue. North Korean demands and diplomatic brinkmanship resulted in a United States threat to impose comprehensive sanctions, which Pyongyang replied would be an act of war. United States military preparedness in South Korea and Japan were heightened, while plans were drawn up for surgical air strikes against the Yongbyon nuclear facility and other key military targets in North Korea. However, with the blessing of the Clinton administration, former United States President Jimmy Carter was able to broker a deal with the North Korean leadership in June

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1994, in terms of which the United States, Japan, and South Korea agreed to build two proliferation-resistant nuclear power plants in North Korea and to provide the country with fuel oil (the so-called 'Agreed Framework'). In exchange, Pyongyang promised to terminate all nuclear weapons research and development.

The North Korean decision to pull out of the NPT was widely regarded as an attempt to extract concessions from the United States, Japan, and South Korea. At the same time, maintaining the nuclear option is a rational choice for Pyongyang, as an insurance policy against attack from the United States. At the same time, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, remains determined to keep his economy afloat, given years of negative economic growth and famine. Pyongyang has taken the first steps towards a market economy by increasing prices for rice, diesel, and other staple products, while ending rationing for some products. However, the limited reforms have led to rapid inflation and new economic problems. Thus North Korea's economic revival, based largely on the Chinese model, is yet to show significant positive results. North Korea is hoping that the United States, Japan, and South Korea will provide rewards for agreeing to return to the NPT. The first prize is a non-aggression pact with the United States, which will prevent any pre-emptive strike. The second North Korean objective is a new wave of aid and investment to boost economic development.

North Korea's nuclear capacity

North Korea's nuclear weapon capability remains unconfirmed, but a range of estimates suggests an effective capacity to develop, deploy, and deliver nuclear weapons. The United States intelligence community suggests that North Korea is capable of producing enough weapons-grade plutonium for nuclear weapons fabrication. Since 2001, North Korea has reprocessed an estimated 8 000 spent fuel rods stored at the Yongbyon nuclear complex. The reprocessed material could provide around 25–30 kg of weapons-grade plutonium, which is sufficient to create five or six nuclear weapons. North Korea has also been suspected of operating a 5 MW(e) reactor in Yongbyon since late February 2003, which can produce enough plutonium to manufacture one bomb a year. However, no evidence so far exists to confirm that North Korea has closed down the reactor to discharge the spent fuel, and reprocess it into plutonium. Pyongyang's nuclear capacity could reach up to 20 nuclear weapons a year, in the event of North Korea using its two large nuclear reactors (50 MW[e] and 200 MW[e]) to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

The full scale of North Korea's uranium enrichment programme is still unclear, but investigations suggest that the country started to purchase dual-use items in the 1980s, an activity that intensified in the 1990s, during the post-Agreed Framework era. Thus the precise nature and level of the ability of the DPRK to undertake a large-scale uranium enrichment operation remains a matter of conjecture. Other elements in the nuclear capacity issue, such as whether North Korea has converted its fissile material into actual nuclear weapons, are also issues of debate in intelligence communities. Furthermore, debate exists over whether North Korea has any nuclear weapons small enough to be loaded onto an appropriate delivery vehicle. The country could deliver its nuclear weapons with Hwasong-5, Hwasong-6, Nodong, and Paektusan-1 (Taepedong-1) ballistic missiles. Moreover, the country's air force has fighter-bombers and larger aircraft that could deliver nuclear gravity bombs, but only up to a limited range.

Washington's ambiguous diplomacy

From the early days of the Bush presidency, White House foreign-policy makers have been divided on how to deal with North Korea. In March 2001, then secretary of state Colin Powell indicated that Bush would continue the Clinton administration's policy of dialogue with North Korea. However, the hawks, led by vice-president Dick Cheney and defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld, called for comprehensive sanctions to topple the North Korean government, the so-called 'regime change' option. After meeting with former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung early in 2001, Bush ruled out an early resumption of talks with Pyongyang, and essentially ended up following a policy of 'neglect' towards North Korea. At the same time, Bush refused to endorse South Korea's 'sunshine' policy (constructive engagement with the north), suggesting that a new, more assertive policy was required to deal with Pyongyang's intransigence.

Divisions within the White House postponed the implementation of a clear policy, leading to accusations that Bush had acceded to an ineffective and impractical policy of 'delayed engagement'. Failure to initiate diplomatic intercourse with Pyongyang, along with Bush's 'Axis of Evil' speech, in effect provoked North Korea into challenging Washington. Following a North Korean public affirmation in

October 2002 that a nuclear weapons programme had been secretly under way for a number of years, Washington cited violation of the 1994 agreement and immediately cut off the supply of fuel oil. The White House hawks were clearly in the ascendancy as they convinced Bush that the cut-off was the first step towards forcing Pyongyang to capitulate. In addition, as the largest donor of food aid to North Korea, the United States said it would tie any future assistance to the international monitoring of distribution, aimed at preventing supply only to the armed forces and supporters of Kim Jong Il. However, Kim responded by moving quickly to restart a plutonium weapons programme, expelling IAEA inspectors, and announcing a withdrawal from the NPT. Thus Pyongyang's response to United States pressure was a major escalation of the diplomatic impasse. Pyongyang also rejected international monitoring of United States food distribution as an 'unjustified politicisation of humanitarian aid'.

Secretary of state Powell suggested that the diplomatic crisis was provoked by North Korea's actions, but he ruled out any military action. He confirmed that Washington had no plans to attack (although plans for a devastating first strike against North Korea were drafted, fine-tuned, and then shelved in 1994), and called on Pyongyang to refrain from 'war talk'. But Powell emphasised that Washington rejected a non-aggression treaty, as this would imply rewarding Pyongyang for bad behaviour. At the same time, the United States offered aid to North Korea, provided it terminated its nuclear weapons programme. Nevertheless, the ambiguous Bush approach of swinging among a continuation of dialogue, deferred engagement, and comprehensive sanctions severely undermined diplomatic efforts to resolve the nuclear weapons issue.

In response to the 10 February 2005 official announcement from Pyongyang that North Korea possessed nuclear weapons and intended to enlarge its capacity further, the new United States secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, declared the decision 'an unfortunate move'. In response to North Korea's assertion that the United States was seeking to overthrow the regime, secretary Rice issued a strong denial. She added that North Korea would be accorded a security guarantee on a multilateral basis on condition that its nuclear weapons programme was terminated in a verifiable way. Moreover, Washington refused any bilateral discussions with Pyongyang, asserting instead that the Six-Party Talks were the correct forum for dealing with the issue. For Washington, North Korea's nuclear weapons programme was a regional issue, to be dealt within the regional framework of the Six-Party Talks.

The response of Japan, Russia and China

North Korea's bold admission of possessing nuclear capacity has provoked some nervous responses from its regional neighbours. Relations between Japan and North Korea are still on shaky grounds, troubled by deep historical animosities. The North Korean statements have accused Japan of following the United States like a 'puppet', and obstinately clinging to a hostile policy. The allegations have generated a cautious response from Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi, who has focused instead on resuming the Six-Party Talks while keeping up pressure on North Korea. A related demand from Tokyo is directed at resolving the 'abduction issue', in terms of which North Korea has been accused of abducting Japanese citizens. The issue of Japanese abductees has been a major concern for Japanese public opinion since Kim Jong Il's revelation in 2002 that North Korea had abducted 13 Japanese citizens. The Japanese were removed to North Korea for interrogation. Thus Japan's engagement in the Six-Party Talks is complicated by a need to resolve fully the North Korean abduction of its citizens.

With regard to Russia, Moscow's official response described the North Korea's statement of its intention to develop nuclear weapons as 'regrettable'. However, the Russian media have adopted a different approach, suggesting that the move from a nuclear capability to nuclear weapons is motivated largely by a need to improve North Korea's self-defence and deterrence capacity. Broad Russian opinion has suggested that the Korean crisis was, in fact, provoked by a policy change in the United States under the Bush administration. Russian assessments contend that Pyongyang's aims in the Six-Party Talks are two-fold: minimising the United States threat, and gaining access to international financial credits. Moscow has suggested that future discussions on North Korea's activities should shift the focus from freezing the nuclear weapons programme, to preventing the export of nuclear technology and weapons.

Beijing has taken a cautious approach when dealing with North Korea, given the broader implications for bilateral relations and regional security. China's foreign ministry has repeatedly confirmed China's long-held position of seeking a denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula through the Six-Party Talks. China's proactive diplomacy over the past few years, first as the facilitator of a trilateral meeting, and later

as the host of the Six-Party Talks, has yet to yield significant results. Beijing is also aware of the fact that any move forward on this issue will have a major impact on its own relations with North Korea and the United States. The nuclear issue poses a significant threat to regional security, but no direct threat to China itself; however, Japan's determination to improve its military capability in response to the North Korean threat poses a new challenge for Beijing. Moreover, any instability in the Korean peninsula could result in a huge influx of refugees into China itself.

Kim Jong Il's visit to Beijing on invitation from president Hu Jintao, 10–8 January 2006, suggested some positive developments towards addressing the stunted North Korean issue. Kim requested a joint effort with president Hu to overcome 'difficulties' in the Six-Party Talks. Hu reiterated China's interest in pursuing the talks and described them as an 'effective mechanism' for resolving the nuclear gridlock. The North Korean response stressed its long-term commitment to a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. It was widely hoped that Kim's visit would result in a changed approach by Pyongyang at the six-party negotiating table. China clearly holds all the aces in terms of its ability to apply concerted economic pressure, and thereby bring about a diplomatic solution. However, the application of comprehensive sanctions would have significantly negative repercussions for China, given the long history of friendship between Beijing and Pyongyang.

South Korea's engagement policy

South Korea's engagement approach towards its northern neighbour, encapsulated in the 'sunshine policy', has shown some limited, but positive results over the past few years. The border with North Korea remains one the most heavily militarised zones in the world, but tensions between the two states are being addressed at the negotiating table, rather than on the battlefield. Relations between the two have been improved by connecting railway lines, and increasing commercial and political interaction. By early 2006, North Korea's exports to South Korea had reached US$340,3 million, while South Korea's exports to North Korea went up to US$715,5 million. The increased volume of trade is also an outcome of South Korean corporate involvement in the north's Gaeseong Industrial Complex. In June 2000, the leaders of the two Koreas met for the first time in Pyongyang, where both voiced support for the goal of eventual reunification. This meeting promoted a level of conciliation, resulting in a diplomatic liaison office in the North Korean border city of Kaesong.

Seoul's engagement policy is intended to advance a new, closer inter-Korean relationship based on peace, reconciliation, and co-operation under the three principles of avoidance of armed provocations, no unification based on absorption, and an active pursuit of reconciliation and co-operation. In other words, Seoul seeks to sustain peace through maintaining strong security, while endorsing reconciliation and co-operation with the north. The engagement policy aims at fostering an atmosphere that would allow North Korea to seek openness and change through dialogue and co-operation. South Korean policy-makers contend that engagement will moderate the Pyongyang's policies, and strengthen the North Korean economy to the benefit of all citizens. Alternatively, engagement will stimulate a North Korean drive for freedom and liberty, provoking an internally driven regime change.

South Korea's engagement policy is intended to resolve the nuclear issue within the framework of diplomatic negotiation and compromise. South Korea has repeated its preference for engaging in deepening trade with North Korea, while simultaneously supporting the Six-Party Talks to resolve the nuclear issue. The South Korean government views a nuclear North Korea as 'unacceptable', and continues its 'peace and prosperity policy' engagement with Pyongyang. This policy hinges on two overarching goals: first, to guarantee peace on the Korean peninsula, and second, to promote the mutual prosperity of South and North Korea, while adding to the overall prosperity of North East Asia. The South Korean government has assimilated four vital principles for meeting the objectives of peace and prosperity: resolution of issues through dialogue, promotion of mutual interests, international co-operation between the parties directly concerned, and extension of public participation.

Seoul contends that the North Korean issue can be peacefully resolved through dialogue and, most importantly, that the south should play a key role in resolving the nuclear issue while limiting tensions. Since mid-2005, South Korea has been advancing a comprehensive programme to improve relations with the north, in terms of which South Korea assumes the role of a facilitator in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue by putting forward a range of incentives to the north, including the provision of large-scale electricity assistance. In effect, South Korea's approach towards the north is in direct opposition to Washington's policy of containment. South Korea sees interaction, communication, compromise, and positive reinforcement as a means of addressing the nuclear issue, rebuilding the DPRK's economy, and establishing a lasting

peace on the Korean peninsula. Seoul's 'sunshine', rather than Washington's 'thunder', is the chosen option for a lasting long-term solution. South Korea sees the problem as essentially a political one, which can be resolved by constructive interaction, but Washington's post-9/11 paranoia pushes the United States towards a hard-line security approach, blinding policy-makers to the available diplomatic options.

The Six-Party Talks: outline and prospects

Prospects for an early conclusion of the Six-Party Talks have been undermined by the irreconcilable differences between Washington and Pyongyang. During the Clinton administration, both parties were able to negotiate and reach a compromise on the key issues separating them under the Agreed Framework, which included North Korea's promise to freeze its nuclear programme. However, since the 2001 inauguration of the Bush administration, which has advocated both a policy of using United States power to consolidate American global hegemony, and the strong labelling of North Korea as a 'rogue' government, any hope for a positive relationship has been severely undermined. The Six-Party Talks were the outcome of a range of multilateral dialogue initiatives relating to North Korea's development of weapons-grade uranium. Following a series of Trilateral Co-ordination and Observation Group (TCOG) meetings in April and June 2003, South Korea, the United States, and Japan proposed a basic strategy contending that the North Korean nuclear crisis should be resolved in a peaceful manner, combining dialogue with pressure.

North Korea's less than enthusiastic involvement in the Six-Party Talks has served to increase tension on the peninsula. Proposed United States concessions have been insufficient to encourage North Korea to use the Six-Party Talks as the vehicle to facilitate the termination of its nuclear programme. Delays in negotiations during 2004 were motivated by Pyongyang's hope that the Bush administration would be replaced following the United States presidential elections. The Bush rhetoric, strongly personalised, blunt, and targeted at Kim Jong Il, did little to advance diplomatic interaction. Moreover, Washington's adoption of North Korean Human Rights Act, immediately after the third round of Six-Party Talks, signalled the United States's intentions to increase pressure on Pyongyang.

United States actions were seen by Pyongyang as an attempt to undermine its system of governance, and thus did little to coax it back to the negotiating table. North Korea responded by declaring an interest in talking only on the basis of a willingness by the United States to compromise, and a clear indication of new negotiation incentives. The DPRK also insisted that any discussions should encompass denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula more broadly, as well as arms reduction and the dismantling of the Cold War structure in the region. The north pointed out that United States security policy in North East Asia was a continuation of Washington's Cold War approach, and as such prevented a new, more stable, regional security arrangement.

Despite the lack of trust and differing perceptions at the negotiating table, the Six-Party Talks produced a joint statement on 19 September 2005. This outlined the principles for advancing the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, along with promoting a regional security system on the Korean peninsula and new multilateral security co-operation in North East Asia, providing a framework for dismantling the lingering Cold War structure. North Korea committed itself to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, while the United States reaffirmed that it had no intention of attacking or invading North Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons. Washington's moderated stance at the table was driven by a need to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula, given the growing problems in Iraq and a new, more urgent challenge from Iran's nuclear programme. Pyongyang offered to abandon its nuclear weapons, but soon after the talks concluded modified its statement, demanding a range of concessions, including a nuclear power plant, before its end of the bargain would be upheld.

The day after the joint statement was tabled, North Korea declared its intention to stay out of the NPT, subject to a range of concessions. Pyongyang insisted that the United States confirm its intention to refrain from any military action as an act of good faith. The DPRK also demanded that the United States recognise North Korea's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy by providing North Korea with a light-water reactor. The United States responded by demanding a verified abandonment of all nuclear programmes and a return to the NPT, along with comprehensive IAEA inspections. United States chief negotiator Christopher Hill stressed that Washington would discuss the demands proposed by North Korea only when North Korea was in complete fulfilment of the NPT and IAEA safeguards.

Despite a joint statement from the Six-Party Talks, a major discrepancy persists on the way parties have interpreted the terms and conditions. North Korea demands a nuclear

reactor before it abandons its nuclear programme, while Washington insists on a fully verifiable termination before any rewards are provided. Thus misunderstandings and differing interpretations continue to dominate the process, preventing a final settlement. The South Korean government favours the provision of a nuclear reactor as a means of modifying North Korea's behaviour and opening the door for further compromises from both sides.

Resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis

The Bush administration has rejected South Korean president Roh Moo-Hyun's request to exempt North Korea from any pre-emptive attack in terms of Washington's counter-proliferation strategy. National security adviser Condoleezza Rice suggested that the United States will keep all 'options open' in the ongoing dispute with Pyongyang. At the same time, there have been reports of Pentagon plans to bomb North Korea's nuclear plant at Yongbyon, as well as a number of other nuclear installations, if it goes ahead with the reprocessing of nuclear fuel rods. The United States plan also includes an intensive bombardment of North Korean military targets (specifically artillery batteries) stationed close to the border with South Korea. Pentagon planners gamble that the air strikes would destroy North Korea's nuclear capability, and significantly blunt its conventional military ability to damage South Korea, while at the same time discouraging Pyongyang from initiating a general war. Specific targets identified number between 60 and 70, easily targeted with cruise missiles or PGMs (precision-guided munitions). However, military planners are well aware that North Korea has an effective and imposing capacity to retaliate against any United States pre-emptive strike. The Korean People's Army (KPA) is structured and deployed for offensive action. KPA military doctrine stresses that decisive results can be obtained only through offensive operation. Strategy and tactics emphasise battle-field mobility, flexibility, and firepower. North Korea is believed to have stockpiled in hardened underground facilities enough ammunition (estimated to be more than 1 million tons), food, and petroleum to sustain combat for several months. Any United States pre-emptive strike against North Korea, even if limited only to nuclear facilities, is certain to lead to a massive counter-attack against United States and South Korean forces.

Given the potential for a rapid and dangerous escalation of the conflict, Washington has not ruled out a diplomatic solution in concert with regional powers. President Bush has suggested that the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China have a 'good chance' of persuading North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons programme. Bush has specifically praised China for its role in the process, stressing that Beijing favours a nuclear-weapons-free Korean peninsula. China's UN ambassador has suggested that the best, and most likely to be effective, approach is via 'constructive dialogue' and consultations on the basis of equality. The Six-Party Talks, facilitated by China, suggest that, over the long term, Pyongyang's exit from the NPT can eventually be resolved via constructive dialogue, rather than force.

A comprehensive negotiation framework for engaging Pyongyang is outlined in David Albright's (2000) extensive study of North Korea's nuclear programme, contained in his book *Solving the North Korean Nuclear Puzzle.* Albright points out that engagement with North Korea since 1994 has in fact produced significant benefits, specifically Pyongyang's agreement to stop its nuclear weapons programme. Military conflict was avoided and missile flight tests were suspended. In addition, prospects for South–North Korean relations improved, leading to increased dialogue and diplomatic interaction. The improved south–north economic and political framework provides the foundation for a lasting resolution of the present impasse, and an eventual peaceful unification of Korea. A successful resolution of the present crisis would be best advanced by a comprehensive engagement with Pyongyang along with the full implementation of the Agreed Framework. Military confidence-building measures, as well as a verified troop pull-back from the demilitarised zone, would lay the foundation for increased stability on the Korean peninsula. Washington needs to develop a United States–North Korean co-operative threat reduction programme, similar to that which exists with Russia, as a step towards comprehensive disarmament. A policy based primarily on forced isolation, sanctions, and threats is unlikely to resolve the crisis. The United States needs to engage North Korea at all levels, offer incentives, and address the central issues that motivated Pyongyang's withdrawal from the NPT in the first place.

The absence of sufficient trust between the United States and North Korea underpins the greatest obstacle to a diplomatic settlement, even supposing an agreement that works for the welfare of all parties appears to exist. The ongoing North Korean nuclear crisis is only the tip of the iceberg under which a number of complex issues have emerged. The nuclear crisis is complicated by the clash between Washington's global strategy and Pyongyang's survival strategy, the clash between

those who aspire to maintain the Cold War structure in North East Asia and those who seek its collapse, and the competition among the four neighbouring powers for influence on the Korean peninsula.

The prospects of success for such Six-Party Talks will be severely restricted by domestic policy constraints, differing priorities, and conflicting historical experiences among each of the countries, which have brought vastly differing perspectives to the multilateral negotiating table. For United States, although the threat from North Korea is an issue of nuclear proliferation, as a result of its focus on terrorism, Iraq, and now Iran's nuclear programme, North Korea has been downgraded on Washington's agenda, resulting in new policy constraints impeding the successful resolution of the Six-Party Talks. For China, the North Korea issue has more to do with a threat of a potential failed state and humanitarian disaster, than with it being a rogue state or threat to international security. For Japan, its role in the talks have been sidelined due to continuing historical animosities, and North Korea's determination to focus on negotiations with the United States. For Moscow, the Six-Party Talks are a venue at which it is able to support other members' proposals but is unable to lead. South Korea's principle concern has been to maintain a stable security environment in order to promote the Roh administration's 'peace and prosperity policy', and the maintenance of Kim Dae-jung's 'sunshine policy'. Seoul intends to avoid the huge costs likely to be incurred in any hasty reunification of Korea, and instead aims to achieve a gradual, but steady, reunification process, facilitated by South Korean direct investment and increased trade.

Washington has sought to strengthen sanctions against North Korea by advancing the Proliferation of Security Initiative (PSI) – intended to mobilise international support to obstruct the transfer of WMDs and components by 'rogue' countries such as North Korea and Iran. Washington has also strengthened and broadened economic sanctions on North Korea, which is allegedly involved in counterfeiting US dollars. South Korea and China have been reluctant to impose stricter economic sanctions on Pyongyang, fearing that this will be counter-productive. Moreover, the hard-line approach favoured by Washington undermines both Seoul and Beijing's efforts to resolve the North Korean issue through dialogue and negotiation. Washington's security-focused approach restricts diplomacy and could effectively close the door on a lasting negotiated settlement.

Advancing arms control and disarmament

In the anxious response to 9/11, the Bush administration largely dropped the United States's long-held support for arms control and disarmament. A new antagonistic approach has set the scene for a further deterioration of global security, and especially East Asian security. Washington's apparent determination to improve its own defence capabilities, and simultaneously ignore long-established arms control regimes, threatens to exacerbate global security concerns. The international response to Washington should be to assist in finding the keys which will once again unlock the door to a more stable, peaceful, and co-operative international society, based on a security consensus, shared values, and a common belief in the value of limiting arms build-ups and managing conflicts. The Bush administration's preoccupation with WMDs and military threats ignores the fact that political settlements precede disarmament processes. Without a political settlement with North Korea, disarmament has no chance of success. The framework for Bush's post-9/11 and Iraq security policy should be a comprehensive system of diplomacy, conflict resolution, political problem-solving, and arms control, rather than an array of threats, warnings to initiate pre-emptive military action (possibly nuclear attacks), and new intimidation techniques which are likely simply to threaten further the security of other states in the international system.

Efforts to control WMDs should be advanced via a multilateral, rules-based system of international security. The resort to pre-emptive military strikes against states harbouring such weapons would further destabilise the international system. Moreover, the lessons of Iraq emphasise the shortcomings of this approach. The way forward on North Korea (and Iran) should rather include attention to the following:

- The link between security and the underlying incentives to acquire nuclear weapons should be addressed. Countries involved in conflict, such as North Korea, should be encouraged to seek lasting political solutions, thus removing the incentive for acquiring nuclear weapons.
- An effort should be made to treat not only the symptoms, but also the root causes of conflict – the divide between rich and poor, lack of education, and regimes in which human rights and human freedoms are suppressed.
- No system of global collective security is sustainable if it is based on the continuing asymmetry between the nuclear haves and have-nots.
- Global security should be based on the delegitimisation

of WMDs – the nuclear-weapons states (NWS) need to make tangible moves towards disarmament. (It is far easier to make others comply with treaty commitments if the United States and other NWS comply with theirs).
- A new global security framework must be inclusive in nature, ensuring that every state's security is improved.

At the end of the day, only through eliminating the motivation to acquire WMDs can global security be enhanced. Those states which possess WMDs, especially those with large nuclear weapons arsenals, need to address the threat that they pose to other states, and seek to reduce their capability in accordance with NPT obligations and other arms-control agreements. Moreover, Washington's new security and counter-proliferation policies need to reconsider the proposed 'all stick and no carrot' approach. Washington's restrictive counter-proliferation strategy undermines a diplomatic solution to the North Korean issue.

As the Canberra Commission (Australian foreign ministry 2005) pointed out, as long as NWS maintain and strengthen their nuclear weapons capability, this will be a 'constant stimulus to other states to acquire them'. Moreover, Washington's strategy says little about addressing the sources of conflict that give rise to the desire to acquire WMDs in the first place. A reduction in conflict is the first step to a more secure international system. Without a more balanced and comprehensive approach to global conflict resolution, including a renewed commitment to existing arms-control regimes, Washington's post-9/11counter-proliferation policy as it is applied to North Korea (and Iran) is unlikely to be successful.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of progress on current negotiations, the Six-Party Talks provide the potential for a peaceful resolution of this issue. Moreover, inter-Korean co-operation is systematically laying the foundation for long-term Korean unity and prosperity. Both China and South Korea are playing a critical role in maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula, and keeping communication channels between Washington and Pyongyang open. The foundation of a future peaceful settlement will require a harmonising of the Bush administration's interests with the South Korean government's 'sunshine' policy and Kim Jong Il's survival strategy.

If Washington were to be serious about a negotiated settlement, the United States could enter into direct negotiations with North Korea, including on the agenda the dismantling of nuclear-weapons facilities and the DPRK's food and energy needs, along with the complete normalisation of political and economic relations, in exchange for a return to the NPT and monitoring by IAEA inspectors. The United States has the 1994 Agreed Framework as a foundation for negotiating denuclearisation with North Korea, and simultaneously renegotiating some provisions, while adding new ones. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has chosen to ignore the Agreed Framework in favour of a more confrontational approach.

Some observers have suggested that to strengthen negotiations on the Korean issue, a conference on the topic 'Security and economic development in Korea' should be organised in Brussels, with the EU as host and the EU, the United States, South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, and Japan participating, as well as observer participation by other interested states. The conference would provide a platform where the international community could add weight to a negotiated settlement, as well as provide economic and security assurances to North Korea, thereby significantly expanding the benefits of denuclearisation.

A peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue is unlikely without the United States offering a range of convincing compromises. There is a strong possibility that North Korea would agree to abandon its nuclear programme and initiate far-reaching economic reforms once it receives a security guarantee from the United States. Since the North Korean crisis is basically a product of the hostility between North Korea and the United States, a new approach from Washington could open the door to a peaceful solution. The United States and the other participants in the Six-Party Talks should grant Pyongyang another chance to become a full member of the international community and, in exchange, North Korea should demonstrate its intention to take advantage of such an opportunity. North Korea's ongoing pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens to destabilise the East Asian region, but the Bush administration's security-focused approach impedes the prospect of reaching a meaningful negotiated settlement on the issue.

For South Africa, the best option is to advance a pragmatic engagement policy by encouraging both Pyongyang and Washington to pursue dialogue in order to reach a peaceful solution. South Africa's own nuclear experience offers a model to North Korea and an inspiration to all arms-control negotiators. Moreover, South Africa's remarkable democratic transition and reconciliation process offers South and North Korea a guide for future unification. South Africa's inter-

national standing as a strong supporter of the NPT and a liberal democracy provides a strong base from which to offer diplomatic support and encouragement to the resolution of tensions between the United States and North Korea. In this context, South Africa could contribute to conflict resolution through :

- support for a constructive diplomatic resolution of the issue;
- opposition to any military action, which would certainly have severely damaging consequences;
- support for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula as a whole;
- encouragement for the Six-Party Talks, rather than the UN, as the correct mechanism for negotiation; and
- offering post-agreement constructive engagement (political and economic) in the region to support any negotiated settlement.

Endnotes

1 The parties are the People's Republic of China, North Korea, South Korea, Russian, Japan, and the United States.

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