

NORTH KOREA'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPON

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North Korea's position on the global elimination of nuclear weapons has only been addressed in passing. The government has had little to say about global elimination in negotiations with the United States, in informal discussions with Americans, or in public comments and propaganda beamed at audiences overseas or at home.

What North Korea says about nuclear weapons, its own decision to arm, US nuclear weapons policy, and the nuclear weapons policy of its neighbors does have some bearing on global elimination, but a review of North Korea's positions suggests that global elimination is not central to its concerns. Rather, Pyongyang is focused on eliminating the political, economic, and security threats it perceives to be posed by the United States and its allies. Whether a successful nuclear test will change its stance is not known.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR MOTIVATIONS

North Korea's nuclear program has been stimulated primarily by security concerns, but there are also domestic, regional and international political motivations behind the program.

Security Concerns

No country's motivation for building nuclear weapons can be known with certainty, but North Korea has been unusually explicit in its public statements about why it acquired nuclear weapons: insecurity. The prime reason for that insecurity is the United States and what Pyongyang calls America's "hostile policy." For North Korea, the concept of Washington's hostile policy is much broader than the threat posed by Washington's nuclear arsenal, and particularly the US threat of first use of nuclear weapons against it. It includes political, economic, and other military factors, such as the danger of invasion by conventional forces, economic sanctions, and attempts to suborn its government. Ending this hostile policy, rather than requiring the elimination of American

nuclear weapons, has been the main condition for Pyongyang to eliminate its arsenal.

The North's view is the product of decades of confrontation with the United States starting with the Korean War. Aside from a continuing policy of political and economic hostility, which only began to thaw in the mid-1980s, US threats, both nuclear and conventional, were unusually explicit. Thousands of US tactical nuclear weapons were deployed on the Korean Peninsula as part of a strategy designed to deter a North Korean attack, as well as for possible use in a war. The location of these weapons, along with the positioning of US strategic forces, served to compel North Korean actions in certain circumstances, for instance, to coerce the North into ending the Korean War. North Korea has been the object of nuclear threats by the United States more often than any other country in the world—at least seven times since 1945.¹ On top of clear nuclear threats, the US conventional war plan has long called for American and allied forces to both repel an attack on the South and move into the North in event of a conflict.

The North's reaction to these threats has manifested itself in a number of ways. Aside from periodic propaganda offensives intended to undermine US ties with Japan and South Korea, Pyongyang's construction of an extensive system of underground military installations and tunnels dates back to just after 1963 when the Cuban Missile Crisis cast doubt on the Soviet Union's security guarantee. In addition, North Korea's forward conventional military posture, which clearly threatens Seoul, is probably designed to help deter such an attack. Beyond its bristling rhetoric and steps taken to defend against a possible nuclear attack, the North's interest in acquiring its own nuclear weapons to deter attack seems to date back to the immediate aftermath of the 1963 crisis when Kim Il Sung sent Mao Tse-tung a letter proposing that the two countries cooperate in building the bomb.²

By the early 1990s, Pyongyang's strategy seemed to have developed more emphasis on ending hostile relations with Washington, even to the point of constraining its nuclear weapon programs. The collapse of the Soviet bloc, China's establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States and Japan and its tentative movement towards normalizing relations with South Korea, and the deterioration of its own economic and military position vis-à-vis the South required a dramatic rethinking of North Korean security policy. Since Kim Il Sung could no longer count on his erstwhile allies, militarily or economically, he began reaching out to North Korea's lifelong enemies — the United States, South Korea and Japan — in an effort to turn foe into friend. Such realignment would

improve North Korea's security and provide a hedge against an increasingly powerful China.

As a result, Pyongyang's strategy included a new component — not only seeking to deal with the threat of a nuclear attack by acquiring its own weapons, but also using that program as a possible bargaining chip to end US hostility. This strategy has formed the basis of North Korean policy towards the US for the past two decades.

The first significant sign of a shift came in 1991 when US withdrawal of its tactical nuclear weapons prompted North Korea to sign a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Joint North-South Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The 1994 US - North Korean Agreed Framework, which laid out a roadmap to denuclearization, seems to have been based on the assumption that Pyongyang would trade its nuclear program for better relations with the United States.

A fundamental turning point in that direction was reached with the visit of Marshal Jo Myong Rok to Washington DC in October 2000 and the trip by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang a few weeks later. Pyongyang welcomed the US-drafted joint statement made public during Marshal Jo's visit in which the two sides affirmed that "they are prepared to undertake a new direction in their relations." As a crucial first step, the two sides stated that "neither government would have hostile intent toward the other and confirmed the commitment of both governments to make every effort in the future to build a new relationship free from past enmity."³ That progress was discarded by the Bush Administration, which was more interested in confronting than engaging North Korea and other so-called rogue states.

While diplomatic efforts since the 2002 collapse of the 1994 Agreed Framework have made limited progress in restraining North Korea's revived nuclear program, success in addressing the fundamental political issue of strategic relations between Washington and Pyongyang has been even more elusive. As a result, the North has returned to an emphasis on the US's "hostile policy," which it says is designed to "isolate and stifle" North Korea.⁴ The improvement of political relations is absolutely essential to achieve denuclearization. In that context, authoritative North Korean interlocutors have characterized US nuclear strategy as threatening and emphasized the need to remove that threat, but have seldom talked about the need to reduce or eliminate all US nuclear weapons.

North Korea's stance that as long as the United States remains hostile, it will seek nuclear weapons and missiles to deter that threat has permeated all of Pyongyang's major policy moves and statements. For example, the North's resumption of its plutonium production program in 2003 following the collapse of the Agreed Framework was, according to Pyongyang, a response to renewed hostility from the Bush Administration and US refusal to negotiate after confronting the North over its suspected uranium enrichment program.

Drawing lessons from the start of the Iraq war earlier that year, North Korea noted that the United States had first demanded that Iraq submit to inspections, and it did. The United States next demanded that Iraq disarm, and it began to. The United States attacked it anyway. "This suggests that even the signing of a non-aggression treaty with the US would not help avert war," a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman said on April 6, 2003. "Only military deterrent force, supported by ultra-modern weapons, can avert a war and protect the security of the nation. This is the lesson drawn from the Iraqi war."⁵ In short, Pyongyang's price for eliminating its nuclear arsenal is that Washington must demonstrate an end to enmity in deeds, not just words. Pyongyang requires a combination of written statements reaffirming respect for the North's sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs. This could be accomplished through significant agreements like a peace treaty ending the Korean War and a non-aggression pact or negative security assurance. North Korea also requires concrete demonstrations of non-hostility, such as normalizing political and economic relations and the provision of energy and other assistance.

A February 10, 2005 statement by the Foreign Ministry that declared North Korea to be a nuclear weapons state also put emphasis on US enmity:

As we have clarified more than once, we justly urged the US to renounce its hostile policy toward the DPRK whose aim was to seek the latter's 'regime change' and switch its policy to that of peaceful co-existence between the two countries...However, the administration turned down our just request and adopted it as its policy not to co-exist with the DPRK.

The statement cited a US nuclear threat, but in the context of more generalized hostility from Washington: "The US disclosed its attempt to topple the political system in the DPRK at any cost, threatening it with a nuclear stick. This compels us to take a measure to bolster [our] nuclear weapons arsenal."⁶

In other public statements, as well as in discussions with US officials, the North Koreans drew attention to the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, which designated North Korea as a possible target for nuclear attack; and the Bush doctrine of preventive war, promulgated in the president's West Point speech of June 2002.⁷ Yet North Korea usually framed the US nuclear threat in the context of broader conventional military, economic, and political threats, as well as by its neighbors, Japan and South Korea. As the February 2005 statement noted,

We had already taken the resolute action of pulling out of the N.P.T. and have manufactured nukes for self-defense to cope with the Bush administration's evermore undisguised policy to isolate and stifle the DPRK. [Our] nuclear weapons will remain [a] nuclear deterrent for self-defense under any circumstances.⁸

In announcing the October 6, 2006 nuclear test three days before conducting it, the DPRK Foreign Ministry cited the nuclear threat as just one reason among many for the test. Pyongyang denounced the UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on the North for its July 4 missile tests, "a de facto 'declaration of war' against the DPRK," and added,

The US extreme threat of a nuclear war and sanctions and pressure compel the DPRK to conduct a nuclear test, an essential process for bolstering nuclear deterrent, as a corresponding measure for defense.⁹

Nevertheless, the North stated that its aim of negotiated denuclearization of the Korean peninsula remained unchanged and focused on ending its contentious relationship with the United States:

The ultimate goal of the DPRK is not 'denuclearization' to be followed by its unilateral disarmament but one aimed at settling the hostile relations between the DPRK and the US and removing the very source of all nuclear threats from the Korean Peninsula and its vicinity.¹⁰

That source of the nuclear threats is not the weapons themselves, but the political context in which they are deployed.

Whether North Korea will change its approach as a result of a successful nuclear test remains unclear. For example, Pyongyang, like China, could seek to link its own nuclear reductions to those of the United States and other nuclear powers. In

a recent formulation, a January 13, 2009 statement by the Foreign Ministry spokesman hints at a potential change of approach: “If the nuclear issue is to be settled, *leaving the hostile relations as they are*, all nuclear weapons states should meet and realize the simultaneous nuclear disarmament. This is the only option”¹¹ (emphasis added by author). While the statement retains a key qualifier, “leaving the hostile relations as they are,” it can be argued that the North Koreans have now at least raised an alternative path into the future that has evolved from their previous position. North Korean interlocutors have never broached mutual disarmament in US talks, but hinted at the possibility in informal conversations.

Aside from the threat posed by the United States, the North has mentioned, on occasion, the possible dangers of nuclear weapons acquisition by Japan and South Korea. Whether those statements reflect real concern or are purely opportunistic is unclear, although Pyongyang probably does view Japan as a long-term danger. A case in point came on May 31, 2002, after Pyongyang restarted its plutonium program and Washington refused to hold talks. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda contended that Japan's peace constitution did not preclude nuclear weapons and suggested that “depending upon the world situation, circumstances and public opinion could require Japan to possess nuclear weapons.”¹²

The North's response again framed the nuclear issue in the context of broader threats. A KCNA report noted Fukuda's comments:

As evidenced by Japan's arms buildup and the tremendous strength of the ‘self-defense forces,’ such terms as disarmament, peace and three non-nuclear principles are nothing but a fig-leaf to cover up the revived Japanese militarists' moves to turn Japan into a military power and their policy of overseas expansion.¹³

The statement added that, “It is an open secret that one of the important targets of Japan's avowed policy of becoming a military power is to go nuclear to emerge a nuclear power.” The article ended with a warning,

Japan should discard its nuclear ambition, not oblivious of the lesson of history drawn from the nuclear disaster suffered by it in the past. If Japan persistently opts for nuclear armament, it will only invite an unimaginable nuclear disaster.¹⁴

More recently, in an authoritative April 2007 article appearing in the communist party's newspaper, the North criticized Tokyo's less than cooperative stance in

the Beijing Six Party Talks and observed that “Japan’s objective in intensifying its maneuvers against us is to make the settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula out of reach and use it as an excuse to arm itself with nuclear weapons.” The article noted that,

Japan dreams of attaining superpower status after getting out from the United States’ “nuclear umbrella” of shamelessly taking an active hand in major international issues on equal footing with other major powers, and of realizing its ambitions for overseas expansion by coming into possession of nuclear weapons.¹⁵

As for Seoul, when revelations of South Korean enrichment experiments surfaced in October 2004, North Korea’s reaction was low-key, exploiting the disclosure to call for six-party discussions of the issue and later for reciprocal inspections in the South. A Foreign Ministry spokesman put it this way,

The gravity of the situation lies in that South Korea has pursued in secrecy the nuclear weapons program at the tacit connivance of the US and with its cooperation and has now full access to the nuclear weapons development technology. This cannot but be a serious challenge to the efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula...The reality proves that the nuclear issue of South Korea should be discussed and clarified at multilateral negotiations in the future if any discussion is to be made on the issue of denuclearization of the peninsula.¹⁶

Two months later, a Foreign Ministry spokesman linked the North’s denuclearization to the South’s more explicitly:

Double standards as regards the nuclear issues of the north and the south of Korea can never be allowed under any circumstances and it does not stand to reason that the DPRK alone should work for denuclearization. It is illogical for the DPRK to unilaterally dismantle its nuclear deterrent force unless the secret nuclear-related experiments of South Korea are thoroughly probed. Under this situation the DPRK is left with no option but to increase its nuclear deterrent force.¹⁷

Domestic, Regional and International Political Motivations

While Pyongyang's primary motivation for building nuclear weapons seems to be concern about the threat posed by the United States, a number of domestic, regional, and international political factors may also be driving its program.

Some analysts argue that nuclear weapons have become an important domestic prop for the current regime and could give the North greater confidence in pursuing much needed economic modernization. According to this view, Pyongyang's nuclear program has proven to be an important asset in building support among the general population, as well as in strengthening Kim Jong Il's control over the powerful North Korean military. That increased control, along with the greater security against outside threats which these weapons provide, might also enable the North to justify reallocating military resources to civilian use, thereby allowing it to pursue more actively the economic reform program begun in the early 2000s.

The annual 2007 New Year's Day editorial published in the leading newspapers, observed that while the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent "was an auspicious event in our national history," the civilian economy was also critically important to North Korea, arguing that,

The present reality, in which all conditions for leaping higher and faster have been created, demands that we step up the revolutionary advance more boldly to achieve the high objectives of building a powerful socialist state...Building an economic power is an urgent demand of our revolution and social development at present and a worthwhile and historic cause for perfecting the looks of a powerful state. We should concentrate national efforts on solving economic problems, so as to turn the military-first Korea into a prosperous people's paradise. The main task in today's general onward march is to direct primary efforts into rapidly improving the people's living and step up technological updating to put our economy on a modern footing and display its potentials to the fullest...We should successfully realize the noble intention and plan of our party that regards the improvement of the people's living as the supreme principle in its activities.*

* *Rodong Sinmun*, "Let Us Usher in a Great Heyday Full of Confidence in Victory," January 1, 2007. This is in contrast to an earlier line taken by the Korean Workers' Party to call the nuclear test "a demonstration of its scientific and technological potential" as justification for belt-tightening to give priority to military spending. KCNA, "*Rodong Sinmun* Praises Songun as Great Banner of National Prosperity," November 27, 2006.

Whether Pyongyang has sought nuclear weapons in order to conduct a more assertive regional policy is unclear. From a geopolitical perspective, the North may see its nuclear weapons as helping to shift the regional power paradigm more in Pyongyang's favor, enhancing its standing and placing it front and center of the diplomatic agenda. According to an article published in a pro-DPRK Japanese newspaper in December 2006:

The DPRK's nuclear test has shaken the balance of power and mechanical structure in Northeast Asia. In the past, the United States threat of nuclear war and the DPRK's responsible measures for self-defense created tension in the region. As the DPRK and the United States are facing each other as nuclear states, the prevention of their all-out confrontation has now become the most urgent task. A phase is opening where the new order of peace and stability can be established in the region by putting an end to the two countries confrontation and by seeking coexistence by the two countries.¹⁸

As for inter-Korean relations, some conservative South Koreans believe that a nuclear Pyongyang will feel empowered to conduct a more aggressive, intimidating policy towards South Korea. Nuclear weapons may also give the North new hope that it will be able to achieve reunification of the two Koreas on its own terms. Others disagree, arguing that the North already has sufficient political, military, and economic resources to act provocatively towards the South. And, regardless of its capabilities, Pyongyang cannot hope for reunification on its terms given the strength of political, military, and economic factors arrayed against it.

Pyongyang's nuclear weapons have helped enhance its political leverage, though not its international standing. While the North has been relatively low-key in boasting of its nuclear prowess, its nuclear stockpile and ballistic missile program have been important sources of political leverage in dealing with other more powerful countries, particularly the United States. These programs have allowed a small, economically devastated country to command international attention and to bolster what otherwise would be a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the rest of the global community.

Moreover, by sowing mistrust and feeding doubts about its ultimate intentions, the North has skillfully exploited that attention. The North has played to uncertainty about whether it will give up its weapons (including Pyongyang's pledge in the September 2005 Joint Statement to abandon "all nuclear weapons

and existing nuclear programs.”) By continuing to yield, however grudgingly, to demands that it constrain its nuclear programs, the North has kept alive hopes that it will finally agree to denuclearization.

NUCLEAR PLANS

Little is known about North Korea’s plans for the development of a nuclear arsenal and its possible uses. As of the end of 2008, all the components for a small nuclear force appeared to be in place. Pyongyang has sufficient nuclear material, has worked for many years on a weapons design, and has developed ballistic missiles potentially capable of striking targets in the region. But critical questions still remain, particularly about the size and reliability of Pyongyang’s nuclear device and whether it can be mated successfully to existing missile delivery systems. Data from its May 2009 test may answer some of those questions.

Over the past 15 years, the North’s planning for a nuclear arsenal may have evolved. In the late 1980s, those plans appeared to have been extensive. Pyongyang’s plutonium production program, located at the Yongbyon nuclear facility, included an operating five megawatt reactor, two much larger reactors under construction, and a large reprocessing plant near completion. Overall, US intelligence estimates were that by the end of the decade, if all these facilities became operational, the North could produce hundreds of kilograms of plutonium, enough nuclear material to build a large nuclear weapons stockpile.

However, that large stockpile never materialized. As a result of the 1994 US–North Korea Agreed Framework, Pyongyang never completed its two larger nuclear reactors. While the five megawatt reactor and reprocessing plant were “frozen,” they were still maintained. Both larger reactors, however, were allowed to atrophy to the point where they were no longer salvageable. A fuel fabrication facility, which had produced fuel rods for all three reactors, fell into a state of serious disrepair even before the 1994 agreement was signed. Efforts to refurbish it were suspended during disabling.

Consequently, North Korea’s plan for plutonium production now seems limited. In addition to the small amount US analysts believed was extracted at Yongbyon before the 1994 agreement was signed (some 8.4 kilograms), Pyongyang is thought to have separated approximately 25 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium in its 2003 reprocessing campaign, following the collapse of the agreement in 2002, and 12 to 14 kilograms in its subsequent campaign in 2005. As a result, the North may have had approximately 40 to 50 kilograms of

weapons-grade plutonium, sufficient for roughly six to eight bombs, before using a certain amount of that material in its October 2006 nuclear test.¹⁹ The North also has a bomb's worth or more of plutonium in the spent fuel unloaded from the Yongbyon reactor in 2008 as part of the process of disabling that facility, as agreed to in the Beijing Six Party Talks.

There is some evidence to suggest that North Korea has also periodically explored the possibility of producing highly-enriched uranium (HEU) to build nuclear weapons. The North Koreans have told visiting Americans that they had a pilot uranium enrichment program in the early 1990s which was discontinued. In the late 1990s, US intelligence received reports that Pyongyang had acquired a small number of centrifuges from Pakistan that could be used for enrichment. Acquisitions of technologies useful for uranium enrichment were stepped up in 2001, leading the United States to estimate that the North was "constructing a plant that could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for two or more nuclear weapons per year when fully operational, which could be as soon as mid-decade."²⁰ However, the US later admitted that it was less certain about the North Korean program and that no such plant had ever been located. The North, meanwhile, unable to acquire components for very many centrifuges, seems to have diverted aluminum tubes acquired for that purpose to other uses. Pyongyang has now threatened to resume its enrichment effort.

Parallel to its plutonium production program, Pyongyang has been developing — albeit in a haphazard manner — ballistic missiles, some potentially able to deliver nuclear weapons. Pyongyang's indigenous program dates back over three decades and is largely based on old Soviet technology. The first missile thought capable of delivering nuclear weapons, the Nodong, was developed during the late 1980s and has a range of about 1500 kilometers, sufficient to reach targets in Japan. During the 1990s, the North unveiled a longer-range missile capable of reaching the United States (Taepodong), albeit only if carrying very small payloads. More recently, Pyongyang is reported to be working on a new family of solid-fuel mobile missiles based on the design of an old Soviet submarine-launched ballistic missile that would presumably be capable of delivering nuclear weapons throughout the region.

A key factor in determining whether these missiles could serve as delivery systems is whether the North had tested them sufficiently so that DPRK leaders could be confident that they would work reliably and with a modicum of accuracy. The North's indigenous test program has been limited. Only two tests of medium- and longer-range missiles were conducted until July 2006, when it launched eight missiles, including a failed Taepodong-2 test, and April 2009,

when it tested Taepodong-2 technology with partial success in the guise of trying to put a satellite into orbit. One possibility is that the North has gathered sufficient test information from Iran and Pakistan, both of which also have developed missiles based on the Nodong design. Even if that is the case, test data for the Taepodong and the new family of mobile missiles would seem to be limited.

A closely related consideration is North Korea's nuclear weapons design. The North has been working on a design since at least the early 1980s when US intelligence detected implosion tests of the required high explosive core at the Yongbyon facility. A KGB report issued in 1990 concluded that the North had completed the development of a nuclear device.²¹ The following year, the Pentagon estimated that Pyongyang was capable of building a crude device able to fit on a railroad boxcar.²²

Whether Pyongyang's partially successful nuclear test in 2006 allowed it to further miniaturize its design remains unclear. If North Korea had attempted to test a large, crude nuclear device, some analysts think the detonation demonstrated that it had not mastered the complex timing of high explosives needed to compress the plutonium into a critical mass. Others contend that North Korea was testing a smaller device, one with a lower yield-to-weight ratio that could be mounted on a missile. If so, the North may require another nuclear test to validate the warhead. Without further tests, however, the North may not be sufficiently confident about the reliability of its missiles to risk mounting its few nuclear warheads on them.

Answers to key questions about the North's nuclear capabilities and its plans for employing those weapons remain uncertain. There is no indication that the North Koreans have any illusions about the military utility of nuclear weapons. As Kim Il Sung himself told a visiting member of Congress, Stephen Solarz, chair of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, in December 1991:

What's the use of a few nuclear weapons? In 10,000 years time we couldn't have as many nuclear weapons as you. Assume that we are producing nuclear weapons and have one or two nuclear weapons. What's the point? They'd be useless. If we fire them, they will kill the Korean people.²³

Instead, the North Koreans have spoken of their weapons capability as a deterrent. Given the retaliatory capabilities arrayed against Pyongyang, the North Koreans would likely consider nuclear use only as a last resort in the event that

their country came under attack. A case in point came in announcing its nuclear test, when a Foreign Ministry spokesman declared its policy to be one of no first use and nonproliferation: "The DPRK will never use nuclear weapons first but strictly prohibit any threat of nuclear weapons and nuclear transfer."²⁴

One possibility is that the North is planning a small nuclear force consisting of a few weapons deliverable by missiles and other, larger devices. The main purpose of such a force would be to deter attack against North Korea, perhaps through a combination of detonating "warning shots" during a crisis, as well as using them against military targets and population centers in South Korea and Japan during a conflict. In 1998, Hwang Chang-yop, the most senior North Korean official to have defected, stated that the North "will use them [i.e., nuclear weapons] if South Korea starts a war. For another, they intend to devastate Japan to prevent the United States from participating. Would it still participate even after Japan is devastated? That is how they think."²⁵

NORTH KOREA'S PROLIFERATION CONCERNS

While North Korea may have some concerns about the spread of nuclear weapons to neighbors, particularly Japan, its primary focus has been on US hypocrisy in its relationships with proliferating states. Pyongyang has condemned Washington's willingness to condone proliferation by friendly states (evidenced by the 2008 US-India deal), but to exploit the proliferation issue to isolate and attack unfriendly states. A Korean Central News Agency commentary recently noted:

The US biased nuclear policy is upsetting the general view of the international community on the energy issue. The US is still working hard to completely block the DPRK's nuclear activities for a peaceful purpose although it talks about the provision of nuclear technology and fuel for a civilian purpose and the like to those countries outside the NPT [India]...The US has long shut its eyes to its allies or those countries in which it is interested over the matter of R&D for nuclear weapons and its intensification and covertly helped them, unhesitatingly transferring even nuclear technology to those countries although they are outside the NPT. This notwithstanding, it urged the other countries to strictly observe the NPT and has applied sanctions against them in a coercive manner. The US not only insists that those countries incurring its displeasure including the DPRK be denied access to nuclear technology including that for

a civilian use but threatens that it would not rule out a preemptive nuclear attack on them. This proves that the US call for nuclear non-proliferation is nothing but sophism intended to pressurize other countries to meet its own interests. The US biased application of double standards concerning the settlement of major international issues found a clear manifestation in the issue of providing light water reactors (LWRs) to the DPRK.²⁶

A different tack was taken by a pro-North Korean newspaper in Japan which was sharply critical of the India deal on nonproliferation grounds:

The essence of the nuclear agreement concluded at summit talks between President Bush and Prime Minister Singh states that the United States not only acknowledges India's possession of nuclear capability, but also recognizes cooperation in the field of nuclear technology between the two countries...The United States has come out now and ratified India's withdrawal from the N.P.T.[sic] to become a nuclear state, and it has even decided to shower it with 'gifts'...The Bush government's underlying motives are clear. First, it wants to drive a wedge in the tight India-China-Russia relationship, and especially contain China by pulling another great Asian nation – India – over to its side, while at the same time it wants to make large sales of its latest weapons to India, along with state-of-the-art nuclear technology. We do not know if this measure by the Bush government will be a money-maker, but we can say it is a fatal diplomatic blunder that will destroy the basic framework of the N.P.T. built by the United States itself and will hasten the collapse of the already-crumbling [US] policy of unipolar domination.²⁷

Pyongyang's commentary may reflect its own policy objectives. For example, there is little doubt that the North's ideal outcome for the Six-Party Talks is both to improve relations with the United States and to hold on to its nuclear arsenal. In short, the North would like to be included in a class of "approved" proliferators. Another possibility is that if North Korea finally agreed to eliminate its nuclear arsenal, it would likely demand nuclear power plants in return, a point its diplomats noted after the India deal. In either case, the proliferation issue is not one that motivates North Korea to do much besides take rhetorical and tactical negotiating positions.

NORTH KOREA'S LIKELY RESPONSE TO GLOBAL ELIMINATION

A serious initiative by leading nuclear weapon states to eliminate nuclear weapons might make it easier for North Korea to rationalize eventual implementation of its commitment to eliminate its own nuclear weapons. But Pyongyang is unlikely to move down that path regardless of what steps other countries take unless there is a fundamental improvement in political relations with long-time enemies, particularly the United States, but also Japan and South Korea. Without such an improvement, the North is likely to see its small nuclear arsenal as vital to defend against the threat posed by these more powerful countries, even if they are armed only with conventional weapons.

That reality would seem to argue for a parallel process of bilateral and multilateral denuclearization and normalization of negotiations with Pyongyang, part of which focuses on steps to improve political relations, even if the international community moves down the road towards the elimination of nuclear arsenals. Such a process is already in place through bilateral contacts between Washington and Seoul, as well as the Beijing Six-Party Talks, which have been ongoing since 2003. While the future of those talks remains unclear given recent differences between Pyongyang and the other participants over verification issues and North Korea's refusal to return to talks in response to the UN Security Council's criticism of its April 2009 missile test, it is well understood that steps towards political and economic normalization of relations with the North must be embedded in any future agreements if denuclearization is to be achieved.

ENDNOTES

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