

## ***North Korea is Asking for Too Much in the Nuclear Crisis—Or is It?***

By Anthony DiFilippo

Although it is generally known that the recent North Korean crisis has deep roots, what is not understood is just how these roots have grown over the past several years.

Americans and others harbor the impression that North Korea—commonly described by the administration as a “reclusive” and “rogue” nation—possesses nuclear weapons even after the 1994 accord between Washington and Pyongyang. The 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, signed in Geneva, was designed to end the purported nuclear threat from North Korea. Recently both Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell have publicly stated that North Korea does indeed possess a small number of nuclear weapons. News that Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly successfully elicited a confession in early October from Pyongyang that it had a secret nuclear weapons program ostensibly confirmed what many Americans and others around the world had thought all along. The news also lent credibility to President Bush’s claim that North Korea was part of the “axis of evil.”

As policymakers and the public grapple with this new information, they should be aware that North Korea is not the reclusive nation it once was. By the end of May 2001, North Korea was maintaining formal ambassadorial-level relations with 156 countries—including 38 in Asia, 52 in Africa, 11 in the Pacific, 1 in North America (Canada), and 37 in Europe. Within the past two years, North Korea has established diplomatic ties with key U.S. allies in Europe, including Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Turkey. Pyongyang’s formal ties with France date back to 1984.

Its rogue status is also slipping, though not in the eyes of the Bush administration, which continues to cite the North Korean threat as the principal justification for the development of a national missile defense system. North Korea’s missile launch that crossed over Japanese territory in August 1998 turned out to be a civilian satellite, according to the Pentagon. Since Pyongyang did not notify Tokyo in advance of its plans to send a projectile over Japanese territory, it is true that an implicit threat still existed for Japan, which then had a rather poor bilateral relationship with North Korea. Subsequently, Pyongyang agreed to suspend future missile launches for several years, thereby lessening the perceived threat to Japan.

By the summer of 2000, North Korea had become a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, a multilateral security organization formed in 1994 that has more than twenty participating members, including the United States, Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia. In the wake of the horrifying terrorists attacks on the United States in September 2001, Pyongyang became a signatory of two UN anti-terrorist conventions. Amid its perception of an extremely hostile policy adopted by the Bush administration toward North Korea, Pyongyang announced the day after the U.S. attacks that they were “very regretful and tragic” and that it “is opposed to all forms of terrorism.”

### **From Engagement to Axis of Evil**

According to Pyongyang, the exceptionally hard-line policy crafted by the Bush administration is responsible for widening the breach in the U.S.-North Korean relationship. Although the 1994 Agreed Framework did not eliminate

all U.S. concerns about Pyongyang's nuclear intentions, by the summer of 1998 the Clinton administration believed that the accord had managed to freeze North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The Clinton administration still had concerns related to the monitoring problems encountered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, since these problems were not a core part of the Agreed Framework, and because North Korea's nuclear weapons program appeared to be static, the Clinton administration, while remaining suspicious, reluctantly accepted Pyongyang's repeated claims of compliance with the accord.

Subsequent U.S. inspections in 1999 and 2000 of Kumchang-ni, a suspected nuclear weapons development site in North Korea, produced no evidence that Pyongyang had violated the Agreed Framework. The Clinton administration's continuing suspicions of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's nuclear weapons aspirations gave way somewhat to conciliation in late 2000 when then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang. Although for a short time it seemed certain that Clinton himself would travel to North Korea, this did not materialize.

From Pyongyang's standpoint, comments from Secretary of State-designate Colin Powell marked an abrupt and hostile change in what had been improving U.S.-North Korean relations before the Bush administration took office. During his senate confirmation hearings, Powell referred to Kim Jong Il as "the dictator in the north," who insists on building excessive conventional and advanced military capabilities that pose a serious threat to the Asia Pacific region.

## U.S. Not Fulfilling Its Commitments

For several years, Pyongyang has argued that the United States has not been fulfilling its obligations under the Agreed Framework and has warned that the negotiating framework survival is in serious jeopardy. So, Pyongyang's current huff that the Agreed Framework is void is hardly new. During the Clinton administration, Pyongyang made clear that the two light-water reactors to be built by U.S.-led entity KEDO (Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization) to produce electric power, and which were to be completed by 2003, would not be ready for several years past the target date. Pyongyang has complained about delays in the delivery of heavy oil, which North Korea is not to receive until the completion of the light-water reactors. It has complained that the United States has not fully lifted economic sanctions and, more recently, that North Korea is entitled to financial compensation from Washington, since the long delay in the construction and completion of the light-water reactors has placed an economic burden on the country by causing it to give up electricity production.

A major point of contention in the current crisis is that the Bush administration is demanding that Pyongyang accept IAEA inspections of suspected nuclear facilities before there can be an improvement in bilateral relations. Pyongyang, however, vehemently disagrees, stressing that the Agreed Framework calls for IAEA inspections after the completion of much of the work on the light-water reactors. In attempting to demonstrate the Bush administration's hostile policy, Pyongyang stresses that the "axis of evil" diatribe that

prompted the threat of a preemptive nuclear strike against North Korea is tantamount to a declaration of war, since the Agreed Framework states emphatically that the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against North Korea.

While Pyongyang's recent acknowledgement that it has a nuclear weapons program at the very least indicates that North Korea has violated the spirit of the Agreed Framework, there is still the need for some clarification. A North Korean delegate to the United Nations has revealed to a leading Japanese newspaper that, while Pyongyang has procured devices to enrich uranium, it has not made use of this equipment. A report from another major Japanese newspaper indicates that diplomatic sources have stated that the procured devices have not been used yet, adding that they think that North Korea does not have nuclear weapons. Creating some question about the accuracy of the U.S. account, Jeong Se-hyun, the South Korean minister responsible for his government's attempt to unify the Korean Peninsula, stated that he was "afraid that Kang Sok-ju's [the North Korean official involved in the heated discussion with Kelly in Pyongyang] remarks were quoted without their full context." Jeong went on to state that: "Since some of North Korea's conditions were omitted, it was interpreted as reverting to brinkmanship."

A security adviser to South Korean President Kim Dae Jung threw caution to the wind when he questioned why Washington had released the news about North Korea to Japan and South Korea in August. This was just before Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi visited Pyongyang to begin a dialogue on the possibility of normalizing relations between Japan and

North Korea and when South and North Korea were hard at work attempting to reestablish rail lines and roadways on the peninsula.

## Wants Non-Aggression Pact

Pyongyang is now asking Washington to drop its hostile and aggressive approach toward North Korea, to recognize its sovereignty, and to not impede the development of its economy. Pyongyang is especially interested in signing a non-aggression treaty with Washington. This is very a small price to pay to keep North Korea as a party to the Agreed Framework and

ultimately to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The last thing that the world needs now is another country with nuclear weapons. Since no one outside of North Korea knows for sure whether or not it has nuclear weapons, and because the current crisis is linked directly to a bilateral agreement that both Pyongyang and Washington still want to preserve, despite departures from it on both sides, a commitment by the United States to a non-hostile and non-aggressive policy brings reasoned equanimity to the bargaining table and minimizes the prospects that another Iraq-like crisis will emerge. There is a big difference

between principled diplomacy that genuinely seeks a peaceful resolution to ensure a nonnuclear North Korea and a policy that is perceived as hubristic and hostile—one that sparks reaction and unnecessarily increases the risks of war.

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