

## Explaining the United States' Approach to the North Korean Nuclear Disputes

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### Abstract

This paper argues that a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear disputes greatly depends on the U.S. strategy, since that country has enough capabilities to control the negotiation process, whereas the North's resources are quite limited. Therefore, it suggests that accurate identification and analysis of the evolving positions of the United States and their underlying causes at various levels are essential. The paper has found that the key explanatory variables include the Bush security team's ability to understand the international constraints that limit the practicability of the Bush doctrine and domestic politics that could tie the Bush administration's hands while, at the same time, prompting it to readjust the course of its foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Agreed Framework, six-party talks, light water reactor, uranium enrichment program, normalization of relations, war in Iraq, neoconservatives, realists, "anything-but-Clinton"ism.

## Introduction

On March 6, 2001, Secretary Colin Powell stated that the Bush administration would pick up where the previous administration left off in negotiations with North Korea. But he soon became aware that he was not in sync with Vice President Cheney and other powerful neoconservative colleagues in the administration, and therefore had to retract his statement. By mid-2001 it became clear that the United States was taking a disciplinary approach to North Korea. On June 6, 2001 President Bush, reflecting his deep-seated mistrust of the North, called for “a less threatening conventional military posture,” in addition to requests for improved implementation of the Agreed Framework (AF) and verifiable constraints on missile programs, which North Korea viewed as intentions “to disarm and stifle it.”<sup>1</sup> Since that time, the Bush administration has been publicly critical of the AF and has refused to honor the 2000 U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué, which North Korea regarded as a basic agreement governing bilateral relations. Furthermore, in an atmosphere in which the validity of these agreements was being seriously questioned, the United States sent a special envoy to Pyongyang in early October 2002 to warn that it was aware of North Korea’s clandestine program to enrich uranium for use in nuclear weapons. The encounter led to the United States announcement that the North had admitted to having such a program, which caused the termination of fuel oil delivery to the North. North Korea denied the existence of the program and took retaliatory actions. The AF effectively collapsed, precipitating the second North Korean nuclear crisis.

On September 19, 2005, after years of strenuous and intense negotiations, the six nations participating in the North Korean nuclear disarmament talks in Beijing finally reached an agreement that contained a set of shared principles under which North Korea would barter its existing nuclear programs for measures that would guarantee its survival

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<sup>1</sup> North Korea interpreted the proposal as requesting its acceptance of “early” nuclear inspections, reduction of conventional weapons, and pull-back of its forward-deployed forces. It responded on August 8, 2001 that it “can never accept the agenda items of the talks unilaterally raised by the United States out of its intention to disarm the DPRK and stifle it and will not respond to the talks with the United States before it withdraws the items.” *Korean Central News Agency*, August 8, 2001.

as a nation and a regime. Some in the United States and South Korea declared this a victory on the Korean peninsula and tended to suggest that the newly formed flexibility on the part of the United States had contributed to the success of the fourth round of talks. But only twenty-four hours later the victory turned into a quarrel. Washington was quick to retort that having agreed to leave for later the details of the light water reactor, what the wording of the first point in the agreement meant was “after the dismantling of the North Korean nuclear programs,” something that Pyongyang had already told Washington to not even dream about unless it had first delivered the plant. Besides, there is a great and dangerous ambiguity about North Korea’s uranium enrichment program, which was the origin of the second North Korean nuclear crisis in 2002. Perhaps the most daunting challenge for both the United States and North Korean negotiators would involve finding a proper timing of diplomatic normalization between the two nations in a way that could maximize their security and political interests.

It seems plausible to argue that the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear disputes greatly depends on the U.S. strategy, since that country exerts a large amount of control over the negotiation process, whereas the North’s resources are quite limited. Therefore, if one is interested in predicting the outcome of the six-party talks, it would be imperative for her to accurately identify and analyze the evolving positions of the United States and its underlying political and economic causes at various levels. Such is the objective of this paper.

### **The History of the Second North Korean Nuclear Dispute and Evolving U.S. Positions**

Since the end of the Cold War, North Korea has suffered greatly from its loss of communist patrons and the supporters who had provided virtually everything to aid the country, including security guarantees. It also lost Kim Il Sung, “the sun of the nation,” followed by the suffering that came after unprecedented floods in the mid-1990s. The widespread economic troubles of North Korea continued, although aid from the outside provided temporary relief.

The year 2002 was quite significant for the North in that Pyongyang made a serious effort to reform and open up its economic system in a desperate attempt to secure its national survival. Kim Jong Il's visit to Shanghai in 2001, where he made an unusual four-day tour of the city and related Pudong's stunning development as a "new Creation of Heaven and Earth," seemed critical for such a decision by the North. On July 1, 2002, North Korea launched what a Washington Post journalist called "a landmark series of free-market reforms"<sup>2</sup> for the first time in its entire history. It set up "measures to improve economic administration" that it believed would bring it closer to a (global) market economy, with the intention of overhauling its current economic administrative system. The essence of the measures includes deregulation of prices and an increase in wages that would infuse elements of a market economy into a planned economy. The other critical characteristic of the measures is the emphasis on a reward principle based on individual performance. Kim Jong Il has himself stressed the importance of abolishing *gongjajui* (free-riding or parasitism). Particularly important from a strategic perspective is the introduction of the "family production system" in agricultural areas, reminiscent of the system implemented by China in the initial stage of its reforms, with the goal of increasing production through stimulus packages.

Most economists in the United States would assess the reforms as being modest at best and not fundamental changes in the economic system. But, what is significant is that the North has become much more of a risk-taker than ever before. From the perspective of Kim Jong Il, this might be a bold, risky adventure, given that it was unprecedented in the North and that he knew it might cause the regime collapse.

To support and finance the economic reform, North Korea announced the establishment of the "Sinuiju Special Administrative Region" on September 12, 2002. This was intended to induce much needed foreign investment and technology to prop up its moribund economy. Excluding foreign policy matters, Sinuiju would operate as a completely autonomous region with its own legislative, administrative, and judicial branches and a "minister" acting as the top administrator. By removing the need to work

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Faiola. 2004. "For North Korea, Openness Proves a Two-Way Street." *Washington Post*, December 13.

through the central government's red tape, Pyongyang was hoping to guarantee maximum flexibility and freedom for doing business in Sinuiju.

Besides these significant reform programs, North Korea's effort for survival was also evident in its handling of foreign relations. One example was Kim Jong Il's agonizing apology to Japan, or "new flexibility"<sup>3</sup> as Senator Lugar called it, offered in the North Korea-Japan summit meeting on September 17, 2002; Koizumi quoted Kim as acknowledging Pyongyang's responsibility and offering an apology for the abductions of Japanese nationals.<sup>4</sup> An apology of any kind by "the headquarters of the revolution" has been extremely rare in the history of North Korea. An apology to a former colonial master had been inconceivable from the North's point of view. There could be no better evidence showing its desperation.

When North Korea started launching its version of reform/opening-up policy, the United States thought that the North was cheating on the AF and that it was not appropriate to simply watch it reaching out to its neighboring countries.<sup>5</sup> The United States sent an envoy to Pyongyang to explore the possibility of removing its security concerns. On October 4, 2002, special envoy James Kelly met the North's representatives and informed them that the United States was aware of a clandestine program to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. Twelve days later, the United States announced that the North had admitted to having such a program. But North Korea claimed on October 25 that the United States intentionally misinterpreted its message, which should have been read: "the DPRK was entitled to possess not only nuclear weapons but any type of weapon more powerful than that so as to defend its sovereignty and right to existence from the ever-growing nuclear threat by the United States."<sup>6</sup>

No country at that time was able or willing to prevent this from escalating further. On November 14, 2002, KEDO announced its suspension of heavy-fuel oil deliveries to

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<sup>3</sup> Richard G. Lugar, Opening Statement for Hearing on North Korea and the Six Way Talks, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*. 2002. "No Resolution to Kidnapping Issue, No Normalization." October 6; Eric Johnston. 2004. "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics." *JPRI Working Paper* no. 101 (June). <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp101.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan D. Pollack. 2003. "The United States, North Korea, And The End Of The Agreed Framework." *Naval War College Review* (summer). [http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume1/august\\_2003/8\\_03\\_1\\_pf.html](http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume1/august_2003/8_03_1_pf.html).

<sup>6</sup> *Korean Central News Agency*, October 25, 2002. North Korea said later that it had [more] powerful weapons, including single-hearted unity. *Korean Central News Agency*, August 29, 2003.

North Korea. In response to this, North Korea restarted its functional reactor and reopened other nuclear facilities frozen under the AF. It also removed the seals and monitoring equipment from its nuclear facilities. Subsequently, denouncing the IAEA as unfair, the North expelled IAEA inspectors and withdrew from the NPT.

As there was no sign of the North reversing its course, the IAEA referred the issue to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions. The Security Council expressed concern about North Korea's nuclear program, but did not condemn Pyongyang for pulling out of the NPT; Russia and China opposed such a condemnation. Meanwhile, North Korea rejected international efforts to resolve the nuclear crisis. It maintained that the dispute could only be resolved through direct negotiations with the United States and demanded that Washington sign a nonaggression treaty because "No other country in the world community, except the United States, has singled the DPRK out as a member of an "axis of evil" and a target of a preemptive nuclear attack."<sup>7</sup> South Korean President Kim Dae-jung said that the United States held the key to resolving the crisis and should put aside aversion to the North and open talks.

It was China that persuaded both parties to settle for a compromise. But the tripartite talks held in Beijing in late April 2003 did not make any progress because the United States would not settle for anything less than a "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantling (CVID)" of North Korean nuclear weapons capabilities, which the North refused even to consider.<sup>8</sup> The United States tried to apply heavy pressure on North Korea to make it comply with the United States demand by publicly stating, with the endorsements of its allies, the possibility of "further steps" (South Korea) and "tougher measures" (Japan) against the North while initiating the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). North Korea did not back off. It informed the United States through the New York channel that it had completed the reprocessing of spent fuel rods.

As the stalemate showed little sign of resolution, China, once again, volunteered to play a brokering role. The United States and North Korea, after squabbles regarding the formalities of the talks, finally accepted the Chinese formula of direct talks within a multilateral framework. The first two rounds of six-party talks produced no significant

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<sup>7</sup> The North's Ambassador to China Choe Jin Su's remarks. *Associated Press*, January 31, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> *Korean Central News Agency*, April 29, 2003.

results primarily because the United States was not ready to lay out a concrete proposal.<sup>9</sup> The United States changed its position in the third round of the talks, making a concrete proposal for the first time. Regardless of the motivations behind the apparent shift, and despite a number of attempts by United States hardliners to spoil the process,<sup>10</sup> it was widely accepted as a first step that promised progress in the talks (in the sense that negotiation was seen to be possible).

On July 15, 2004, James A. Kelly, assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and chief negotiator at the six-party talks, summarized the U.S. position in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. According to him,

The United States proposes “the DPRK would, as a first step, unilaterally commit to dismantle all of its nuclear programs.”<sup>11</sup> Assuming that North Korea would commit to this, the parties would:

- (1) provide provisional multilateral security assurances that would become more enduring as the process proceeded;
- (2) begin a study to determine the energy requirements of the DPRK and how to meet them through non-nuclear energy programs;
- (3) begin a discussion of steps necessary to lift remaining economic sanctions on the DPRK, and on the steps necessary for removal of the DPRK from the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

The parties would then reach agreement on a detailed implementation plan requiring, at a minimum:

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<sup>9</sup> The frustration of the North was reflected in its statement that the head of U.S. delegation “only read the prepared script, showing no sincerity and giving no answers even to the questions raised.” *Korean Central News Agency*, February 29, 2004. Wang Yi, the Vice Minister of China, was quoted as saying that “the United States was the biggest obstacle to resolution of the problem.” ABC Radio Australia News. [[http://www.abc.net.au/asiapacific/news/GoAsiaPacificBNA\\_937819.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/asiapacific/news/GoAsiaPacificBNA_937819.htm)].

<sup>10</sup> A senior official at the Unification Department of Korea suggests that a prime example is Under Secretary of State Bolton’s remark right after the third round of six-party talks in 2004. John R. Bolton, “Lessons from Libya and North Korea’s Strategic Choice,” (Seoul, July 21, 2004). Interview (December 1, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> James A. Kelly, assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, “Dealing With North Korea’s Nuclear Programs” (prepared statement, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, July 15, 2004).

- (1) the supervised disabling, dismantlement and elimination of all nuclear-related facilities and materials;
- (2) the removal of all nuclear weapons and weapons components, centrifuges and other nuclear parts, fissile material and fuel rods, and implementation of a long-term monitoring program.

Upon conclusion of the agreement, non-U.S. parties would provide heavy-fuel oil to the DPRK. The agreement would be implemented with a three-month preparatory period in which the DPRK would:

- (1) provide a complete listing of all its nuclear activities;
- (2) cease operation of all its nuclear activities;
- (3) permit the securing of all fissile material and the monitoring of all fuel rods;
- (4) permit the publicly disclosed and observable disablement of all nuclear weapons, weapons components and key centrifuge parts.

These actions by the North should be subject to international verification. Particularly important from the United States perspective is to make sure that the North's declaration and actions include its uranium enrichment program and existing weapons. After the dismantlement is completed, "lasting benefits to the DPRK" would result from the energy study and the discussion of ending sanctions and the removal of the DPRK from the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism.<sup>12</sup>

Even after the dismantlement, however, "the DPRK must take other steps to achieve a wholly transformed relationship with the United States" including:

- (1) changing its behavior on human rights;
- (2) addressing the issues underlying its appearance on the List;
- (3) eliminating other WMD;

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<sup>12</sup> Kelly did not mention the timing of the provision of these specific benefits to the North in his July 15 2004 statement. The U.S. position rules out any material benefits to the North prior to dismantlement of all of its nuclear programs.



- (4) putting an end to the proliferation of missiles and its technology;
- (5) adopting a less provocative conventional force disposition.

Since the Kelly testimony on July 15, 2004, the United States appeared to have changed its foreign policy attitude in general and its position regarding the North Korean nuclear question in particular. There have been a number of reasons for these changes that will be discussed later in this paper; however, the changes have been effectively reflected in the Joint Statement on September 19, 2005. The most notable statements or commitments by the United States reflecting these changes include:

- (1) The United States having expressed its respect for the DPRK's statement that it has the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- (2) The United States having stated its willingness to join with other participants in providing energy assistance to the DPRK.
- (3) The United States not opposing the ROK's provision of 2 million kilowatts of electric power to the DPRK.
- (4) The United States having agreed to take coordinated steps to implement the agreement in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action."

One should be cautious in identifying the meaning of the apparent changes made by the United States because the Joint Statement is simply a statement of shared principles rather than an agreed implementation plan. One can reasonably suggest that the gap between the positions of the United States and North Korea is still great and that a resolution of the disputes will still take a lot of time and effort on the part of the participating nations, especially the United States and North Korea.

Having said that, however, one cannot ignore the difference between the U.S. position in 2004 and its attitude now. Moreover, if one goes back to *Nuclear Posture Review* of 2001 and *National Security Strategy* of 2002, one can find the greater difference between then and now. Quietly, the Bush administration seems to have been

abandoning some premises and practices that defined its first-term conduct of foreign policy. On one issue after another, President Bush has permitted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to “navigate the slow-turning ship of state away from the unilateralist course set by doctrinal neoconservatives during the first term and back toward a multilateral pragmatism.”<sup>13</sup> The U.S. policy toward North Korea is not likely to be an exception. In the following section, let us discuss the fundamental and continuing elements of the U.S. approach to the North Korean nuclear disputes and some methodological changes that are currently being made.

### **Factors Influencing the U.S. Attitude toward the North Korean Nuclear Disputes**

*Reality Check: the Bush administration’s ability to understand international constraints*

It seems clear by now that the U.S. security team understands that diplomacy is the only viable alternative for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear disputes. Let us discuss why this is so. One of the policies the United States can pursue is inaction that preserves a status quo. The result would be a nuclear North Korea, with unpleasant consequences for the United States. It may trigger a nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia, thereby impairing various U.S. commercial opportunities in the region and the non-proliferation regime that has long been a cornerstone of U.S. security policy for the last several decades. It also may cause Iran to go nuclear, which is likely to increase the unwanted possibility of nuclear exchanges with Israel. Moreover, the threat to the United States will be greatly amplified by the potential development of North Korean ballistic missiles with the capability of reaching major cities in the western United States. The worst-case scenario would be a North Korean nuclear attack on the U.S. as a result of the belief that it was about to be attacked in a preemptive U.S. strike.

Another option is for the United States to bring more pressure to bear on North Korea, for example, referring the issue to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions.

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<sup>13</sup> *Boston Globe*. 2005. “Foreign Policy Realism.” October 9.

But the U.S. security team knows that the council did not even condemn Pyongyang for pulling out of the NPT in 2003. Japan may join the U.S. sanction effort, but these two nations have already been sanctioning the North. The effect would be similar to not giving meat to a Buddhist monk. Worse than that, pressure would increase the North Korean people's suffering and strengthen the pretext Kim would use to solidify his principle of "military-first politics."

A third alternative would be surgical strikes against suspected nuclear installations in North Korea. But this option would be not only technically problematic, but also fairly costly for the United States for strategic and political reasons. The United States does not know the location of the uranium enrichment program, one of the key objects of the strikes. And the collateral damage such a strike would cause, including that of radioactive fallout, will be enormous. There is a high probability that the North would retaliate with strikes of its own to cause a war on the peninsula, which the nations in the region, particularly China and South Korea, would abhor and even try to obstruct the U.S. war effort for strategic, economic, and political reasons.<sup>14</sup> The war would also put the large number of Americans living and working in Korea in harm's way. If North Korea has nuclear weapons, it might use them, perhaps killing millions of people in South Korea. Japan would also be at risk.

Defeating North Korea would not be easy, even assuming that the United States got out of the Iraq quagmire. The military might of the North far surpasses that of Iraq's in terms of both quantity and quality. The conquest of North Korea would take years and require huge casualties to accomplish. Moreover, North Korea's mountainous geography poses additional formidable obstacles to the invader in two major ways. Unlike the case in Iraq, the majority of which is flat, the effectiveness of missile attacks on North Korea

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<sup>14</sup> China may dislike Kim Jong Il, but it has to help him in order to avoid the flood of refugees that would have a disastrous effect on Chinese social and economic order. China may also recognize the expected harm to its reputation, at home and abroad, if it failed to protect its sole military ally given the Chinese leadership's favorite claim of "lips-to-teeth" relations when describing the bilateral relationship with North Korea. China is also worried about "the infiltration of U.S. influence in Northeast Asia." The Chinese government has always maintained that the outbreak of another Korean war would seriously jeopardize the national security of China. It seems to believe that a more serious consequence would be "if the United States eventually occupies North Korea, it will in effect complete the U.S. encirclement of China." Hairen Zong. 2003. "Hu Jintao Writes to Kim Jong-il to Open Door to Six-Party Talks." *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, August 28. South Koreans will not cooperate with the United States or may even resist it because they would not allow the United States risk their lives, so the alliance will be greatly damaged. The Chinese influence in Northeast Asia, as a result, would be greatly expanded at the expense of the U.S.

would be quite limited. And, the massive North Korean special forces supported by elaborate guerrilla tactics and entrenched in mountains would become an insurgent force that would be hard to eradicate and cause tremendous casualties and expenses to occupying forces.

Fourth, there is an option of regime change, which has received the lion's share of attention, especially from the neoconservative hardliners (or proponents of a "principled" approach). But one must understand that any external pressure, short of a military attack, is not likely to cause regime change in North Korea. There is no significantly potent group to rebel against the "sun." However, let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that an external pressure could cause the regime collapse. The regime change is most likely to bring about a civil war, and the loss of central control would leave North Korean WMD in the hands of unscrupulous domestic factions with potentially horrible consequences, including their sale to "rogues." North Korean desperation and dysfunctionality would increase this possibility.<sup>15</sup>

The United States is capable of pursuing any of these options. But whatever the United States chooses, it is likely to have only a limited effect or result in grave consequences the United States may not be ready to face. Understanding the poverty of these non-diplomatic alternatives that do not serve U.S. interests appear to have prompted the U.S. leadership to consider a more pragmatic approach.

#### *"Anything-But-Clinton"ism and American Crusadership*

It seems that even after the reality check has been done regarding the options available to the U.S. in denuclearizing North Korea, the Bush administration still harbors a sense of strong distrust and opposition toward the Clinton administration's approach to North Korea, the core embodiment of which it says was the 1994 Agreed Framework (AF) between the two nations. The Bush security team believes that the AF is seriously technically flawed and morally wrong in that it was incapable of eliminating the North Korean threat as a totality while rewarding "bad behaviors" on the part of North Korea.

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<sup>15</sup> Ashton B. Carter, "Implementing Denuclearization Agreement with North Korea" (testimony before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, July 15, 2004); Bennett, Bruce, and Nina Hachigian. 2004. "Don't Try Regime Change in North Korea." *International Herald Tribune*, January 31.

Therefore, anything similar to the AF is simply not acceptable to the Bush administration. For them, no deal may be better than a bad deal because reaching an agreement just to have it fail would open them up to great risk within their own party.

It is clear that the Bush security team was sensitively mindful of the political importance of distinguishing between the AF and what it wished to accomplish in the disarmament talks. Specifically, unlike the Clinton security team, it wanted to avoid direct bilateral talks with North Korea, tried to make the Light Water Reactor (LWR) project at Sinpo a thing of the past, and ruled out the possibility of providing significant benefits to the North until it has verifiably dismantled its weapons efforts. Of particular importance in this context is that Stephen Hadley, the national security advisor to the U.S. president, has reminded North Korea that the United States sticks to the proposal tabled at the third round of the talks and has said that the United States does not have a plan to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea even after the North gives up its nuclear programs, citing various conditions the North has to fulfill.<sup>16</sup> As stated earlier, the Bush administration seems to have made a methodological change in its dealing with North Korea. However, Bush's "allergy" to be seen doing anything like Clinton as it pertains to North Korea is likely to limit his administration's policy options and continue to characterize the U.S. approach to the North.

Related to the "ABC," there is another key driving force that shapes the current U.S. policy toward North Korea. One can call it "American crusadership." Since the inauguration of the first-term Bush administration, its security team has often tried to distinguish itself from the Clinton administration as it pertains to North Korea by arguing that it would pursue a "principled" policy, casting aside the latter's amoral appeasement policy. A strong conviction against and hatred toward totalitarian, tyrannical, inhumane North Korea held by many key U.S. leaders has dominated the foreign policy decision-making process in both the administration and the Congress. Reinforcing this trend is this group's need to continue to win the support of the Christian Right, a group that played a crucial role in the 2004 U.S. presidential election. What is ironic about crusadership is

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<sup>16</sup> *Yonhap News* (October 24, 2005) quoted from Ria Novosti. Under the U.S. proposal tabled at the third round of the six-party talks, Washington requests that the North take "other steps to achieve a wholly transformed relationship with the United States," including changing its behavior on human rights and adopting a less provocative conventional force disposition.

that the demonizing of North Korea by the Bush administration may make it the prisoner of its own deeds. For example, the Bush administration defined North Korea as evil. Evil in a Christian context is not something to be rewarded, even if it performs good deeds. Rather, evil, as such, is the object of annihilation. Even if the Bush administration wants to return to its formerly proclaimed “bold initiative,” it would take a lot of time and energy for it to persuade religious voters with crusadership to follow its lead unless North Korea completely surrenders, which is, in any case, highly unlikely.

### *Fallen Vulcans?*

As explained above, the U.S. policy toward North Korea is constrained by the inapplicability of the Bush doctrine there, neoconservative thinking in a foreign policy form, and the proclamation on the right of the United States to wage preemptive war should it be threatened by terrorists or rogue states. Thus, it seems that the Bush security team is trying to maximize its security, political, and ideological interests within that boundary while trying to achieve significantly more than the Clinton administration did in dealing with the North. But, it is apparent that the failing foreign policy of the Bush administration, most notably the policy toward Iraq, has tipped the balance of power between the neocons and the realists within the administration in favor of the latter. In fact, the U.S. war in Iraq was considered a test of the practical validity of neoconservative policy and principles. If the U.S. policy toward Iraq can establish a pro-American, liberal democracy in Iraq, then the neoconservative influence on U.S. foreign policy would likely increase. If, however, the policy ends up creating a quagmire in Iraq, the influence of neoconservative thought on the administration and the Republican party will likely be greatly diminished. As the war in Iraq, along with crises involving nuclear problems with North Korea and Iran, have, in fact, turned out to cost the Bush team a lot, politically and otherwise, the neocons seem to have lost influence.

Of course, the fall of prominent neocon officials does not mean the demise of the neocon policy forces altogether, because the real role of the neoconservative policy intellectuals was not, in the first place, to lead the nation, but to advise the leaders. Therefore, neoconservative policy intellectuals do not have to hold the highest office in

order to exert a controlling influence in the government. But, that being said, it is important to understand that, given that Bush has enemies on all sides of his foreign policy front, he does not appear happy to lend his ears to the neocons who care less what allies think, hates negotiating with a party with different values, and takes it on faith that North Korea is determined to arm, not deal. Instead, prominent neocons had to leave their influential posts in the government. Among the most prominent, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, the architect of the the Bush Doctrine, is now at World Bank. The Under Secretary of State John Bolton has left Washington D.C. for a job in New York. Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith also left his position this year. Condoleezza Rice, one of the former neocon Vulcans, has been in transition from a neocon to a realist, since she has taken the job as a chief diplomat. This power shift in the administration is reflected in the empowerment of Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill, a realist, as the chief U.S. negotiator in the six-party talks, and the September 2005 Joint Statement, which contains a significant flexibility and a methodological change on the part of the United States. Still, it does not mean that the Bush administration is likely to adopt a policy similar to the Clinton-style engagement policy.

### **Conclusion**

This paper identified and analyzed the evolving positions of the United States in its dealing with North Korean nuclear disputes and their underlying causes at various levels. It has found that the key explanatory variables include the Bush security team's ability to understand the international constraints that limit the practicability of the Bush doctrine, as well as the domestic politics that could tie the Bush administration's hands while, at the same time, prompt it to readjust its foreign policy course.

In the course of several rounds of six-party talks, the distance between the positions of the United States and North Korea has, in fact, narrowed. The Joint Statement of September 2005 is indeed a significant achievement in the relationship between the participating nations. But, it is also true that the Joint Statement is full of nebulous commitments and promises and that the United States and North Korea are not

likely to reach an easy agreement as they start discussing more specific implementation measures for the latter's nuclear disarmament. The most significant stumbling blocks would include the disagreements concerning the LWR project, the alleged North Korean uranium enrichment program, and the timing of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the North. It is difficult to predict how the United States would deal with such complex issues. However, one can make the educated guess that, if international constraints remain stationary and domestic politics actually work to the disadvantage of the Bush administration's hardliners as they are expected to, then U.S. policy toward North Korea is likely to lose some of its religious and moral character while assuming a more pragmatic shape; this will be true, unless, of course, North Korea does something that would cause the triumph of the neocon zealots who are ever-present in contemporary American politics.



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