

US Subversion of Diplomacy and North Korea's Phantom Nukes

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In the months ahead, the U.S. can be expected to intensify its pressure on South Korea and China to back more aggressive measures and it is probable that the U.S. will ask the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against North Korea.

If the U.S. is successful in its efforts to further isolate and blockade North Korea, then it will risk plunging the Korean Peninsula into a state of crisis. That development would only be exacerbated by further hostile actions undertaken by the Bush Administration which could potentially raise the specter of war.

On February 10, 2005, the Foreign Ministry of North Korea made its most explicit statement yet concerning nuclear weapons. The announcement was treated in the West as a bolt out of the blue and a slap in the face after what was regarded as President Bush's conciliatory gesture of refraining from specifically condemning North Korea in his State of the Union address. Only the month before, it appeared that resumption of the six-way negotiations was imminent. A congressional delegation travelled to the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea - the formal name for North Korea) in January and talked with North Korean officials. Afterwards, delegation head Rep. Curt Weldon said, "Our unanimous impression is that the DPRK is ready to rejoin the six-party process."

The North Korean news service KCNA reported that its delegation told the congressmen that "the DPRK would not stand against the U.S. but respect and treat it as a friend unless the latter slanders the former's system and interferes in its internal affairs." North Korean officials assured the congressional delegation that the DPRK "would opt for finding a final solution to all the outstanding issues between the two countries" and take part in the six-party talks if the attitude of the congressmen reflected that of the Bush Administration.

"Outposts of tyranny"

It was a promising development, but not for those in the Bush Administration who preferred "regime change" in North Korea to peaceful negotiations. Only five days after the congressional delegation left the DPRK, Condoleezza Rice named North Korea in her Senate confirmation hearing as one of six nations she categorized as "outposts of tyranny." Two weeks later, President Bush delivered his State of the Union address, in which he promised to "continue to build the coalitions that will defeat the dangers of our time," and to "support democratic movements in the Middle East and beyond, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." It was not hard to infer the inclusion of North Korea in that policy,

given the juxtaposition with Rice's words.

Just before President Bush's State of the Union address, Michael Green and William Tobey of the National Security Agency (NSA) visited Asia to brief Japanese, South Korean and Chinese officials on a U.S. intelligence assessment tying uranium hexafluoride found in Libya to North Korea. Although hexafluoride is not fissile material, it can become so if it is processed through nuclear centrifuges. Extensive testing on the material was done at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, leading to the conclusion, one American official said, of an origin in North Korea "with a certainty of 90 percent or better." Western media repeated the claim that the analysis had "proved" a link with North Korea, therefore showing the nation to be engaged in the proliferation of nuclear materials. However, the process used to arrive at this conclusion actually failed to establish a North Korean connection.

U.S. scientists compared the rarest of uranium's three isotopes, U-234, in the Libyan uranium with samples from a variety of known sources. The percentage of U-234 in uranium varies by regional source, and therefore it can be a means of identifying the country of origin. The problem is that U.S. scientists failed to match the Libyan uranium to any of their samples. Lacking uranium from North Korea, by a process of elimination it was concluded that the source must be North Korea since other sources were ruled out. But U.S. scientists also did not have samples from a number of other nations, including Pakistan, a nation that would surely be a far more likely source than North Korea, given its assistance to Libya's nuclear program.

To complicate matters further, the percentage of U-234 in uranium can vary widely even in the same mine or in a single sample of uranium ore. The International Atomic Energy Agency conducted tests on the same material and concluded that the evidence was inconclusive. An official for the agency pointed out, "In order to come to this conclusion, you need a sample from North Korea and no one has a uranium sample from North Korea. The Pakistanis won't allow any samples of their UF₆ either." Another official, requesting anonymity, said that it would be hard to believe that the material came from North Korea. Fueling the agency's skepticism, the container holding the Libyan uranium hexafluoride originated in Pakistan. It was apparent that the Bush Administration was once again playing fast and loose with the truth in order to further its political objectives, and the visit by the two NSA officials to Asia was an obvious effort to sway regional allies to support harsher measures against the DPRK.

North Korea long played on the ambiguity of its nuclear status as a means of discouraging the Bush Administration from launching an attack. Yet it was careful not to overplay that hand because its goal was to achieve a long-sought rapprochement with the United States which would bring about an end to the economic embargo. An earlier congressional delegation visiting the DPRK in June 2004 was told that "the only option open to them, given their inclusion in the 'Axis of Evil' and the U.S. refusal to engage in bilateral discussions" was to "strengthen and possess deterrent capability" which they were putting into action. A North Korean official explained to the delegation, "We are not blackmailing or intimidating the U.S. side. We are not in a position to blackmail the U.S. - the only superpower. Our purpose in having a deterrent is related to the war in Iraq. This is also related to statements by the hawks within the U.S. Administration. Our lesson learned is that if we don't have a nuclear deterrent, we cannot defend ourselves." This nuclear program, a North Korean official said, was "only for deterrence and not being pursued to seek economic aid. We only wish to be left alone."

North Korea's "Nuclear Deterrent"

The first public mention of a "nuclear deterrent" came on June 9, 2003, when KCNA declared that "if the U.S. keeps threatening the DPRK with nukes instead of abandoning its hostile policy toward Pyongyang, the DPRK will have no option but to build up a nuclear deterrent force." Nine days later, a spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry announced that his country "will put further spurs to increasing its nuclear deterrent force for self-defense."

The actual choice of words used by the North Koreans was interesting. "Nuclear deterrent" was a deliciously ambiguous phrase. What precisely did "nuclear deterrent" mean? Did this refer to nuclear weapons intended to deter attack? Or did it mean something else, such as an army strong enough to deter attack by nuclear weapons? Or was this a reference to something nuclear in nature, other than weapons, meant to keep the U.S. guessing as to North Korea's capability? The phrase was intentionally vague and suggestive. From this perspective, reopening the Yongbyon nuclear plant and reprocessing fuel rods could serve as a "nuclear deterrent" if it led U.S. leaders to speculate about a weapons program.

In January 2004, an unofficial American delegation led by Prof. John Lewis of Stanford University travelled to North Korea as a private initiative to see what they could learn. In Pyongyang, they met with Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan on January 7, who told them that North Korea desired a serious and substantive discussion with the U.S. Kim noted that North Korea's offer to freeze its nuclear program had elicited no response from the United States. Kim denied that his nation had an enriched uranium program by pointing out that "not only do we not have any program, we have no equipment" and "we never had any scientists trained in that area." Kim asked, "How is it that we can prove that we don't have something that we don't have?"

The delegation was shown the spent fuel pool and confirmed that all 8,000 of the fuel rods had been removed. North Korean officials told them that the fuel rods had been taken to the radiochemical laboratory where all of them were reprocessed to extract plutonium. Just how many fuel rods were actually reprocessed is uncertain. On October 3, 2003, North Korea reported that it had finished reprocessing all of the fuel rods at Yongbyon four months before. However, the evidence doesn't appear to confirm such a claim. Responding at the time to the North Korean report, a South Korean intelligence official noted, "It doesn't seem that the North has finished reprocessing the spent fuel rods. Heat and vapor including krypton-85 always accompany the process of reprocessing spent fuel rods in such numbers, but we have detected no such signal."

After touring the plant at Yongbyon, the delegation was taken to a conference room where they were shown two glass jars containing what was said to be reprocessed plutonium from the fuel rods. Lacking essential equipment, it was not possible for Hecker to verify that the powder inside the jars was reprocessed plutonium, but he did note that the visible characteristics were not inconsistent with the claim, and a Geiger counter confirmed that the material was radioactive. Hecker pointed out that "even if we could confirm that the product we were shown is plutonium, we would not have been able to confirm that it came from the most recent campaign without additional, more sophisticated isotopic measurements that would let us identify the age of the plutonium."

A spokesman for the North Korean foreign ministry announced afterwards that the DPRK had shown its "nuclear deterrent force" to the American delegation. Permission was granted to the delegation to visit Yongbyon, he said, to provide an opportunity for the Americans "to

confirm the reality...and ensure transparency, as speculative reports and ambiguous information about nuclear activities are throwing hurdles in the way of settling the pending nuclear issue." At one point, a North Korean official told the delegation, "We have the potential to make nuclear weapons, but we do not have a weapon." Hecker reported that North Korean officials "believe that they provided us with evidence of their 'deterrent.'

At Yongbyon, they demonstrated that they most likely had the capability to make plutonium metal. However, I saw nothing and spoke to no one who could convince me that they could build a nuclear device with that metal, and that they could weaponize such a device into a delivery vehicle." The extent of North Korea's 'nuclear deterrent' appeared at the time to be little more than the ability to extract and refine plutonium, leaving the rest to the imagination of U.S. officials all too eager to exaggerate that capability into a full-blown nuclear weapons program, replete with a nuclear arsenal.

An assessment by the CIA that North Korea had succeeded in building two nuclear weapons based on plutonium extracted before the signing of the 1994 Agreed Framework has long been a staple of Western news reports. What never gets mentioned is how this assessment was arrived at. The claim is based on a National Intelligence Estimate developed in November 1993, "the product of hypervigilant imaginations in the American intelligence community," writes political analyst Leon V. Sigal. The CIA came to the conclusion that the DPRK had developed nuclear weapons by asking assembled experts for a show of hands. "They asked the question two ways," recalled a Defense Department official. "They asked, 'How many of you think they have a bomb?' More than half raised their hands. They asked the question, 'What is the probability that they have a bomb?' They averaged the answers. They got more than fifty-fifty." This hardly constituted a serious analysis, but by such dubious means the CIA concluded that there was a "better than even chance" that the DPRK possessed nuclear weapons.

The number of weapons the CIA claimed that the DPRK had developed was based on an estimate of how much plutonium might have been extracted from the Yongbyon reactor. But a study conducted by former officials for the U.S. Institute of Peace concluded that the estimate was "a worst-case extrapolation that is not based on direct evidence. There is no hard evidence - only the presumption - that the North has successfully weaponized the plutonium it has accumulated." Nonproliferation specialist Leonard Spector of the Carnegie Endowment pointed out, "All of the assumptions in the worst-case scenario have to be true for North Korea to have a bomb." Although the Western public is routinely led by news reports to believe that the CIA assessment was solidly grounded in evidence, it was in fact constructed upon multiple layers of assumptions.

In 1996, the Livermore and Handford laboratories estimated that North Korea could have extracted at best 7 to 8 kilograms of nuclear fuel prior to the Agreed Framework, "yet it takes ten kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium to fabricate a first bomb," and 8 to 9 kilograms for each additional weapon. "The possibility of North Korea's possession of nuclear arms has been stated on many occasions by U.S. intelligence authorities," said South Korean President Roh in June 2003. "But the Korean intelligence organization has no compelling evidence to prove these claims."

Before it signed the 1994 Agreed Framework, North Korea may have conducted a nuclear research program based on plutonium and may even have assembled some components, although nothing can be said for certain. It is possible that North Korea may have resumed a

program following collapse of the Agreed Framework. But this wouldn't necessarily indicate the actual development of nuclear weapons.

A nuclear weapons program based on highly enriched uranium, which is what the Bush Administration accuses North Korea of operating, would be a far more arduous endeavor than one based on plutonium. Because uranium must be enriched to more than 90 percent purity in order to attain weapons-grade quality, the process poses truly daunting technological challenges. The rotors used in centrifuges, spinning at the speed of sound, must be extremely strong and precisely balanced, or they will wobble out of control and destroy the centrifuge. Uranium enrichment to that level of quality requires several thousand centrifuges, adding significantly to the expense and difficulty of the operation. More importantly, the process soaks up enormous amounts of electricity, the supply of which must be uninterrupted and without fluctuation, precisely the resource that is most lacking in the DPRK. Plainly put, such an operation would be impossible for North Korea.

Robert Alvarez, former policy advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Energy pointed out, "To make and operate thousands of centrifuges successfully, they would have to rely on so many outside sources. They would need ready access to the most sophisticated machine tools. They don't have the money that the Iranians do to buy this fancy technology." Even nations with far better resources can take several years to achieve a successful result.

Only after ten years of effort was Pakistan able to produce any highly enriched uranium at all, and it took a further two years before it had produced enough for a few weapons. Libya, despite more than ten years of effort, never managed to enrich uranium to weapons-grade quality. Possibly the DPRK may have conducted research related to enriching uranium for the production of nuclear fuel. It would certainly have had an interest in doing so, as the light water reactors under construction under terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework could only operate on nuclear fuel. North Korea would be dependent on the U.S. and other Western nations for its low enriched uranium fuel to power the plants, and the supply could be cut off at any time for political reasons. Far better for the DPRK if it could produce its own supply.

Furthermore, uranium need only be enriched to a level of two to three percent purity for the purpose of manufacturing nuclear fuel, so the process would not be nearly as formidable as that of highly-enriched uranium. However, no evidence has yet been produced that North Korea is engaging in either type of uranium enrichment program. At a three-day seminar in New York in August 2004, North Korean delegate Ri Gun denied that his nation had a uranium enrichment weapons program. When asked directly whether there was such a program for peaceful objectives, his response was coy. "We are entitled to have it for peaceful purposes."

Several South Korean officials have pointed out that it is uncertain whether the fuel rods at Yongbyon were capable of being reprocessed into weapons-grade material. South Korean nuclear experts also said that once operations at North Korea's 5-MW(e) reactor in Yongbyon were resumed, it would take over a year before additional waste fuel rods could be extracted. The reactor would have to run at full power 75 percent of the time for four years in order to produce enough plutonium for a single nuclear weapon.

Russian nuclear safety analyst Sergei Kazenov reported that "converting peaceful atoms to military use is a special problem" and "North Korea lacks the necessary components, including the detonating systems and some others." "The DPRK's present technical prowess

and economic strength are not yet up to the level of developing nuclear weapons,” says Evgeny Kozhokin, Director of the [Russian] Institute for Strategic Studies. “First, it lacks qualified personnel in nuclear physics. Second, it does not have supercomputers for designing tests. Third, it will be very difficult to master nuclear explosion technology without any nuclear tests. In the past dozen years or so, the United States has all the while been monitoring the DPRK’s nuclear science research programs through various means of espionage and up until now, there has been little evidence to show that the DPRK has achieved progress in the area of nuclear weapon development.” This analysis was confirmed by Vladimir Belous of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences. “It is impossible to make nuclear arms or vehicles of their delivery without field testing. In the meantime seismic equipment and space monitoring means have registered no such tests in North Korea. Creation of nuclear arms in stealth is impossible.” Belous concluded, “North Korea’s economic, technical and research potential will not let it acquire nuclear capability in the foreseeable future.”

The Pakistan Connection

In early 2004, the media buzzed with the revelation that Abdul Qadeer Khan, head of Pakistan’s Khan Research Laboratories, had provided North Korea with plans and technology for a highly enriched uranium weapons program from the late 1980’s to 2002. One U.S. official described what Pakistan gave to North Korea as “the complete package.” An investigation by Pakistani officials led to the discovery, and Khan was said to have admitted aiding nuclear weapons programs not only in North Korea but also Iran and Libya as well. American officials quickly announced that spy satellites had taken photographs of Pakistani cargo planes at an airfield in Pyongyang in the late 1990’s, which they speculated had delivered nuclear equipment. Kahn was reported to have told interrogators that he was taken to an underground facility when he was in North Korea in 1999 and shown what the North Koreans claimed were three nuclear devices. On February 4, 2004, Khan read out a statement on Pakistani television, in which he apologized to the nation for his actions. “The investigation has established that many of the reported activities did occur and that these were inevitably initiated at my behest. In my interviews with the concerned government officials, I was confronted with the evidence and the findings. And I have voluntarily admitted that much of it is true and accurate.”

U.S. officials were jubilant, quick to point out that the news proved their allegations about North Korea. Vice President Dick Cheney flew to Beijing where he told Chinese officials that the news meant that talks were going too slowly and that the Bush Administration was losing patience with the process and might consider stronger actions such as the imposition of sanctions.

To bolster that effort, the Administration prepared a report asserting that the DPRK had increased its nuclear arsenal to as many as eight weapons. The new estimate was admittedly based on guesswork, but Administration officials hoped it would help persuade the other parties involved in negotiations to support the U.S. position that no concessions should be made to North Korea. For those who cared to examine the details, Khan’s confession raised more questions than it answered. What is striking about Khan’s televised confession was the lack of specifics. Nothing concrete is mentioned, only that “many of the reported activities did occur,” without identifying which did not. Nor did he indicate what evidence he was confronted with and therefore responding to in his address to the nation. Kahn was being held under house arrest and forbidden from speaking to the public.

Pakistani officials even refused to allow anyone from the U.S. to talk to Khan. What the public in the West was hearing was fourth hand: what Khan had told Pakistani officials, who then relayed to American officials what was told to reporters, who in turn informed the public. One couldn't be sure that the story wasn't being massaged along the route. The story grew more curious in the following days. Pakistani officials told reporters that Khan had confessed in writing to selling nuclear technology to Iran and Libya because he wanted to help fellow Islamic states develop nuclear weapons.

North Korea wasn't mentioned. After calling Khan by cell phone, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, head of Pakistan's main religious opposition party, Jammat-e-Islami, told reporters, "I called Abdul Qadeer Khan on Monday and he told me that he has not given any statement." Kahn told Ahmed that he rejected the statement and had made no written confession. When Ahmed asked to meet, Khan told him that would be impossible as meetings with him were banned. One can only speculate as to what pressures may have been applied on Khan to make him read a statement on television that he later disavowed. Or why Pakistani officials were claiming that Khan had revealed things under interrogation which he denied saying. It soon became known that Pakistan's investigation and house arrest of Khan was prompted by pressure from high-ranking U.S. officials, claiming to have evidence of Khan's involvement with the black market, and threatening Pakistan that relations with Washington would worsen unless they took action against him.

Responding to U.S. claims that Pakistani C-130 cargo planes had delivered nuclear technology to North Korea, Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Masood Khan claimed that the planes had flown in empty and only picked up "a load of shoulder-fired SA-16 missiles," which Pakistan had purchased from the DPRK. "There was no nuclear technology on board, absolutely none. This is utter nonsense," he declared.

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto told a Japanese reporter that shortly after taking office in 1988, some military officials suggested trading nuclear technology with North Korea for missiles. Bhutto discouraged such talk, and said her nation obtained "long-range missile technology" by buying "them with money." North Korea was quick to discount the story, which a spokesman for the ministry termed "nothing but a mean and groundless propaganda." In March, the CIA delivered a classified report to President Bush, in which it maintained that Pakistan had provided the DPRK with nuclear technology. This trade, the CIA indicated, began during Bhutto's first term in office and continued through 2002.

The intelligence report was based in part on what Pakistani officials were telling Washington, but as one U.S. diplomat admitted, "What we are getting is second-hand accounts, which means the Pakistanis may be editing it." To say the least, it was not unlikely that the CIA in turn was doing some additional editing of its own, aiming to tell the President what he wanted to hear, much as the agency had done leading up to the invasion of Iraq. Further evidence for the CIA's conclusion was said to be based on U.S. satellite photos of Pakistani cargo planes in Pyongyang, which only proved that they were there to pick up missiles, not how these were paid for.

As long as Pakistan keeps Khan under house arrest and refuses to allow contact from the outside, we may never know what, if anything, he had to say on trade with the DPRK. What we do know is that he denied making a written confession and that he disavows the statement that he read on Pakistani television, which in any case failed to mention North Korea. It is probable that some level of trade with Iran and Libya took place, based on feelings of Islamic solidarity. It is less obvious what interests Khan would have had in aiding

the DPRK, particularly since Pakistan had the ready cash for purchasing all the missile technology it needed from the North Koreans. By September 2004, Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the IAEA, revealed that he, too, had been snubbed when requesting to speak to Khan. "We have not been allowed by Pakistan to talk to the man."

The tale grew yet more convoluted in April when Pakistan sprung another surprise by reporting that Khan had told investigators that in visiting North Korea in 1999, he was shown what were said to be three nuclear devices. The story strained credulity. Had North Korea such weapons, it would be highly improbable that it would show them to a visitor from abroad, not to mention the implausibility of storing all three bombs in one place. Furthermore, Khan's training was as a metallurgist, and he would not be in a position to judge the reliability of what he was being shown. We can't be sure that Khan even made the claim, as once again, no one was allowed access to Khan and it was expected that we take the matter on trust. When asked whether the U.S. had talked directly with Khan, U.S. Undersecretary John Bolton responded, "We have not asked for access to Mr. Khan, nor do we think we should." But then, why would they when the story that was being told was so expedient? South Korea exhibited more curiosity about the report than U.S. leaders, asking Pakistan for answers to several questions. Unsurprisingly, it received no response.

With an air of alarm, U.S. officials spoke of a North Korean nuclear arsenal. The number of weapons varied depending on who was telling the story but all spoke with certitude unsupported by evidence. The public and media accepted the stories without question, yet what was consistently overlooked was the lack of evidence to back up the assertions. It was all supposition and fear mongering, driven by self-serving motives. Charles Kartman, executive director of KEDO, expressed his feelings on the matter. "When you get into this discussion about the numbers, it quickly sort of becomes people seeking facts. They feel comfortable with the numbers because they imply facts. These aren't facts. They're worst-casing all sorts of stuff. There may be zero. The number of proven weapons is zero."

North Korean leaders observed that Iraq's compliance with weapons inspections in the months preceding the war did nothing to deter attack, and Iraq's detailed documentation of biological and chemical weapons disarmament elicited nothing but arrogant scorn from the Bush Administration. For a nation identified as a member of the "axis of evil," unilateral and continual concessions promised only to be met by escalating demands and risked inviting attack. In an odd congruence of interests, North Korea, motivated by anxiety over its survival, sought to suggest to the United States that it may have produced nuclear weapons without directly saying so. The image of a nuclear-armed North Korea suited the Bush Administration as well, which held it aloft as justification for a hard line approach.

U.S. military might was a menace, and the DPRK played the only hand it had, hoping to instill doubts in U.S. leaders about its ability to defend itself. There was an inherent flaw in this approach, however. North Korea's vague phraseology was intended to imply a more developed nuclear effort than actually existed, but any agreement on disarmament would be doomed by the impossibility of revealing weapons that existed primarily in rhetoric. For its part, U.S. insistence on a North Korean highly enriched uranium weapons program for which it lacked evidence posed a similar impediment to diplomatic resolution. It would be an impossible task for the DPRK to reveal a program that existed only in the minds of U.S. leaders, thus ensuring the certain failure of any negotiated agreement.

Such latent contradictions would trouble even the most cordial of negotiations, and the six-party talks were far from that. The intrinsic complications were unlikely to trouble the Bush

Administration, given its antipathy towards the DPRK, for what it sought was regime change. Kenneth Quinones, a former State Department official responsible for North Korean affairs, claimed the crisis was primarily due to the policies of the Bush Administration. "Diplomatic dialogue has been ruled out as a tool to achieve a resolution," he said. "Instead it is included in a package of rewards that Washington promises to bestow on Pyongyang once it has satisfied U.S. demands." Quinones maintained that the Administration's multilateral approach was at heart unilateral. President Bush's "approach is multilateral only in that he strives to focus multilateral pressure on Pyongyang to compel its submission to his demands. This makes it essentially coercive. The Bush Administration has used the multilateral forum mainly for diplomatic shadow-boxing, rather than actually dealing with North Korea on substantive issues."

During the first three meetings of the six-party talks it was clear that the Bush Administration had no interest in negotiating a solution to the impasse, and instead used the talks as a means of delivering demands for unilateral disarmament. The DPRK hoped for a more diplomatic approach from the Bush Administration in its second term, but it quickly became apparent that the president felt that his aggressive approach to foreign policy was vindicated by the popular vote.

North Korea correctly gauged that the Bush Administration had no intention seriously engaging in negotiations, and wanted to use the talks instead as a platform for convincing other nations to back sanctions. The only option available under the circumstances, the North Koreans probably concluded, was to make an explicit statement on nuclear weapons in the hope that this would forestall any U.S. military action over the next four years.

On February 10, the DPRK Foreign Ministry referred to recent developments and said that although the nation wanted six-party talks it felt compelled to suspend participation for an indefinite period until there is a more positive attitude from Washington. Because the U.S. was aiming to "topple the political system," the DPRK said it was compelled "to bolster its nuclear weapons arsenal." The nation had already "manufactured nukes for self-defense." It can't be ruled out that North Korea had managed to build a nuclear weapon, although it lacks the miniaturization technology that would enable a weapon to be delivered by missile or bomber. More likely, strides may have been made but an actual weapon remains a remote possibility and the announcement was a bluff intended to deter the U.S. from launching an attack.

US Response

The U.S. response was sadly predictable. Even before the announcement, the National Security Council was developing a plan to block North Korea from earning foreign currency, and U.S. officials are now actively trying to rally other nations behind that effort. The Bush Administration is determined to block warming relations between South and North Korea and recent moves linking the two nations together. Cooperative developments on the Korean Peninsula promised substantial progress towards the goal of reunification, a dream embraced by nearly all Koreans on both sides of the border. Vice President Dick Cheney recently told South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Ban Ki-Moon that "any reciprocal deal on economic cooperation with the North is not acceptable." Seoul had maintained that it would continue its projects with North Korea, including the ambitious industrial park being built in Kaesong in the DPRK, but only days after talking with Cheney, Ban felt compelled to back-track. South Korea would not promote "large scale" economic cooperation with North Korea until the nuclear issue was resolved, Ban said after returning

from Washington. "We will only push for economic cooperation on humanitarian grounds." Both Cheney and U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz pressured South Korea to cancel its commitment to ship 500,000 tons of fertilizer to North Korea, leading Ban to indicate that his government would evaluate "various situations" before making a decision on the matter. Wolfowitz suggested to Ban that the matter of North Korea be taken to the UN Security Council.

In the months ahead, the U.S. can be expected to intensify its pressure on South Korea and China to back more aggressive measures and it is probable that the U.S. will ask the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against the DPRK. If the U.S. is successful in its efforts to further isolate and blockade North Korea, then it will risk plunging the Korean Peninsula into a state of crisis. That development would only be exacerbated by further hostile actions undertaken by the Bush Administration which could potentially raise the specter of war.

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