



Ensuring a Korean Peninsula Free of Nuclear Weapons

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Remarks to The Research Conference - North Korea: Towards a New International Engagement Framework

Washington, DC

February 13, 2004

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Introduction

It is an honor and a pleasure to address the distinguished participants in the research conference on "North Korea: Towards a New International Framework." I thank the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy and the Korea Economic Institute for organizing it, and the American Enterprise Institute, the Chosun Ilbo, the Ford Foundation, and the Kookmin Bank for their support of the conference.

With a resumption of Six-Party Talks on ending North Korea's nuclear threat less than two weeks away, this conference is very timely. The United States, and the international community as a whole, can benefit from the wisdom of the scholars, analysts, and policymakers here today from the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, China, and Russia on the great and complicated challenge that North Korea poses to regional stability and the international nonproliferation regime.

For six decades, the threat of war on the Korean Peninsula has been one of the chief concerns of American foreign and security policy. While the Republic of Korea has, in recent decades, developed into a leading member of the international community, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea took a historic wrong turn from the very start of its existence. The result has been self-induced isolation resulting in insecurity for the regime and enormous suffering for the people of North Korea. In addition, the regime has become a source of global concern by its widely spread proliferation and illicit activities.

The net result is that the D.P.R.K. has fallen further and further behind the dynamic East Asian economy and the world. North Korea's best hope is to embrace the opportunity presented by the Six Party Talks and chart a new course. We and the other parties realize that moving away from isolation and estrangement toward openness and engagement will be a major undertaking and we are willing to help. Everyone knows that establishing the grounds for normalcy and peaceful co-existence will be difficult. However, we have no choice but to make every effort to try -- and that's why President Bush at the APEC meeting last October made clear our willingness to document multilateral assurances of security.

But, this process of transformation must begin with a fundamental decision inside the D.P.R.K. North Korea needs to make a strategic choice -- and make it clear to the world as Libya has done -- that it will abandon its nuclear weapons and programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner. Two days ago, President Bush -- in a most important speech -- called on other regimes to follow the example of Libya. As he put it, "Abandoning the pursuit of illegal weapons can lead to better relations with the United States, and other free nations. Continuing to seek those weapons will not bring security or international prestige, but only political isolation, economic hardship and other unwelcome consequences."

Moreover, as negotiator in our multilateral talks, I would offer that we also need a strong commitment to timely action. Given the history of broken and unsuccessful agreements with the D.P.R.K., we cannot afford to leave the hard work for the end of the implementation process.

North Korea's Nuclear Programs

North Korea nuclear ambitions go back at least to the 1970s and are deeply grounded in its policy of national independence. Several decades ago, a North Korean leadership fearful of its own people and of the challenge represented by the economically developing, democratized Korean republic to its south, set out on a path to acquire nuclear weapons. Over time, various justifications have been offered. But, whatever the regime's rationale, the United States believes that a decade or so ago North Korea probably managed to develop at least a couple nuclear weapons.

As we now see it, maintaining a nuclear arsenal apparently has become a core, not peripheral, element of North Korea's national defense strategy. Thus, the challenge of getting rid of nuclear weapons and capabilities, needs to be seen in the context of North Korea's willingness to dramatically alter its national strategy. With the changed environment of this new century, among the world's vibrant economies, there is such an opportunity for North Korea to seize.

A Partial "Solution"

Ten years ago, we believed we were on the road toward ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program, once and for all. In 1992, North Korea reached an agreement with South Korea to ensure a Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons, but North Korea almost immediately walked away from that arrangement. The U.S. stepped in and, with the U.S.-D.P.R.K. Agreed Framework of 1994, succeeded in freezing North Korea's known nuclear weapons program, a plutonium-based effort centered on a place called Yongbyon.

In exchange for North Korea's promises eventually to come clean about its nuclear past, dismantle its known facilities, and put its remaining nuclear activities under full IAEA safeguards, the United States organized under its leadership an international consortium -- the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, or KEDO -- to finance and supply the light water reactor project. The KEDO partners, primarily the Republic of Korea and Japan, have spent over \$1.3 billion on the construction of two light water reactors. And the U.S. provided North Korea with half a billion dollars worth of heavy fuel oil between 1994 and 2002, to replace the energy presumed to be foregone by the freeze of the North's nuclear program.

In the meantime, in response to a humanitarian crisis, the United States and many other countries came to the rescue of the North Korean people, who suffered a terrible famine in the mid-1990s due primarily to the leadership's mismanagement of the economy. Between 1995 and 2003, the United States alone provided nearly 2,000,000 metric tons of food aid worth \$654,000,000 to North Korea through the UN World Food Program. According to the World Food Program, the international community as a whole has provided an estimated average of 1.2 million metric tons of food aid each year to North Korea since 1999.

North Korea Pursues an HEU Program

In the summer of 2002, however, the United States discovered that North Korea had not kept its part of the bargain. We learned conclusively that it was pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program based not on plutonium but on uranium enrichment. This was a clear violation of North Korea's obligations to South Korea under the Joint Denuclearization Declaration of 1992 and to the international community under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the D.P.R.K.'s Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It was also a fundamental breach of the U.S.-D.P.R.K. Agreed Framework, which aimed to "achieve peace and security on a nuclear-free Korean peninsula." By the way, our negotiator of the Agreed Framework, Ambassador Robert Gallucci, left the North Koreans in no doubt that any uranium enrichment program would break the Agreed Framework. As he testified to Congress in December, 1994, the Agreed Framework requires the D.P.R.K. to implement the North-South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, which precludes any reprocessing or enrichment capability. "If there were ever any move to enrich," Ambassador Gallucci told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "we would argue they were not in compliance with the Agreed Framework."

The matter was extremely serious. North Korea's goal appeared to be a plant that could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for two or more nuclear weapons per year when fully operational.

The President thus instructed me to lead an interagency U.S. team to Pyongyang in October 2002 to quietly inform the North Koreans that we knew about their secret nuclear arms program. I was to tell them that we had intended to propose bilateral negotiations on our entire range of concerns with North Korea, including missile proliferation, chemical and biological weapons, conventional forces, terrorism, and human rights. However, the North Koreans' violation of the Agreed Framework had put the nuclear issue again front and center. I was to call on North Korea to reverse its nuclear course, after which the United States would be prepared to consider bilateral negotiations on other matters.

The North Koreans Escalate

Surprisingly, the North Koreans acknowledged their uranium enrichment program to us and suggested that if we provided them with additional benefits, they would, at some point in the future, resolve our concerns about their nuclear programs -- how they would do so, they did not say. In other words, even though the North Koreans had violated the Agreed Framework, which had proven to be only a partial and thus unsatisfactory solution, they were proposing to us that we basically repeat the same formula. We weren't prepared to accept that. As Secretary Powell has said, we were not going to "buy the same horse" twice.

Instead of taking the opportunity we had afforded them to begin walking back their covert nuclear arms program, the North Koreans escalated the situation. In December 2002, they expelled IAEA inspectors and began to reactivate the 5 MW nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. In January, the D.P.R.K. announced its withdrawal from the NPT. And in October 2003, it declared it had finished reprocessing its 8,000-plus existing spent fuel rods. If that is indeed the case, it could have produced enough fissile material for an additional five or six nuclear weapons.

The North Korean Acknowledgement and Subsequent Denial

Let me digress here briefly to address the issue of the North Koreans' acknowledgement to me of their uranium enrichment program, because they later began to deny that they had done so, causing some confusion in the media.

The acknowledgement came over the entire course of a 40-minute-long meeting that my team and I had with North Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju, the number two man in the North Korean foreign ministry and said to be close to Kim Jong Il.

Kang's remarks were interpreted into English by his own interpreter, and his original Korean presentation was monitored by our side's experienced professional interpreter.

It was very clear to all members of my team that Kang was acknowledging the existence of a highly enriched uranium program and that North Korea was willing to negotiate about addressing our concerns about it if the United States first provided additional benefits to North Korea.

Thereafter, for nearly two months, even after we publicly stated that the North Koreans had acknowledged the uranium enrichment program to us, the D.P.R.K. did not deny the program or the acknowledgement. Instead, to the rest of the world, the D.P.R.K. essentially took an NCND position -- that is, to "neither confirm nor deny" the program. Only later, when it became clear that this was a major tactical error that was resulting in massive international criticism, did D.P.R.K. officials first begin to suggest that the United States had misunderstood its statements, and later still that the United States had lied about them. Only much later did the North Koreans actually begin to claim that they have no HEU program.

In any event, the key point in regard to this issue is that the steps taken by the United States subsequent to my mission to Pyongyang in October 2002 were in response not to the North Korean acknowledgement but to our knowledge, based on our own intelligence, of the North Korean uranium enrichment program. We are confident that our intelligence in this matter is well-founded. In fact, the recent confession of Pakistan's A.Q. Khan suggests that, if anything, the North Korean HEU program is of longer duration and more advanced than we had assessed.

U.S. Policy

So how are we to respond to this very serious situation in which North Korea has lifted the freeze on its plutonium-based nuclear arms program and is aggressively pursuing an enriched-uranium nuclear arms program?

The United States has adopted two basic principles for resolving this situation. First, we cannot accept anything less than the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of the North's nuclear programs. Second, the diplomatic format for achieving that outcome must be a multiparty framework.

Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Dismantlement

We insist on the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all of North Korea's nuclear programs because we must not again allow a situation in which the North's dismantlement of its nuclear arms program is put off into the distant future, as it was under the Agreed Framework. That would permit North Korea, at any time, to resume its use of nuclear threats to blackmail the international community.

We will not be satisfied with a resolution that is not complete. North Korea must dismantle not only its plutonium program but also its uranium enrichment program and its existing nuclear weapons.

We will not be satisfied with a resolution that is not verifiable. In this regard, the burden is not on the international community but on North Korea to come clean. As the Libya cases illustrates, there are ways that North Korea can do this as a sovereign country. It is certainly in North Korea's interests, as it is in Libya's.

We will not be satisfied with a "reversible solution". This must be once and for all. North Korea's nuclear programs and facilities must be dismantled, and never reconstituted. Mechanisms can be found to do this that are reasonable. This will not be difficult to accomplish once North Korea has made a fundamental decision to abandon its nuclear programs.

The Advantages of a Multilateral Framework

To accomplish these ends, the United States has strongly supported a multilateral process. Some have criticized this, and urged that multilateral talks be replaced, or at least supplemented, by bilateral U.S.-D.P.R.K. negotiations on the nuclear issue. We don't intend to do that. Let me explain why.

First, and most important, the D.P.R.K.'s nuclear arms programs are not just a bilateral U.S.-North Korean issue. North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear arsenal is a serious

threat to regional peace and security and a challenge to the global non-proliferation regime. The United States' bilateral effort to address the problem, resulting in the Agreed Framework of 1994, was less than successful. Other countries need to bring their interests, influence, and resources to bear, not only in persuading North Korea to end its nuclear arms program but to ensure that the program is never resumed and that broader conditions on the Korean Peninsula are conducive to lasting peace and security. I might add that South Korea and Japan have their own relations and problems with the D.P.R.K., and these are being addressed far more directly than was the case ten years ago.

Thus, in early 2003, the United States proposed multilateral talks to end North Korea's nuclear program. The P.R.C. made strenuous efforts with North Korea to realize such talks. The result was trilateral talks in Beijing in April, with participation by the P.R.C., North Korea, and the U.S., and Six-Party Talks in Beijing in August, which also included the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Russia.

The two rounds of multilateral talks in Beijing represented important first steps in achieving a fundamental solution of the North Korean nuclear problem. The North Koreans heard from all of the other parties present that a North Korean nuclear weapons capability is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. And the other parties heard first-hand North Korea's threats to expand its nuclear weapons program. This was very important, because, in the past, the North Koreans utilized the tactic of making such threats to the United States while denying them to others -- of taking a hardline position with us while telling others that it was the United States that was hardline.

But it isn't just the United States that the D.P.R.K. plays off against. During the decades of Sino-Soviet rivalry, North Korea became adept at playing one off against the other. With the end of the Cold War, North Korea has continued to focus on dealing bilaterally with all of its neighbors, playing them off against each other.

The six-party format helps to deny North Korea the opportunity to play its neighbors off, one against the other. The result is increased understanding and solidarity among the six-party participants about the nature and seriousness of the North Korean nuclear problem.

Preparing for Round Two of Six-Party Talks

As I noted, the second round of Six-Party Talks is less than two weeks away. We will meet in Beijing on February 25, and we expect that the round will result in further progress toward a permanent solution, even if the progress may not be readily apparent.

At the talks, as I have stressed, the aim of the United States will be the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear programs. That is our focus, but we are prepared to listen carefully and respond to all positions.

North Korea has said that its nuclear arms program is a defensive response to the hostility of the Bush Administration, and it has demanded, among other things, security assurances from the United States before it will, as it says, "consider resolving American concerns." I would note that the D.P.R.K.'s HEU program existed long before the Bush Administration was inaugurated. I would also note that President Bush stated as early as February 2002 that the United States has no intention of invading or attacking North Korea. Nevertheless, in an effort to move the process along, President Bush stated last October that the United States was willing to join other participants in the Six-Party Talks in providing security assurances to North Korea in the context of its complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear program.

In preparing for the next round, we have consulted especially closely with our allies the Republic of Korea and Japan, both bilaterally and trilaterally. We have also had extensive bilateral consultations with both the P.R.C. and Russia.

President Bush is committed to a diplomatic solution and is convinced that multilateral talks are the appropriate diplomatic forum, for the reasons I have described. We are confident that the Six-Party Talks offer the best opportunity to persuade North Korea to end its nuclear arms program and thereby to open up brighter prospects for the entire region. That is not to say that we expect to resolve the nuclear problem in a matter of a few weeks or even a few months. It is a difficult issue and will take time. But we will take the time necessary to achieve a fundamental and permanent solution.

IAI and PSI to Continue on Their Merits

Meanwhile, the U.S. is currently working with many of North Korea's neighbors in East Asia to enhance law enforcement and judicial cooperation to address North Korea's illicit and criminal activities. North Korea is involved in activities such as counterfeiting, drug-running, and smuggling. We are also working towards implementing the President's Proliferation Security Initiative, a separate program to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missiles. While not directed at North Korea, North Korea is affected because it is the world's leading proliferator. These initiatives will be continued on their merits.

Conclusion

North Korea has an opportunity to change its path. As some Americans might put it there is a chance for redemption. The examples of Libya, Ukraine, South Africa and others demonstrate that there is real reason for hope that North Korea will eventually respond. States, even those with existing nuclear arms, can decide that abandoning nuclear weapons is in their interests. Presumably, the intention of the D.P.R.K. leadership in embracing nuclear weapons was to enhance the regime's security and status. Clearly, the effect has been the opposite. With continued international solidarity, there is good reason to believe that North Korea will eventually rethink its assumptions and reverse course. The Six-Party Talks offer North Korea a path toward international responsibility and increased well being for its people. The United States sincerely hopes that the D.P.R.K. will take the opportunity.

Thank you.



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