



## Lessons from Libya and North Korea's Strategic Choice

**John R. Bolton, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security**  
Yonsei University, Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul, South Korea  
July 21, 2004

[\[Questions and Answers\]](#)

### Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to be back in Seoul and have the opportunity to speak before this distinguished audience. It has been a remarkable year. In the past twelve months, we have witnessed a number of momentous events, all of which point to one inescapable conclusion: we live in a safer world today than we did one year ago.

There are still regimes that support terrorism, but there are fewer today than before. Over 40 nations are working together to ensure that Afghanistan no longer provides safe harbor to the terrorists of al Qaeda. In Iraq, over 30 nations worked together to ensure as smooth a transfer of power as possible to the people of Iraq. With Saddam Hussein captured and awaiting trial in his own country, Iraq no longer poses the threat it once did to the region or the outside world. Within Iraq, people can now breathe air free of threat that chemical agents will again be shelled upon their villages by Saddam's armies. And most importantly, and for the first time in decades, the Iraqi people have the opportunity to taste freedom and govern themselves, free from the tyranny of a brutal dictator. We thank the people of the Republic of Korea for your courageous support in helping to make this happen. It will not be forgotten, and we view your support as a testament to the strength of our alliance.

The world is also safer because of our actions against the shadowy entities and companies operating within states—often times without the knowledge or consent of their home governments. Here I am referring to the work of over 60 nations now participating in the Proliferation Security Initiative ("PSI") and the unearthing and disruption of the black market arms network of A.Q. Khan. As President Bush stated, "Three years ago, a private weapons proliferation network was doing business around the world. This network, operated by the Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan, was selling nuclear plans and equipment to the highest bidder, and found willing buyers in places like Libya, Iran, and North Korea....We have [now] ended one of the most dangerous sources of proliferation in the world, and the American people are safer." So are the people of the world. Left unchecked, A.Q. Khan's criminal network would have succeeded in supplying critical components for nuclear weapons to a number of outlaw regimes whose intentions were certainly hostile to the United States, our friends and our allies. Nations around the world are helping roll up the A.Q. Khan network. And new nations are continuing to join in the activities of PSI to address the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of outlaw regimes and terrorists.

Finally, the world is safer today than one year ago because of an event unprecedented in modern history: after years of isolation and being caught up in a web of sanctions, the leader of a regime made a simple, but profound strategic choice—he came to the conclusion that his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction made his country and his regime not more, but less secure. It is not just the outside world that has benefited. Indeed, what a difference a year has made to the people of Libya since Colonel Qhadadfi made and acted upon that bold and momentous decision.

I will describe these benefits in a moment, but let me assure you at the outset that my reason for doing so is not because I believe this audience has a profound interest in the politics of North Africa. Almost exactly a year ago, I spoke of the strategic choice faced by Kim Jong Il. I spoke of how relations between the United States and the DPRK would advance once it stopped devoting the country's scarce resources to the pursuit of weapons of terror and mass destruction. I spoke of how the long-suffering people of North Korea would benefit enormously from exchanges and opportunities to interact with the outside world.

Sadly, one year later, the leader of North Korea has not made that strategic choice to move away from the destructive legacies of the past and place his people first. He still fails to recognize that his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction makes North Korea less, not more secure. When I spoke a year ago, some may have doubted that the United States would fulfill its pledge to put relations on a new plane once North Korea fulfilled its pledge to verifiably dismantle its weapons of mass destruction programs in a complete and irreversible way. Those doubts should now be dispelled. The reason is that I can offer empirical proof—proof of how the United States acts toward such regimes when they learn from their past mistakes and work to make amends with the international community. Let there be no doubt: the case of Libya has shown concretely the benefits that can flow when leaders of isolated regimes make the strategic choice to invest in their countries future, and not in weapons of mass destruction.

To be sure, there are differences between the cases of North Korea and Libya, but whatever cultural, historical, geographical and natural resource differences separate the two, they share an important commonality: the primary obstacle to both countries' prosperity and development has been the decision by their respective rulers to pursue terrorist activities, pursue weapons of mass destruction, and trample the human rights of their citizens.

The paths of North Korea and Libya, however, have now diverged—Colonel Qhadadfi has made a strategic choice to put his people before his unjustified fears of a U.S. invasion. Kim Jong Il has not.

I read with great interest a recent quote attributed just a few days ago to North Korea's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Han Sung-ryol. In those remarks, he rejected the model of Libya as being applicable to the DPRK, saying his country was "not interested." What was most telling, though, was his next comment where he remarked: "How can we trust the U.S. when a powerful country like the U.S. doesn't trust us?"

The answer to this question is simple, and, building on the U.S. presentation at the Six-Party Talks, I will again attempt to answer it now.

### Libya: A Model for the DPRK

Ambassador Han is right when he says that the United States does not trust North Korea. It would be fair to say, though, that the United States had no trust in Libya either. Only now are we building that trust—slowly, but steadily and unmistakably, it is happening—and we are doing it as part of a

verifiable agreement in which Libya is giving up its weapons of mass destruction programs in exchange for a new relationship with the United States and the outside world. The legacy of mistrust, though, had been well-founded. Libya, like North Korea, had been involved in the bombing of civilian airliners. Libya, like North Korea, was covertly developing WMD programs, in contravention of its international obligations.

Resolving this conundrum with Libya was not easy, but we found a way. The answer was to be found in an old Russian proverb, one quoted by President Ronald Reagan in the context of negotiations with the former Soviet Union. In those negotiations, President Reagan was asked about how to resolve the issue of lack of trust with the former Soviet Union. His response to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, was clear and direct: "Trust, but Verify."

And this is exactly how we approached the case of Libya. After decades of lying and deceit by Libya, the United States and the United Kingdom insisted on the application of verification measures that met international standards and could give the international community confidence. When Libya approached us and said it was ready to abandon its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, we made clear to the Libyans that historical realities would compel us to verify their declaration. After some discussion on the modalities of that verification, the Libyans agreed.

After the initial declaration of facilities related to weapons of mass destruction, in this case not just nuclear but chemical and missile-related facilities, Libya allowed experts from the United States and the United Kingdom to visit those facilities. Several months later into the discussions, Libya also agreed to visits by experts to non-declared facilities.

Once Libya agreed to rid itself of these programs, we took the next step by helping Libya to physically *remove, disable, or dismantle* most of the country's critical WMD infrastructure. There was no 'freeze' negotiated and the bulk of the elimination of their WMD programs took place within a relatively short time-frame of only a few months. To this day, along with the IAEA and the OPCW, the U.S. and the U.K. continue to work with the Libyans to increase our confidence that they will not reconstitute their WMD programs.

What has this meant for Libya and, more importantly, the people of Libya? The benefits have not just been in the abstract. They are direct and being implemented now. In response to Libya's actions to eliminate its WMD and long-range missile programs, Libya has seen the tangible benefits that better relations with the United States can bring. We are no longer enforcing some of the most important sanctions against Libya, including travel restrictions, trade in oil and other important industries. U.S. government officials have noticed that formerly empty hotels in Tripoli are teeming with Western businessmen. The United States has opened a liaison office in Tripoli, and Libya is planning on reciprocating in Washington—the first step, we hope, to the eventual reestablishment of full diplomatic relations. Libya participates in international meetings like those held by the OPCW, the IAEA—not as a pariah nation, but as a partner in the laudable goals of these organizations. Libya's recent help to the World Food Program efforts in Darfur, Sudan, show that it is trying to rejoin the world community in a positive way.

We have sent doctors and scientist redirection experts to assist the Libyans in their efforts to modernize and redeploy the scientific and health care fields, redirecting efforts from WMD to more productive activities with the full support of the international community. With Italian assistance, and under international supervision, the Libyans are converting the infamous Rabta plant from a chemical weapons factory to a pharmaceutical plant.

What bears mentioning, though, is that the United States and the United Kingdom did not offer specific promises or rewards to the Libyans. Rather, we held out the most attractive incentive available: the ability to naturally reap the benefits that comes from participating fully in the community of nations. By ending its pariah status, Libya is no longer shunned by the outside world. Economic and security benefits have been the natural and inevitable result.

The principle, though, of not rewarding outlaw regimes merely for coming back into compliance with their past obligations is an important one for the United States to uphold. It is not only anathema to our values—it is bad policy. It will encourage further violations not only with the state in question, but other rogue states as well.

### **Moving Forward with the DPRK**

How then do we move forward and encourage Kim Jong Il to make the strategic decision that Colonel Qhadaffi made? Ambassador Han lamented that the process with Libya was different than that with North Korea, commenting a few days ago that, "Even though the U.S. and the U.K. negotiated with Libya for eight months, there has been no type of negotiation between the U.S. and us."

But we do have a framework for such negotiations with the DPRK in place—the Six-Party Talks. While the Six-Party Talks are a means to an end, we still believe it is the best venue at this time to realize the shared goal of all countries participating—namely—a Korean Peninsula permanently free of nuclear weapons. Indeed, the Six-Party Talks have enabled us to be open about discussing the benefits that will accrue to the people of North Korea once Kim Jong Il makes the strategic choice to abandon his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Other Six-Party partners, for example, have offered to provide energy assistance even before the dismantlement process is complete, indeed, from the outset of the process.

Why should North Korea believe us? First, because the United States has kept its word to Libya—and the evidence of that is clear for all, even Pyongyang, to see. Second, the other participating countries to the Six-Party Talks are present. The process and the negotiations themselves are transparent and the nations with the most at stake will be part of the solution and its implementation.

It is critical, therefore, to have a truly multilateral solution. Some have accused the Bush Administration of ignoring the North Korean nuclear issue, allowing it to fester given our refusal to engage in direct, bilateral negotiations. This criticism is off the mark. The U.S. government tried the bilateral route and it failed—it was called the Agreed Framework of 1994. Contrary to what critics of the Bush Administration suggest, the Agreed Framework did not resolve the issue, it simply postponed it—and ultimately made it worse. We tested Kim Jong Il's intentions when we rewarded him with carrots at the time and our reward was that he temporarily froze one nuclear weapons program based on plutonium, but started another based on uranium enrichment in secret. Eight years later, he was able to almost quite literally flip a switch to unfreeze and restart his plutonium program.

We have a saying: "Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me." We will not be fooled again. It would be the height of irresponsibility for the Bush Administration to negotiate a band-aid solution and leave the problem to some future administration when North Korea again decided to flip a switch and unfreeze its programs. We are interested in a lasting and meaningful solution to the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program. This was the fundamental failing of the 1994 Agreed Framework and it will not be replicated by the Bush Administration—either in this term, or in our next. Given the sad history of our and other states' and international organizations' negotiations with North Korea on the nuclear issue, halting ongoing nuclear programs can only make sense when it is explicitly and credibly part of a clear plan leading to rapid dismantlement.

Our experience with Libya shows that a freeze is unnecessary, and, moreover, would simply delay the time when the people of North Korea could reap the benefits of rejoining the international community. Furthermore, the longer a freeze went on, the more we would question whether or not Kim Jong Il had truly made the correct strategic choice, or whether he was simply holding out for more rewards. The task of disabling, dismantling, and removing North Korea's nuclear programs, though, is much larger and more complex than it was for Libya, so the sooner we can get started the better.

For our part, we need to see movement on the part of the DPRK's representatives at the next round of Six-Party Talks. To the extent that these talks have not made more progress, it is for two primary reasons: 1) North Korea continues to deny that it has a uranium enrichment program; and 2) North Korea continues to insist on maintaining a 'peaceful' nuclear program, when they themselves told us at the last round that most of their program, including the 5 megawatt research reactor, had military applications. We must have a shared understanding of the objective facts before we can arrive at a meaningful solution. So there is no misunderstanding—North Korea's continued denial of its uranium enrichment program precludes a solution to this problem. And so there is no misunderstanding—the United States knows that North Korea's nuclear programs are primarily intended to support its nuclear arms programs. This is why we insist that the dismantlement of their programs must be complete, verifiable, and irreversible.

Despite the slow progress, it is our confidence in the Six-Party process that compelled the United States to specify in more detail the nature of our proposal at the last round. We hope North Korea is carefully studying our proposal and will avoid statements that dismiss it out of hand. So far, North Korea has not responded formally, but has complained publicly that the proposed timelines are "unscientific and unrealistic." We believe the case of Libya proves not only our sincerity and our willingness to make progress, but that it can happen. It was with this in mind that Secretary Powell remarked in reference to the Libyan situation, "we hope the North Koreans are watching all of this, and realizing that others are getting smart." Similarly, Kim Jong Il could follow the advice of Dr. Condoleezza Rice. She was serious when she expressed several days ago her hope that Kim Jong Il would talk to Colonel Qaddafi. In so doing, he would learn of the benefits in store for his country upon reintegration into the international system.

#### **Time is Not on Our Side**

The seriousness of the more detailed U.S. proposal presented by the United States at the last round of Six-Party Talks should put to rest any reservations that our side is in a holding pattern until the next U.S. presidential election. We seek progress now. At the highest levels, we have demonstrated a seriousness of purpose to resolving this issue and ending the threat posed by North Korea's possession or potential to transfer nuclear weapons or related materials.

As Vice President Cheney emphasized, while we will continue to approach to the Six-Party Talks with patience, we must be responsible to our citizens and recognize that it is the North Koreans who may be stalling. President Bush has made it clear that the Six-Party Talks are the best way at this time that we know of to achieve our goal of the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all of North Korea's nuclear programs. But we are not talking for the sake of talking and we must use all means at our disposal to prevent North Korea from threatening international peace and security, either through its possession or through its potential exports of nuclear weapons and related material. It is for this reason that no option has or can be taken off the table or unconditionally ruled out.

This is why the Bush Administration has worked hard to achieve international consensus, not only through the Six-Party Talks, but in other multilateral fora as well. We worked with other members of the IAEA Board of Governors, which reported the North Korean nuclear issue to the United Nations Security Council, though the Security Council has not acted. We have worked with members of APEC and ASEAN and the G-8 to make the world understand the threat to international peace and security posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. We have worked through the United Nations to condemn North Korea for the egregious abuse it inflicts upon its citizens starving in death camps. We are using all of these institutions to encourage, and yes, pressure Kim Jong Il to make the right strategic choice.

But don't tell us, least of all President Bush, that our proposal is "unscientific and unrealistic." Who would have guessed that just two weeks ago, the President of the United States would be standing next to the dismantled components of Libya's now defunct nuclear weapons program at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, declaring that: "We're working with responsible governments and international institutions to convince the leaders of North Korea and Iran that their nuclear weapons ambitions are deeply contrary to their own national interests." Ladies and gentleman, it does not get any more real than that.

There is, of course, the possibility that Kim Jong Il will not make the correct strategic choice. We are prepared for that as well. In that event, the world should know that even now the United States and other countries are not sitting idly by waiting for Kim Jong Il to see the light. Let me be clear: the United States and like-minded countries are doing all we can to stop North Korea from buying and selling the technology to produce nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, or the means to deliver them. We have persuaded Libya and Yemen to renounce all military trade with North Korea and we will continue to encourage other countries to make the same decision.

We are also devoting considerable resources to interdiction efforts through the Proliferation Security Initiative. North Korea likes to say that PSI is unfairly directed at it. North Korea is half right. It is directed at countries like North Korea, but not unfairly so. If North Korea wants to get out of the spotlight of PSI—there is an easy way—get out of the business of buying or selling weapons of terror and mass destruction. It is that simple. PSI is an activity that is not directed toward any one nation—it is directed at the illicit transfer of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them worldwide. And it will not stop.

Few would have guessed that PSI would have become as successful as it has since President Bush announced it in Krakow, Poland, on May 31, 2003. Its successes are notable. It is not lost upon the international community that it was only a few months after a successful PSI operation against Libya that Colonel Qaddafi made the pledge to renounce fully his pursuit of WMD.

This is not to gloss over remaining differences that we have with Libya—these differences still exist. But a meaningful dialogue is taking place. The same can happen with North Korea. After Kim Jong Il makes the strategic choice to abandon his pursuit of WMD and the means to deliver them, we can begin discussing a range of other important issues. It will not be easy and the list is long, ranging from North Korea's acts of state terrorism against the people of the Republic of Korea, Japan, and others, the disposition of conventional forces along the DMZ, and, of course, the trampling of the most basic of human rights of so many struggling to stay alive in North Korea.

But what a difference a year can make as the events in Libya show. And the difference between this year and last stems from the simple, yet profound strategic choice by Colonel Qaddafi, who came to the realization that his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction made him less, not more secure.

With Kim Jong Il, we are sadly still at that crossroads. The world is still waiting for Kim Jong Il to make the right strategic choice. Whatever his choice, though, we are prepared. In the words of President Bush: "There are still outlaw regimes pursuing weapons of mass destruction, but the world no longer looks the other way. Today, because America has acted, and because America has led, the forces of terror and tyranny have suffered defeat after defeat, and America and the world are safer."

Thank you.

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.