The Hungry Mouse that Roared:

The Consequences of a North Korean Nuclear Bomb

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The Bush administration seems to be of two minds regarding the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Publicly, administration officials speak of DPRK nuclear weapons as one of the greatest threats to world peace, as evidenced by President Bush's labeling of North Korea as part of the "axis of evil." The administration's actions, however, show little urgency about solving the problem. When allegations arose that North Korea was pursuing an enriched uranium program--which even if true could not produce fissile material until at least 2005[1]--the United States responded by scuttling the 1994 Agreed Framework that had frozen the DPRK's plutonium production capability. As a result, North Korea was able to remove the 8,000 spent fuel rods that had been stored under IAEA safeguards, and claims to have reprocessed all of them.[2] If true, this would mean that North Korea has gone from having enough fissile material for one or two nuclear weapons to sufficient amounts to produce

[1] This is according to a CIA estimate, although some other estimates range as late as 2007. http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/dprk/nuke-uranium.htm

[2] Sigfried Hecker, the former head of Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory, reported that during a recent visit to North Korea he was shown something that appeared to be plutonium metal, but that he was unable to confirm the DPRK's reprocessing claims, or whether they had weaponized any plutonium. *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network (NAPSNet) Daily Report*, January 4, 2004, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0401/jan21%2D04.html#item2 Hecker's testimony is available at http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2004/hrg040121a.html

five or six bombs. As DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan reportedly told Jack Pritchard, the former U.S. special envoy to North Korea who resigned in protest of the Bush administration's policy, "time is not on the American side."[3]

The U.S. inaction on the DPRK nuclear crisis appears to be predicated on the ongoing hope that the DPRK regime will simply collapse and be absorbed by South Korea, combined with an ideological distaste for negotiating with so-called "rogue states." At one point, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld even approved a new strategy, OP Plan 5030, to deliberately increase tensions on the Korean Peninsula short of war, in hopes of inducing regime change in North Korea.[4] Whatever righteous satisfaction the administration gains from taking a hard line against Kim Jong-Il, however, is greatly overshadowed by the danger inherent in DPRK development of a nuclear capability. A nuclearized North Korea could increase instability on the Korean Peninsula, spark an arms race in Northeast Asia, undermine global nonproliferation norms, and increase the likelihood of nuclear weapons use.

Consequences for the Korean Peninsula

DPRK acquisition of a nuclear weapon would have the most serious consequences for the security and stability of the Korean Peninsula. The worst-case scenario, of course, is that nuclear weapons would actually be used in a second Korean War. Many South Koreans doubt that North Korea would use nuclear weapons against Seoul, believing that the weapons are aimed at the United States or Japan. Kim Dae-Jung's former unification minister was quoted as saying, "Even if the North does possess nuclear weapons, she would be reluctant to make use of them in the small Korean peninsula." A poll

[3] Jack Pritchard, "What I Saw in North Korea," *New York Times* op-ed, January 21, 2004.

conducted by Gallup and the *Chosun Ilbo* in December 2002 found that 54.4% of South Koreans thought that DPRK nuclear weapons were targeted towards "other countries."[5] Some even see a DPRK nuclear weapon as a positive thing, arguing that anything North Korea has now will simply be inherited by South Korea after unification.[6] This attitude is reflected in the popular 1993 novel--later made into a film--*The Rose of Sharon has Blossomed*. In this book, South Korean nuclear scientists defy the United States and work with North Korea to build nuclear weapons, which are used against a remilitarizing Japan.

ROK hopes that brotherly feeling will protect them from a DPRK nuclear weapon are not borne out by history. Ethnic kinship did not stop Koreans on both sides of the 38th parallel from brutally slaughtering each other in the Korean War, in which a total of approximately 3 million Koreans were killed, nearly 75% of them civilians. Nor did it prevent two DPRK agents, reportedly at the instigation of current DPRK leader Kim Jong-Il, from planting a bomb aboard an ROK airliner in 1987, resulting in the deaths of all 115 people aboard.[7] Additionally, North Korea has kidnapped numerous ROK civilians and made several attempts on the lives of the ROK leadership. In 1968, DPRK commandos were stopped just yards shy of the presidential Blue House. In 1974, a DPRK assassin shot at ROK President Pak Chung-Hee during a speech, missing him but killing his wife.[8] In 1983, North Korea detonated a bomb in Rangoon during a visit by

[4] "Upping the Ante for North Korea," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 21, 2003, p. 7.
[5] Cited in Bong Youngshik, "Anti-Americanism and the U.S.-Korea Military Alliance," *Confrontation and Innovation on the Korean Peninsula*, Korea Economic Institute of America: December, 2003. http://www.keia.org/Midyear/Midyear2003/contents2003.html
[6] A survey conducted last year of 430 ROK college students found that 77% supported DPRK development of nuclear weapons. See Marcus Noland, "How Bush Risks Losing Korea," *Financial Times*, January 22, 2004.
[7] Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, new edition, 2001, pp. 183-6.
[8] Ibid, 47-8.

ROK President Chun Doo-Hwan, missing him but killing several members of his cabinet.[9] While it is true that the frequency of these incidents has been greatly reduced in recent years as the two Koreas have sought opening and reconciliation, much of the same leadership that ordered these atrocities remains in place today. There is little reason to doubt that, if backed into a corner, North Korea would utilize any weapon at its disposal against South Korea or any other country that stood up against it.

Nor should the danger of an unintentional or accidental launch be discounted. The success of the United States and the Soviet Union in preventing nuclear exchange throughout the Cold War has bred a false sense of security regarding the stability of a nuclear deterrence posture. Since the collapse of the USSR, however, declassified materials from both Soviet and American archives have unveiled numerous occasions where the two superpowers came perilously close to nuclear exchange due to false alarms or miscalculations. One of these incidents even occurred after the Soviet collapse, when a Norwegian rocket launch in 1995 set off Soviet early warning systems, bringing Russian officials within minutes of asking then President Boris Yeltsin for permission to launch a retaliatory strike.[10] In other words, the two superpower rivals, bound together by a series of treaty relations and possessing the world's most sophisticated command, control, and early warning systems, still needed a fair degree of good luck to escape nuclear Armageddon. On the Korean peninsula, on the other hand, the only treaty binding various parties is a 50-year old Armistice Agreement, which one of the parties (South Korea) never signed, which has been violated several times, and which North Korea has repeatedly threatened to abandon. Large armies face each other across a

[9] Ibid, 139-140.

highly militarized border where warning time of an impending attack is virtually nonexistent. DPRK command and control and early warning systems would be greatly hampered by the obsolete equipment, crumbling infrastructure, and lack of technological savvy in North Korea. With the energy system in shambles, setting up reliable communications systems to prevent accidental or unauthorized weapons launches would be nigh on impossible.[11]

Nor is North Korea the only nuclear capable country with a presence on the Korean Peninsula. While the United States withdrew its tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea in 1991, it can still easily blanket DPRK territory with multi-megaton weapons launched from submarines, bombers, or missile silos. Nuclear contingencies have been an integral part of U.S. military planning for fighting on the Korean Peninsula since the Korean War itself, when both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations seriously considered use of nuclear weapons against DPRK and Chinese forces.[12] In the intervening years, the United States has never ruled out the first-use of nuclear weapons, even against non-nuclear states, and North Korea has continued to play a major role in U.S. nuclear warplanning.[13] Most recently, the current Bush administration has begun research into low-yield, ground-penetrating nuclear weapons, specifically to be able to attack the DPRK's multitudinous underground facilities.[14]

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[10] For a discussion of this incident and other false alarms, see http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/russia/closecall/howclose.html

[11] For a discussion of the DPRK's energy situation, see James H. Williams, David Von Hippel, and Peter Hayes, "Fuel and Famine: Rural Energy Crisis in the DPRK," Nautilus Institute, 2000, available at http://www.nautilus.org/dprkbriefingbook/energy/pp46.html Although the paper deals with the relation of the energy crisis to the food shortage, its discussion of the DPRK energy situation is informative.

[12] Peter Hayes, *Pacific Powderkeg: American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea*, Lexington, MA: 1991, pp. 9-16.

[13] Hans M. Kristensen, "Preemptive Posturing," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 58, no. 5 (September/October 2002), pp. 54-59.

[14] Stephen I. Schwartz, "Nukes You Can Use: Build 'em, Test 'em, Use 'em—The Bush Administration Really Loves the Bomb," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (May/June 2002), pp. 18-19, 69.

If the danger of nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula remains in the realm of theory, another negative effect of the DPRK nuclear program is already reality. International concern with the nuclear program has led to a drastic drop in food assistance to North Korea, particularly from the United States, which was previously the primary donor to World Food Program (WFP) appeals for North Korea. The WFP announced on February 9 that it had run out of cereal rations and would have to cease food aid delivery to four million North Koreans.[15] The Bush administration cut food donations to 100,000 metric tons per year, about one-third the average amount of food aid donated during the Clinton years.[16] Overall, international food aid to North Korea in 2003 was down 38% from a year earlier.[17] The situation has been further exacerbated by the reductions in energy capacity since the United States shut off deliveries of heavy fuel oil under the Agreed Framework.

Concerns over food monitoring, primarily articulated by human rights groups aiding DPRK refugees in China, have undoubtedly played a major role in the drop in donations, even though the WFP has consistently defended its monitoring program.[18] Generalized "donor fatigue" over a crisis that has now entered its ninth year with no signs of abating also plays a role. The Bush administration's own rhetoric, in particular the oft-repeated characterization of Kim Jong-Il as "building nuclear weapons while starving his own people," suggests that the nuclear standoff is a major factor however. While the

[15] *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network (NAPSNet) Daily Report*, February 9, 2004, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0402/FEB09-04.html#item6

[16] According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the United States donated a total of 1.8 million metric tons of commodities to North Korea from 1995-2000. Government of the United States, "More Agricultural Commodities Donated for North Korea," December 18, 2001, http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/s/89E76FC53BA1E9BB85256B260074D554

[17] Agence France-Presse, "International Aid to North Korea Falls Sharply Amid Nuclear Stand-off," Seoul, January 21, 2004.

criticism that North Korea is misallocating resources has some merit, the nuclear program is not fungible enough to be converted into a food security program. The DPRK's nuclear development is based largely on trading missiles for nuclear technology,[19] combined with its ability to mobilize labor, including scientific labor, in support of national goals. It does not rely on cash payments that could easily be used to purchase food supplies instead.

What is ultimately more significant is that the continued standoff over the nuclear program prevents any serious attempt at the economic development that North Korea needs to provide its people with a basic quality of life. As long as it is perceived as a "rogue state," North Korea will not be eligible for assistance from international financial institutions, nor will it be able to attract private investors. Bush himself stated, "we will continue to make it very clear to Kim Jong-il that should he expect any kind of aid and help for his people, that he must comply with the world's demand that he not develop a nuclear weapon."[20] U.S. sanctions against North Korea prevent Pyongyang from applying for assistance from international financial institutions, and would make it difficult for South Korean, Chinese, or other companies to sell any goods produced in proposed special economic zones in Kaesong and Sinuiju. Thus even in the absence of direct economic aid from the United States, Washington still has a large say over DPRK economic development.

[18] Agence France-Presse, "U.S. Raises Concerns about North Korean Food Shipments," Washington, January 16, 2004.
[19] Recent revelations about the nuclear proliferation network run by Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan has reinforced that North Korea received nuclear assistance from Pakistan in exchange for missile technology, not cash. See David Rhode and Talat Hussein, "Delicate Dance for Musharraf in Nuclear Case," *New York Times*, February 8, 2004.
[20] Office of the Press Secretary, "President Bush: 'This Is a Defining Moment for the U.N. Security Council," February 7, 2003, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030207-3.html

More difficult to quantify is the effect of the DPRK nuclear program on the economy of South Korea. The ROK's international credit and investment ratings are adversely affected by the continued DPRK threat; adverse developments on the nuclear issue have sometimes led investors to downgrade South Korea even when the economy was doing well.[21] The nuclear standoff also prevents the kind of ROK economic projects in North Korea that could have a long-term positive impact. The presence of an isolated, hostile North Korea turns South Korea into a virtual island, cutting off the land route to mainland Asia, forcing Seoul to rely on sea and air transportation for movement of goods and people. The sunshine policy of former ROK President Kim Dae-Jung attempted to solve this problem by promoting economic cooperation projects, including a reconnection of the railway between North and South Korea. Implementing these projects has been hampered, both politically and economically, by the DPRK's pursuit of a nuclear weapons option. Delays in much-needed investment and development aid to North Korea may well in the long run increase the economic and social costs to South Korea of eventual unification.

Regional Consequences

It is not true, as has been sometimes argued, that Northeast Asia has a longer or bloodier history of conflict than Western Europe does. One should not forget the centuries of coalition warfare among European powers, culminating in the mass slaughters of the two world wars. It is true, however, that Europe has made significantly greater progress toward reconciliation and integration since World War II than Asia has.

[21] For example, Merrill Lynch in early 2003 cited the nuclear issue when downgrading the ROK investment grading. See *Korea Insight*, Vol. 5, #4 (April 2003), Korea Economic Institute of America, http://www.keia.org/Insight/Insight-April03.pdf

With the end of the Cold War, the primary remaining barrier to greater integration in Northeast Asia is the presence of an impoverished, totalitarian regime in North Korea. Giving this "spoiler state" access to nuclear weapons will only serve to further destabilize an already volatile situation.

The need for greater cooperation in the security, economic, and environmental realms in Northeast Asia is evident. The region accounts for 43 percent of the world's population,[22] and a large portion of its economic activity. Of the five states in the region, two—China and Russia—are acknowledged nuclear powers, while two others—South Korea and Japan—are close allies of the United States and under its nuclear umbrella. Other than Far Eastern Russia, the region lacks significant raw materials for energy production, forcing it to rely heavily on fossil fuel imports from other regions to meet its ever-growing demands for energy. Competition for energy resources is one of the most likely sources of regional conflict in the coming years, and the hope of finding off-shore oil deposits is at the heart of ongoing disputes over such seemingly insignificant territories as Tokto/Takeshima, a small outcropping of rocks jointly claimed by South Korea and Japan. The lack of energy resources also has led countries in the region, particularly Japan and South Korea, to rely heavily on nuclear power, thus producing large amounts of fissile material that could potentially be used to make nuclear

[22] Cited figure is as of 2000 and was found in Sidney Westley, "A 'Snapshot' of Populations in Asia," *Asia-Pacific Population and Policy*, no. 59, Honolulu: East-West Center, April, 2002.

weapons.[23] According to a leading Japanese energy specialist, "Northeast Asia is the only region [in the world] where nuclear power is expected to grow."[24]

The KEDO project, for all its flaws, represented one potential route for regional energy cooperation. To safely operate the two light-water reactors being supplied under the Agreed Framework, North Korea would need to greatly increase its electric grid capacity.[25] This could most easily be done by connecting the LWRs with one or more of the grids in the region—China, South Korea, or Russia. A preliminary study by the Far Eastern Institute in Vladivostock demonstrated that a line from Vladivostock to Seoul, running through the LWR site, could provide peak energy-trading ability and capacity savings that would be economically beneficial to all involved.[26] The scuttling of the Agreed Framework has blocked this possibility, at least for the time being. A pipeline project to bring natural gas from Far Eastern Russia to the other countries in the region is being planned to skirt DPRK territory.[27] As long as the nuclear standoff remains, any regional cooperation will continue to take place around, not through, North Korea.

If economic cooperation in Northeast Asia is elusive, security cooperation barely registers on the radar. Although the Cold War standoff pitting China, Russia, and North Korea on one side against the United States, Japan and South Korea on the other has

[23] As of 2002, South Korea relied on imported petroleum for 49.1% of its energy production, liquid natural gas (also imported) for 11.1%, and domestic nuclear for 14.3%. Jungmin Kang, "Update on Energy Sector Activities and Plans in the Republic of Korea," Paper presented at the fourth East Asian Energy Futures Workshop, November 4-7, 2003, http://www.nautilus.org/energy/eaef/Fourth_EAEF/KangROKCurrent.pdf
[24] Tatsujiro Suzuki, "Energy Security and the Role of Nuclear Power in Japan," Paper presented at the first East Asian Energy Futures Workshop, http://www.nautilus.org/energy/eaef/Reg_Japan_final.PDF
[25] John Bickel, "Grid Stability and Safety Issues Associated with Nuclear Power Plants," paper presented at the First Workshop Power Grid Interconnection in Northeast Asia, Beijing, China, May 14-16, 2001, http://www.nautilus.org/energy/grid/papers/bickel.pdf
[26] Sergei Podkovalnikov, "Study for Russia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, and China Power Interconnection," Paper presented at the Second Workshop on Power Grid Interconnection in Northeast Asia, Shenzhen, China, May 6-8, 2002, http://www.nautilus.org/energy/grid/2002Workshop/Podkovalnikov_020617.PDF

passed, tensions remain. Japan worries about a rising China overtaking it as a military and economic power. Chinese and Koreans retain bitter memories of Japanese aggression in the previous century, bitterness exacerbated by the persistent impression that Japan, in contrast to Germany, has not really repented for its actions.[28] Russia worries that population declines in the Far East combined with rising Chinese immigration will lead to the loss of its eastern territory. Lurking behind the scenes is the fear of a future clash between China and the United States, be it over Taiwan or the more generalized rivalry for hegemony.

While all the countries in the region have similar interests in seeing reform and opening in North Korea, their priorities greatly diverge. South Korea's main goal is preventing a second Korean War at all cost, as a conflagration would be devastating to Seoul. South Korea also opposes a collapse of North Korea that would leave ROK taxpayers footing most of the bill to rebuild the country. China shares the ROK interest in preventing collapse or war, but also prefers to keep its DPRK ally around as a buffer state against U.S. influence in the region. Japan is primarily concerned with solving the abduction issue and preventing North Korea from developing weapons of mass destruction that can threaten Japanese territory. Russia would like to increase its involvement in Korean Peninsula issues as a way of reinvigorating its regional influence and developing markets for its raw materials.

A nuclearized North Korea would only serve to further destabilize this already volatile mix. While some scholars have argued that the presence of nuclear weapons

[27] *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report*, November 14, 2003, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0311/nov14%2D03.html#item10

prevented direct conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War,[29] the same lessons cannot be applied to the Korean Peninsula situation. In the superpower standoff, the level of military power of the two countries was similar enough that either side was risking devastating losses by launching a conventional, let alone nuclear, war. The role of nuclear weapons in that situation was to give pause to both rivals should one side feel that it had gained sufficient strategic superiority to launch an attack. In contrast, the security situation on the Korean Peninsula is one of immense power differentials, pitting the world's most powerful country against a technologically backwards, economically bankrupt third-world dictatorship. With no hope of standing up to the United States via conventional means, North Korea would inevitably come to rely more and more on its nuclear deterrent. Given the state of the country, an internal implosion could not be ruled out, leading to the possibility of "loose nukes" in the hand of a desperate and unstable regime. On the U.S. side, technical advances in ground-penetrating weapons and missile defense, combined with the limited ability of North Korea to threaten distant American territory, could lead to serious consideration of a pre-emptive strike to take out DPRK nuclear weapons. In this situation, the stability of deterrence seems a weak reed to lean on indeed.

DPRK possession of nuclear weapons would also upset the balance of power in the region. Already, the DPRK's nuclear pursuit has been a driving force behind Japanese military development. The DPRK rocket launch in 1998 spurred the Japanese Diet the following April to pass new Defense Cooperation Guidelines to increase the role

[28] This impression has been reinforced by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine to pay tribute to Japan's war dead. "South Korea Expresses Regrets over Koizumi's Yasukuni Remarks," *Asia Pulse*, February 12, 2004.
[29] See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (1989).

of the Japanese military in aiding U.S. forces in case of "situations surrounding Japan."[30] It also led Japan to launch surveillance satellites and engage in joint research on theater missile defense development. It seems but a matter of time before Japan amends its constitution to remove the famed Article 9, which bans the country from all but self-defensive military deployments. Japan's military buildup worries not only China and North Korea, but also South Korea, where nationalistic distrust of Japan remains high despite decades within the same U.S. alliance system. While the remilitarization has largely been encouraged by the United States, which pushed hard for Japan to send to send troops to support American efforts in Iraq, it also indicates the degree to which some sectors of Japanese society are unsatisfied with relying on Washington to provide security. Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, in addition to calling for tough measures against DPRK "terrorist" acts, has stated, "The United States is not a trustworthy country" and warned that unless Japan takes responsibility for its own fate, it will "eventually collapse."[31]

DPRK acquisition of nuclear weapons could conceivably push Japan to seek its own nuclear deterrent instead of relying solely on the American nuclear umbrella. Certainly, Japan, is well-positioned to do so, with a vigorous civilian nuclear program and a large stockpile of plutonium.[32] Were Japan to go nuclear, it would be difficult for South Korea to remain the only non-nuclear state in the region. On previous occasions, the ROK governments of Pak Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan explored the possibility

[30] *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report*, April 27, 1999, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/9904/APR27.html#item6
[31] *Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report*, April 2, 2003, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0304/apr24.html#item11
[32] Nora Akino, "Japan's Plutonium: The New Nuclear Threat," *Nuclear Guardianship Forum, On The Responsible Care of Radioactive Materials*, Issue # 2, Spring 1993, p. 7, http://www.ratical.org/radiation/NGP/JapansPluto.html

of building nuclear weapons, and the ROK nuclear program was not finally terminated until the late 1980s during the administration of Roh Tae-Woo.[33] The nuclear program at that time was driven by fears of withdrawal of the U.S. security commitment to South Korea. With the U.S.-ROK alliance under increasing stress, the possibility of an end to this commitment is looming ever larger. Should Japan become a nuclear power at the same time that the U.S.-ROK alliance breaks down, preventing a nuclearized South Korea would be extremely difficult.

Future of the US-ROK Alliance

Although politicians on both sides routinely emphasize the strength of the ROK-U.S. alliance, the fissures in the relationship profound, and they are not going to go away easily. In large part, they result from the generational change in South Korea. The election of Roh Moo-Hyun, a former dissident, as president brought to power a new class of younger, more liberal government officials. Mostly in their 30s and 40s, these so-called "386 generation"[34] are too young to have experienced the Korean War. Instead, their formative experiences came in the mid-1980s during the pro-democracy protests against the military dictator Chun Doo-Hwan, who was strongly supported by the U.S. under then-President Ronald Reagan. Their image of the United States thus is less of liberator from communist aggression than of a bullying superpower that sells out the legitimate aspirations of the Korean people to political expediency. Recent South Korean public opinion polls see the United States as more of a threat to start a war than North

[33] For a brief overview of the ROK's past nuclear program, as well as links to information on the ROK nuclear fuel cycle, see the website of the Stockholm Peace Research Institute: http://projects.sipri.se/nuclear/cnsc3kos.htm

[34] The term refers to people in their 30s who went to colleges in the 1980s and were born in the 1960s.

Korea is.[35] This image has been reinforced by the insensitive and often arrogant way that the neoconservatives in Washington have reacted to the latest crisis with North Korea. When then ROK President Kim Dae-Jung, a former political prisoner and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, visited Washington to attempt to persuade the recently inaugurated George W. Bush, the privileged son of a former president and grandson of a senator, to go along with his "sunshine policy" of engagement and reconciliation toward North Korea, he was treated rudely. Influential neoconservatives such as Richard Perle and Michael Horowitz have stated that if South Korea refuses to go along with a hard-line policy toward North Korea, the United States will act alone, disregarding ROK opinion.[36] Such words and deeds have reinforced a lingering perception that the United States treats South Korea as a junior partner and is uninterested in Korean aspirations for reunification.

In this milieu of increasing tension in the alliance, the two sides have agreed to relocate the bulk of U.S. forces in South Korea away from the Demilitarized Zone to areas south of Seoul. While successive ROK governments have long wished for the U.S. army to give up lucrative real estate it occupies in Seoul, some critics fear that it that the move designed to remove U.S. soldiers from the range of DPRK artillery, giving the United States flexibility to carry out a pre-emptive strike. Even without this scenario coming to pass, the drawing back of U.S. forces will tend in the long-run to undermine the rationale for continuing American deployments on the Peninsula. Domestic forces in both South Korea, which is prone to occasional flare-ups over such incidents as the traffic accident involving a U.S. tank that killed two schoolgirls, and the United States, whose

[35] "Opinion of the US Troubling," *Korea Times*, January 12, 2004.
[36]"Perle Calls for Blockade of N. Korea," *Donga Ilbo*, January 13, 2004, http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2003/10/19/232728.shtml ; "Statement of Michael J. Horowitz

military forces are increasingly stretched thin by global commitments, will press for complete troop withdrawal. ROK President Roh Moo-Hyun responded to the troop redeployment decision by proposing that South Korea work to achieve military self-sufficiency within ten years.[37]

Even if the DPRK nuclear issue is settled peacefully, it is not clear whether the long-term interests of South Korea and the United States are perfectly aligned. This is particularly true when it comes to China, which last year replaced the United States as the ROK's primary trading partner and destination for investment. Traditionally, Korea has had closer relations with China (especially Han Chinese dynasties) than with Japan. South Korea also lacks the strong interest in Taiwan that is a major determinant of U.S. China policy. Some potential tensions exist between South Korea and China, such as the status of Korean-Chinese and DPRK refugees, and competing nationalistic claims over the legacy of the ancient kingdom of Koguryo, which spanned parts of Manchuria as well as the north of the Korean Peninsula. Nonetheless, South Korea may eventually choose to move away from the United States and toward China, especially if the latter is seen as more supportive of Korean unification than the former. Alternatively, South Korea, or a unified Korean successor state, may choose the path of neutralization rather than be caught once again as the "shrimp among whales" within the US-China-Japan triangle. Whatever the case, the declining threat from North Korea, whether actual or perceived, is bound to lead to a re-evaluation, if not all-out break, of the U.S-. ROK alliance.

Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," July 31, 2003, http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2003/HorowitzTestimony030731.pdf

[37] Hamm Taik-Young, "Self-Reliance or Arms Buildup? The 2004 Defense Budget Request of the ROK," Seoul: Institute of Far Eastern Studies, September 2, 2003, http://ifes.kyungnam.ac.kr/ifes/ifes/eng/activity/05_ifes_forum_view.asp?ifesforumNO=89&page=3

Consequences for Global Nonproliferation

In some senses, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) has been the most successful international treaty ever conceived. It is the most widely subscribed, with 189 countries joining since its inception in 1968. Since it was first signed, only four countries that were non-signatories of the agreement developed nuclear weapons, and one of those—South Africa—subsequently gave up its nuclear weapons program and joined the treaty. North Korea is on the brink of becoming the only country to develop nuclear weapons after joining the NPT, if it has not already done so. Thus the DPRK nuclear program can rightly be viewed as the biggest threat yet to global nonproliferation norms.

The end of the Cold War initially brought about a string of nonproliferation successes. Former Soviet republics such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan voluntarily gave up the nuclear weapons that they had inherited from the USSR and joined the NPT. Acknowledged nuclear powers China and France finally joined the treaty after long holdouts. But these initial positive moves only papered over the fundamental flaws in the treaty, which codifies an unequal split between nuclear haves and have-nots. The Clinton administration, in pushing through an indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, paid insufficient heed to the grumblings over the nuclear powers' failure to move more swiftly toward nuclear disarmament, as required under Article VI of the treaty.[38] The administration's initial crowing over this much-touted victory for its nonproliferation policy was quickly drowned out by the sound of nuclear blasts from the subcontinent, as India and Pakistan joined Israel in the nuclear club among non-signatories of the NPT.

[38] Tariq Aziz and Rebecca Johnson, "After the NPT's Indefinite Extension: The Future of the Global Nonproliferation Regime," *The Nonproliferation Review*, Fall 1995, http://www.cns.miis.edu/pubs/npr/vol03/31/raufjo31.pdf

North Korea had only joined the NPT with great reluctance, responding to a combination of carrots and sticks from the Soviet Union, which promised to provide Pyongyang with LWRs in exchange. It subsequently delayed in submitting its safeguards agreement for six years. When it finally allowed inspectors into its nuclear facilities, they discovered that North Korea had lied on its initial declaration of its nuclear activities. While this incident is rightly pointed to as evidence of DPRK perfidy, it is also shows how the NPT does work. It was *because* of the NPT inspection process that North Korea was caught cheating, and it was *because* it had signed the agreement that there was something to violate in the first place. Had it never signed the NPT, North Korea would likely already have dozens of nuclear weapons, instead of the one or two it is suspected of having now. Moreover, the United States would have no basis to oppose the DPRK's nuclear weapons acquisition under international law, and would be as powerless to stop the program as it has been to respond to Indian, Pakistani, and Israeli nuclearization.

Here again the shortsightedness of the Bush administration's response to the DPRK uranium enrichment program becomes evident. While the Agreed Framework delayed the date by which North Korea would have to come into full compliance with IAEA safeguards, it did require that to happen before Pyongyang took possession of the LWRs. By deciding to kill the KEDO project, Washington removed any incentive that North Korea had to fulfill its NPT obligations. The DPRK's withdrawal from the treaty, citing the "supreme national interests" clause, was a predictable result of the Bush administration's policy. By taking this step, North Korea changed its legal status from a violator of international treaty agreements to a country exercising its sovereign right to build a deterrent force. In attempting to "punish" North Korea for its transgressions, the

Bush administration only ended up providing Pyongyang with a means to legalize its nuclear weapons production.

The implications of this development are stark. Any country in the world can easily follow the DPRK lead, remove itself from the NPT and begin to develop nuclear weapons. This is especially the case for those countries, such as South Korea and Japan, which can plausibly argue that the DPRK nuclear weapons program threatens their supreme national interests and thus justifies such a move. Other countries that are at odds with the United States over suspected nuclear weapons programs, such as Iran and possibly Syria, could follow suit. If enough of these "nuclear dominoes" fall, the NPT could quickly go from the most successful treaty in history to a virtual dead letter.[39]

While the Bush administration has largely ignored this danger to nonproliferation, it has focused attention on the possible sale of nuclear weapons, material, or expertise to other "rogue states" or terrorist groups. DPRK transfer of nuclear technology to Islamic terrorist groups seems unlikely. Unlike its missile program, which is partially designed as a revenue-generating venture, the DPRK's nuclear development appears to be aimed at ensuring its own national security. Selling weapons to terrorist groups would not advance this goal and could undermine it; if nuclear material used in a terrorist attack were traced back to North Korea, Pyongyang would likely suffer retaliatory strikes. North Korea, as a Confucianist-Socialist dictatorship, has no ideological affinity with Islamic fundamentalism, beyond a general dissatisfaction with the U.S.-dominated world order. A more likely danger is DPRK nuclear transfers to other countries. Recent revelations about the degree to which Pakistani nuclear scientists aided would-be nuclear

[39] In a recent op-ed in the *New York* Times ("Saving Ourselves from Self-Destruction," February 12, 2004) Mohammed El-Baradei, the head of the IAEA, warned against this contingency.

powers from Libya to Iran to North Korea demonstrates the dangers of having a nuclear state operating outside of the constraints of the NPT.[40] Were the Kim Jong-Il regime to collapse suddenly—the preferred outcome of some notable Washington think tanks[41]--the danger of "loose nukes" would increase substantially.

The Bush administration has responded to these possibilities by implementing the Proliferation Security Initiative, under which some number of countries have agreed to work together to interdict suspected weapons shipments. While the United States claims that the PSI is not aimed at any specific country, but is an overall response to potential dangers after 9/11, the primary efforts thus far have focused on North Korea. The only interdictions carried out thus far were of a DPRK ship carrying illegal drugs to Australia and a shipment of missile parts bound for Yemen.[42] In the latter case, the United States was forced to relinquish the missiles, as there is no international law prohibiting missile sales between sovereign nations. Even leaving aside the legality of the PSI, relying on the ability of interdiction to solve potential proliferation problems is a questionable strategy at best. The history of smuggling, from drugs to counterfeit documents to arms, demonstrates that criminal networks are always able to get a certain percentage of contraband past the authorities. Given the devastation caused by even a single nuclear weapon, even a 90% success rate at interdiction would be woefully insufficient.

An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure

[40] William J. Broad, David E. Sanger and Raymond Bonner**, "**A Tale of Nuclear Proliferation: How Pakistani Built His Network," *New York Times*, February 12, 2004.
[41] See, e.g., an article by Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute: "La Grande Illusion, Korea Style," Nautilus Institute *DPRK Briefing Book*, February 12, 2004, http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKBriefingBook/multilateralTalks/Eberstadt-LaGrande.html
[42] *NAPSNet Daily Report*, December 11, 2002, http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/0212/dec11.html#sect1

As the preceding discussion has shown, a DPRK nuclear weapon would have severe consequences for nonproliferation on the local, regional, and global levels. Mitigation measures cannot be relied upon, given the weaknesses inherent in the DPRK regime and the potential effects of a DPRK nuclear weapon on regional stability. Therefore the United States should concentrate on trying to "walk back the dog"; to reverse the nuclear developments that have been allowed to accelerate due to the Bush administration's inaction toward North Korea.

The first step is to reinvigorate the engagement process to reach a final verifiable dismantling of the DPRK nuclear program. Doing this will require the United States, first and foremost, to give up the hope of regime change. Only if North Korea is provided with a viable alternative to nuclear weapons for guaranteeing regime survival will it seriously consider disarmament. The United States must make clear to Pyongyang the precise benefits that will accrue from forgoing nuclear weapons, something that the Bush administration has thus far been reluctant to do out of fear of "rewarding bad behavior." The Libyan experience provides one potential model that can be followed. In contrast to the DPRK situation, where much public rhetoric is exchanged while little actual dialogue takes place, the United States and Libya conducted negotiations for two years outside of the public eye, leading up to the surprising announcement that Libya was dismantling its WMD programs and opening to inspectors. No doubt North Korea took notice of this incident, which provided an alternative to the Iraqi case when the U.S. attacked on the basis of flimsy evidence. Already, however, there is some question whether the Bush administration will follow through on its promises to lift sanctions

against Libya, the main carrot that induced Tripoli to agree to the deal.[43] The United States has a credibility problem when it comes to North Korea, and will need to do a better job following through on its promises if it really wants a peaceful solution to the crisis.

If a negotiated settlement can be found, the next step is to reinvigorate the NPT regime. Partly, this means developing better inspection mechanisms. The Iraq experience demonstrates the problems with relying on often-politicized national intelligence means to determine whether a country is cheating on international treaty obligations. Instead, it is vital to either strengthen IAEA capabilities, or create a new international organization, that will have the both the skills and the mandate to track down possible proliferation threats and determine whether countries are living up to the requirements of the NPT and other treaties. The more that such an organization can be insulated from pressure from the United States or other countries, the more weight its findings will carry.

On February 11, 2004, President Bush announced a series of steps to strengthen non-proliferation efforts. Much of the proposal focuses on increasing international cooperation on law enforcement and strengthening of export controls of dual-use items. It also calls for limiting the production of nuclear fuel to the forty nations of the nuclear suppliers group. Bush touted this particular initiative as a means of "closing the loophole" in the NPT which allows states to produce nuclear fuel under the guise of civilian nuclear programs.[44] While Bush's proposals could make acquisition of nuclear

[43] "U.S. Maintains Libya Sanctions," *United Press International*, January 5, 2004.
[44] Office of the Press Secretary, "President Announces New Measures to Counter the Threat of WMD," February 11, 2004, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/02/20040211-4.html

weapons more difficult, they do nothing to address the real flaw in the NPT, the one which provides motivation for states to seek nuclear capacity in the first place.

The fundamental inequity of the NPT must be addressed. The Faustian bargain whereby certain countries were allowed to maintain nuclear weapons arsenals while others were forbidden from doing so may have worked during the Cold War, when the superpower rivalry gave credibility to their respective nuclear umbrellas. But in today's unipolar world, many nations face the potential threat of nuclear attack from one of the existing nuclear powers without a rival nuclear state to provide assurances of protection. This is what led to nuclear proliferation in South Asia. In the absence of an alliance with Russia or the United States, India felt it needed nuclear weapons to guard against China. Unable to count on either Washington or Beijing, Pakistan then needed its own nuclear deterrent against its neighbor. To prevent similar scenarios from playing out in East Asia or the Middle East, it is high time that the nuclear powers begin to seriously implement their obligation under the NPT to work toward total disarmament. The United States, especially, needs to realize that if it wants to be protected from new nuclear weapons states, it cannot continue to make nuclear weapons part of its security apparatus. If anything, as the sole remaining superpower, it has the most to gain from a world without nuclear weapons, and the most to lose by their spread.