



## **U.S.-DPRK Talks: Time to Break Bad Habits**

by Ralph A. Cossa

The U.S. and North Korea will enter into a round of talks in New York between Dec. 4-8 to discuss North Korea's suspicious underground construction project. This would be an excellent time for both sides to break counterproductive old habits and start talking with, rather than merely lecturing to, one another.

The U.S. claims it has "compelling" (but not "conclusive") evidence that the facility, located near the currently frozen nuclear research facility at Yongbong, is an underground nuclear facility although it acknowledges that it is not sure just what type of facility it is. The North swears it is not nuclear-related and is willing to let the U.S. conduct a one-time inspection . . . provided it receives \$300 million compensation for the insult surrounding this "groundless accusation."

What we are witnessing here is classic North Korean behavior. Pyongyang never misses a chance to turn an opportunity for cooperation into a crisis, especially if there is some prospect it can reap financial benefit from the confrontation. The U.S. has (rightly) refused to pay, although there are now rumors that some type of aid through the UN Development Program may be offered as a "persuasive option." This would be a big mistake.

North Korea promised under the 1994 Agreed Framework to freeze its current nuclear activities and take steps to implement the 1991 Denuclearization Agreement with the ROK that calls for nuclear transparency. As a result, Pyongyang has a moral obligation to demonstrate that it is continuing to act in good faith in accordance with this agreement. Paying North Korea for doing what it is already obligated to do reinforces bad habits.

The U.S. has no one to blame but itself for these habits. The Agreed Framework began the process, when two light water reactors (at the cost of some \$5-6 billion) were promised, along with interim deliveries of 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually, in return for the original freeze. This is not to say the Agreed Framework was not the best option at the time; it was! But, it created the "compensation for crisis" mentality that has since been reinforced.

The U.S., after first refusing to pay for the remains of U.S. servicemen missing in action since the Korean War, finally agreed to make six figure payments to compensate Pyongyang for the costs of recovering remains. It also began negotiating with the North to end their missile export program, tying economic rewards (including a lifting of economic sanctions, already promised in the Agreed Framework) to cooperation in this field. This kind of checkbook diplomacy, in which North Korea is rewarded for bad behavior, must stop.

On the other hand, the U.S. must realize that the North is serious when it accuses Washington of "a grave violation of and insult to our sovereignty and dignity." The North has little

left to lose besides face, and the U.S. approach to the crisis -- demanding inspections and sending a large team to Pyongyang without prior approval to conduct such inspections, a mission which predictably ended in failure -- made matters worse.

The question now is, how to proceed from here? I see two options. One is to remind the North of their Agreed Framework obligations and then arrange for an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team, rather than American inspectors, to examine the site -- the Agreed Framework states that the IAEA "will be allowed to monitor this freeze, and the DPRK will provide full cooperation to the IAEA for this purpose." Using the IAEA under the terms of the Agreed Framework does not constitute a violation of North Korean sovereignty, since the North has already agreed to these terms.

Another option is to acknowledge the accusations and suspicions on both sides and meet each other half way. The North has long accused the U.S. of having nuclear weapons based in the South. These accusations continue to appear regularly in North Korean broadcasts. The U.S., while refusing to confirm or deny the existence of nuclear weapons in Korea in the past, notes that President Bush in 1991 ordered all U.S. tactical nuclear weapons removed from overseas bases and returned home. In support of the North-South Denuclearization Agreement, the U.S. had also agreed in principle to North Korean inspections of U.S. facilities in the ROK. Therefore, the U.S., with Seoul's prior agreement, could offer the North the inspection of U.S. and/or ROK facilities in return for its own inspections in the North, as a mutual confidence building measure.

Separate and distinct from these talks, the U.S. also needs to rethink its counterproductive economic sanctions policy against North Korea. South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung called for a lifting of these sanctions during his address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in June to no avail. North Korea has used the continued presence of these sanctions both as proof that the U.S. is not living up to its end of the Agreed Framework and as an excuse for its own economic failings.

In truth, a complete lifting of sanctions is likely to result, at best, in a mere trickle of foreign investment into the North. With so many promising investment opportunities elsewhere, what investor is going to risk funds in a failed state that refuses to reform? By lifting economic sanctions, the North Koreans would get another useful wake-up call. They would be compelled to realize that it is their own policies that are preventing their recovery. They might then be more inclined to look toward economic reform, rather than "compensation for crisis" blackmail techniques, to ensure their long-term survival.

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