



High Time to Reevaluate North Korea Policy

by Peter T. R. Brookes

The time has come for the Clinton Administration to step back and seriously reappraise its policy towards North Korea. In light of recent serious events on the peninsula, including the Taepo Dong missile launch and the revelation of a suspected underground nuclear weapons facility, it is evident that the Clinton Administration's current policies to engage and moderate Pyongyang's reckless behavior are failing.

The Administration is not holding North Korea responsible for its dangerous actions and is swiftly moving towards a policy of appeasement. Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger recently called the Administration's policies "reckless appeasement and naive." Regrettably, many agree.

The White House has come to reward North Korea's bad behavior and taught Pyongyang that brinkmanship allows one to extort concessions from the United States without fear of punishment. The lack of principled resolve by the executive in protecting critical US interests, coupled with political weakness on the part of the Clinton Administration, are blindly leading the United States down the road towards confrontation with the world's last communist police state and fourth largest army.

Recent press reports have suggested that the North Korean nuclear weapons program is still proceeding – in direct violation of the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework. In fact, given this disturbing evidence, it is possible, perhaps even probable, the North Korean nuclear weapons program may never have ceased. The Administration's claims that the nuclear program was "frozen" with the signing of the Agreed Framework unfortunately cannot be verified and consequently is in doubt now more than ever. Many question why anybody would believe that North Korea would ever surrender its nuclear weapons program, which it has been working on for thirty years and would greatly increase its bargaining position, for mere heavy fuel oil and two light water reactors?

The Geneva agreement is a deeply flawed accord which does not include necessary challenge inspections nor does it address the most critical issue of further nuclear weapons research and development. The fact that the United States and the IAEA do not know how much plutonium the North Korean nuclear weapons program produced through 1994, four years into the Agreed Framework, is deeply disturbing. Stopping the North Korean nuclear weapons program – in its entirety – is a good idea but the Agreed Framework as it is constructed is not.

The recent no-notice launch of a three-stage Taepo Dong 1 medium range ballistic missile (MRBM) –satellite or no satellite over the territory of our Japanese allies and the

American troops stationed there, is provocative and deeply troubling. It also signifies a quantum leap in ballistic missile capability and the threat it presents to American forces in the region.

The possible proliferation of the Taepo Dong 1 beyond East Asia and into South Asia and the Middle East is a matter of great concern. Until this week, the North Koreans have not participated in meaningful missile proliferation talks for over two years and during this period both Pakistan and Iran received No-Dong ballistic missile components and enabling technologies. North Korea is the world's largest supplier of ballistic missiles and technology – primarily to Iran, Syria and Pakistan.

The Four Party Talks which were established to find a final and lasting peace on the Korean peninsula have made no progress after two years and six meetings. In fact, these talks have been so ineffective – and meaningless to North Korea – that there has been great difficulty in even arranging a date for the next meeting.

In addition, as a sign of their lack of commitment to the process or its objectives, the North Koreans have not been willing to discuss military Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM) – a crucial initial step on the road to establishing peace on the peninsula. Unfortunately, as evidenced by continued North Korean submarine and special forces (SOF) incursions into the South and tunneling under the DMZ, the Korean peninsula is just as tense today as it was two years ago when the Talks were conceptualized.

Other than lots of inconclusive discussion, the Administration has made little measurable progress in advancing American interests with North Korea in these past four years. Despite the fact that the United States has provided over \$200 million (soon to be \$250 million) in food aid to North Korea over the past three years, Pyongyang continues to directly threaten 37,000 American troops in South Korea – and now 47,000 troops in Japan.

This generosity and goodwill on the part of the United States has only led North Korea to believe that there is no cost to its roguish behavior including: continuing its nuclear weapons program; the proliferation of weapons; incursions into the South; the firing of ballistic missiles; the violent abuse of human rights; starving its people to feed the military and communist Party loyalists; the trafficking of narcotics; or the counterfeiting of American dollars. Contrary to the belief of many, North Korea is not on the brink of collapse and current policy has, in fact, allowed the new regime to consolidate political power and survive in its current form. It is time to rebuild a more focused and pragmatic policy based on American political strength, military deterrence and reciprocity.

First, The Clinton Administration must introduce some new and realistic thinking into its current policy. The Administration presents us with a choice: the Agreed Framework or go to war with North Korea. That is a false dichotomy. The United States needs some fresh critical and constructive thinking on this issue to extricate ourselves from this dangerous cycle of failed policies. A bipartisan commission, along the lines of the Rumsfeld Commission on ballistic missiles, should be appointed to conduct a zero-based review of our North Korea policy and propose a course of action which takes into account new perspectives on the nuclear and missile threat.

Second, the Clinton Administration must get serious about theater and national missile defense and make it a top priority. Diplomatic initiatives towards North Korea should be accompanied by a firm commitment to protect our troops in the field, the United States (including Alaska and Hawaii), and our allies from the burgeoning ballistic missile threat. Our national security must be paramount and it is clear from recent events that time is of the essence. The Administration must not allow the defunct Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty with the former Soviet Union to stand in the way of improving national defense and redoubling deterrence.

Third, the North Koreans must be shown the error of their ways. Pyongyang must understand that they will not be rewarded for bellicose or provocative actions. The United States must be willing to walk away from North Korean attempts at political blackmail. Current American political weakness and an unwillingness to denounce Pyongyang's transgressions only enhances North Korean boldness and increases the likelihood of DPRK military adventurism and miscalculation.

Fourth, the Agreed Framework is deficient – fix it now – not later. Don't perpetuate the myth of a nuclear "freeze." Any agreement must address the entirety of a nuclear weapons development program. In addition, there must be the means to verify North Korea's compliance on a continuing basis. If it is not addressed at this juncture, these issues will only have to be revisited again and again. This is dangerous.

It is clear the stakes are very high for the United States on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia. Deterrence has been successful there for 45 years but political weakness, increasing defense vulnerability, and a flawed nuclear accord are leading the United States and North Korea down the slippery slope towards confrontation – and possibly conflict. Only hard-nosed, well-considered, principled diplomacy and military superiority will ensure continued deterrence, peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

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The Administration's arguments on its Korea Policy were spelled out by Ambassador Charles Kartman in his statement of September 24, 1998 to the U.S. House Committee on International Relations. If you receive PacNet via E-mail, Ambassador Kartman's testimony is being sent to you as PacNet 38A. If you receive PacNet by fax, the Internet source is www.state.gov, or contact Pacific Forum and we will send you a copy.