



## The North Korea Challenge

*In these two articles, AEI's Danielle Pletka and John R. Bolton bring us up to date and discuss the larger implications of developments since Kim Jong Il pledged to give up his nuclear ambitions in exchange for diplomatic recognition and foreign aid. Pletka reminds readers that since North Korea signed the 1994 accord, it has detonated a nuclear weapon, exported a reactor to Syria, aided Libya's incipient (and since dismantled) nuclear program, aided Hezbollah, provided sophisticated missiles to Iran, masterminded the counterfeiting of U.S. dollar bills, laundered development aid, and allowed hundreds of thousands of its citizens to starve. Yet the Bush administration "appears intent on the rehabilitation of North Korea and a broad lifting of sanctions," she says. Bolton argues that North Korea's proliferation is "quite likely more than a series of one-time transactions." The underlying reality of the North's activities, he says, "will haunt Bush's successor and threaten international peace."*

## A Pushover for Pyongyang

By Danielle Pletka

The Bush administration is on the verge of signing an agreement with North Korea that, it argues, will result in the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In practice, however, the likely outcome will be the continuation of North Korea's nuclear weapons program and the proliferation of North Korean nuclear technology around the world.

The evolution of the administration's approach to North Korea has been an object lesson in muddled diplomacy, a "how-not-to" guide for handling rogue states. Six years ago, the Bush administration cancelled the Clinton administration's Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, holding back a generous package of aid and light water nuclear reactors that had been promised to Pyongyang in exchange for giving up its plutonium-based nuclear weapons program. At the time, the Bush administration accused North Korea of cheating on the agreement by establishing a covert uranium enrichment program. Intelligence and the North Koreans themselves affirmed those charges.

Since the signing of the original Agreed Framework in 1994, North Korea has detonated a nuclear weapon; exported a nuclear reactor to Syria; aided Libya's incipient (and since dismantled) nuclear program by providing uranium hexafluoride (a precursor to the enrichment of uranium); aided the terrorist group Hezbollah with the construction of reinforced tunnels that emboldened the group and enhanced its capacity to wage war with Israel; provided sophisticated long-range missiles to Iran, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Libya; masterminded the counterfeiting of U.S. \$100 bills; laundered development aid from the United Nations; and likely starved to death hundreds of thousands of its own people.

This is an impressive record of international and domestic mayhem. Over the years, the American response has been to impose, either under law or executive order, a web of interlocking sanctions the collective impact of which is to preclude foreign assistance, exports, imports, trading preferences, and all the other accoutrements of relations with normal countries.

In the case of most of the penalties imposed over the last decades, the president enjoys the right to waive sanctions under particular circumstances. In the case of at least one law, however—the so-called Glenn Amendment to the Arms Export Control Act (which is triggered by a nuclear detonation)—Congress must act to remove the sanctions imposed. The State Department is now pressing the House and Senate to do just that.

Indeed, far from seeking a narrow carve-out of sanctions in order to facilitate verification of North Korean disarmament, the Bush administration appears intent on the rehabilitation of North Korea and a broad lifting of sanctions. American officials have committed to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, remove restrictions tied to the Trading with the Enemy Act, and waive other sanctions where the president is empowered to do so.

In other words, the Bush administration—having begun its term repudiating the concept of the Agreed Framework because, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice then said, Pyongyang cheated by “pursuing another path to a nuclear weapon, the so-called ‘highly enriched uranium’ path,” and having then initiated the six-party talks with the intention, as Bush suggested, of “North Korea completely, verifiably, and irreversibly dismantl[ing] its nuclear programs”—will end its term by agreeing to an accord that essentially rewards Pyongyang for its misbehavior and falls short of the president’s own demands.

Sequentially, we have demanded that North Korea “dismantle” its nuclear program but have settled for “disabling.” We have demanded a “complete declaration of all nuclear programs” but have accepted a deal that allows North Korea to avoid disclosing details of its program to enrich uranium and its assistance to Syria, Iran, Libya, Egypt, or various subnational terror groups.

Three important questions remain: How did this happen? Will Congress acquiesce to the administration’s plan? And what impact can be expected?

Regarding the first question, it appears that certain officials have developed the North Korean equivalent of Stockholm syndrome. So eager are they to ink a deal, they are not only willing to jettison meaningful requirements, but have stooped to making arguments on behalf of the North Korean dictatorship to the U.S. Congress and the American public. Why so eager? We can only speculate that the unpopular Iraq war, the failure of efforts to contain Iran, and the sputtering Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts have produced a drive within the hallways

at Foggy Bottom to accomplish something for the history books.

Will Congress go along? Notwithstanding expressions of concern from experts and opinion leaders on both left and right, some in Congress appear poised to sign up to the new North Korea deal. The Senate Armed Services Committee recently sent a defense authorization measure to the full Senate that includes a provision waiving the Glenn Amendment—nominally for the purpose of providing aid to dismantle the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon. Practically, however, it is broad enough to permit vast amounts of assistance to the Kim Jong Il regime. The House Foreign Affairs Committee has also sent legislation to the full House. That provision, however, has significant restrictions on the easing of sanctions tied to North Korea’s support to terrorist-supporting states and the accord’s verification requirements.

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Here we get to the heart of the matter: is an accord with Pyongyang that manages to make some undetermined progress on disarming North Korea and allows a marginal engagement with the regime worth the price? Doubtless among would-be nuclear weapons states such as Iran and Syria, the deal will be seen as a model. Rewards without concessions and disarmament without verification are standards that even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad can live up to. The likely outcome? Iran and Syria, and with them Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and others will line up to become nuclear states. Meanwhile, even a partial lifting of sanctions by the United States will unlock the door for other countries and United Nations agencies to open their coffers to North Korea. The result will sustain the world’s most ruthless regime, prolonging the danger it poses not only to its population but to the entire civilized world.

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# Bush's North Korea Nuclear Abdication

By John R. Bolton

Despite rising Capitol Hill opposition to its North Korea policy, the Bush administration continues to find new and imaginative ways to accommodate Pyongyang's sensitivities. Meanwhile, the administration's Democratic congressional allies are urgently pushing to waive the Glenn Amendment, which bars essentially all U.S. economic and military aid to the North.

The strategic folly here is rooted in the administration's decision to focus on North Korea's plutonium supplies and stop caring what Pyongyang once did or is doing on the enriched uranium route to nuclear weapons. That could be a fatal mistake.

In 2002, our intelligence community definitively judged that the regime was working on an industrial-scale enrichment program. Since then, we have little new information, reducing the confidence level but not changing the substantive conclusion that the North Koreans "have and continue to operate a uranium enrichment program," as Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell testified in February. For the Bush administration, however, the lack of new data is an excuse to ignore the entire issue of uranium.

On plutonium, the administration seems content to seek vague statements from the North that "account" for the amount of this fissile material we think it has extracted from its Yongbyon reactor's spent fuel rods over the years. Administration briefings reveal little or no interest in how many plutonium weapons exist, whether there are other plutonium-related facilities hidden in North Korea's vast complex of underground facilities, and what the North's weapons-manufacturing capabilities are.

Proliferation? Perhaps the Bush administration's most wondrous act of magic is to make that problem disappear. The State Department argues that North Korea may have proliferated in the past, but that is all behind us. How do we know? The North Koreans have told us.

Since the reactor it helped Syria build on the Euphrates River was pulverized by the Israeli Air Force last September 6, Pyongyang's efforts at and interest in nuclear proliferation may have ceased. Even if true, that should not give us comfort: it took an act of brute military force to bring this about. One need hardly point out that this tactic is not congruent with the administration's current approach to North Korea's nuclear behavior.

More troubling is the administration's apparent treatment of the Syrian reactor as if it were the only proliferation threat in the Middle East. It is not. Iran should be top of mind as well.

It is inconceivable that Syria could work for five years or more building the clone of North Korea's Yongbyon reactor on the Euphrates without, at a minimum, Iranian acquiescence. Quite likely, Iran was involved. Tehran could well be financing Syria's purchase of reactor technology from North Korea. It could also have expected to benefit from the reactor's production of plutonium.

Indeed, Iran had much the same incentive as North Korea to hide its nuclear activities from international scrutiny. What better way to conceal proscribed work from inspectors in North Korea or Iran than to build facilities in Syria?

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Iran and North Korea already have a history of cooperation in ballistic missiles—the delivery system that, if perfected, could give their weapons global reach. After the North declared a moratorium on launch testing from the Korean Peninsula in 1999, it simply ramped up cooperation with Iran's aggressive missile research and development program.

The North thus continued to benefit from launch-testing data prior to breaking its moratorium on July 4, 2006, while also scoring a propaganda victory among the clueless for its apparent renunciation of provocative behavior in Northeast Asia. Outsourcing weapons programs is nothing new for Pyongyang.

Although our intelligence community stated publicly that the Syrian reactor was a cash transaction, its congressional briefings contained little or no supporting evidence that this was so. This is unsurprising. The Israeli raid was based on the hard physical evidence seen on the

banks of the Euphrates River, not on scrutiny of documents embodying the deal.

Some friendly advice to our intelligence services: Think joint venture. Think asset diversification. Hypothetically, what if the deal had North Korea getting a third of the plutonium produced by the Euphrates reactor, Iran a third, and Syria a third? The North benefits by maintaining open access to a plutonium supply even if Yongbyon remains frozen. Iran gets experience in reactor technologies immune from International Atomic Energy Agency scrutiny. And Syria takes a major step toward undisclosed nuclear capabilities. Win-win-win, as that entrepreneurial proliferator A. Q. Khan might have said.

Here is the real problem. North Korean nuclear proliferation is quite likely more than a series of one-time transactions that create problems elsewhere in the world. It may very well be integral to its own nuclear weapons program.

The Bush administration can wish away these possibilities and still achieve its deal. But it cannot wish away the underlying reality, the full scope of which we simply do not know. That reality, whatever its reach, will still be there to haunt Bush's successor and threaten international peace.

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John R. Bolton is a senior fellow at AEI. A version of this article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on May 8, 2008.