

BOOK REVIEW: Back to the Future

Not even North Korea's October 2006 nuclear test could make Pyongyang's persistent pursuit of a nuclear arsenal a priority for the Bush administration. Its preoccupation with the Middle East, particularly Iraq, and the war on terrorism has relegated the potential collapse of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime to a regional issue for Northeast Asia.

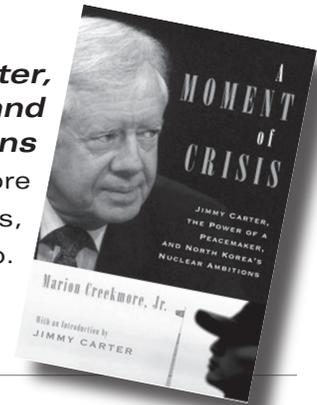
Ambassador Marion Creekmore's recently published book, *A Moment of Crisis*, takes us back to the first North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993-1994, when preventing a nuclear-armed North Korea and preserving the integrity of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the credibility of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were Washington's national security priorities. His very readable and authoritatively documented book focuses on former President Jimmy Carter's June 1994 intervention in the crisis, including a visit to Pyongyang and meetings with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.

For the first time, Carter has permitted research into his personal papers and the Carter Center's records to tell the story of how and why he and his wife Rosalyn, who accompanied him as his sole note taker in all meetings with Kim Il Sung, intervened in the crisis. Revealed are the detailed personal accounts of Carter's thoughts at the time and the unedited record of his discussions with President Bill Clinton, South Korean President Kim Yong-sam and North Korea's leadership.

A Moment of Crisis, however, is as much about the present and future as it is about the past. Creekmore demonstrates that the United States, to succeed in negotiations with Pyongyang, must avoid humiliating North Korea's leadership and engage North Korea as an equal worthy of diplomatic dialogue and negotiation. He also reminds us that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is

A Moment of Crisis: Jimmy Carter, The Power of a Peacemaker, and North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions

By Marion V. Creekmore
PublicAffairs,
August 2006, 406 pp.



an issue of global concern.

Creekmore's work complements and expands on previously published works about the crisis, such as Leon Sigal's *Disarming Strangers—Nuclear Diplomacy With North Korea* and *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* by Joel Wit, Dan Poneman, and Robert Gallucci. These accounts concentrate on examining U.S. policy toward North Korea through the eyes of those in Washington who made the policy and the U.S. journalists who reported it. Creekmore relies on these books to portray the backdrop for Carter's trip to Pyongyang but then goes beyond them.

In 1994 the United States and North Korea were on the brink of war. Their year-long bilateral negotiations were at an impasse. Despite Washington's warnings that it would press for UN sanctions if North Korea refueled its nuclear reactor, Pyongyang did so. It then announced that it would consider UN sanctions "an act of war" and declared itself to be in a "state of semi-war." Washington began reinforcing its military forces in South Korea to defend its ally better and to deter a possible North Korean attack more effectively.

At root, it was these developments that prompted Carter to act; but the direct spur came from Carter's frequent communications with his longtime friend and then-U.S. Ambassador to South Korea James Laney—Creek-

more provides new information about these exchanges. Laney and General Gary Luck, the United National and U.S. Combined Forces commander in South Korea, shared the fear that war would become inevitable if UN sanctions were imposed. Creekmore explains that Laney's concerns motivated him to encourage Carter to meet Kim Il Sung. We learn of Carter's extensive preparations for his trip, his efforts to reassure officials in Washington and Seoul that he would not engage in negotiations with North Korea, and the details of his meetings with Kim Il Sung and his most senior advisers.

Despite his promise not to do so, Carter did engage in negotiations with Kim Il Sung. Kim enticed Carter with offers to break the deadlock and to return to talks with the United States. Carter was eager to build trust with his counterpart. Also, he sensed that Kim Il Sung's stance was more flexible than that of his subordinates, especially North Korea's chief negotiator, First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Sok Ju. Carter decided to take advantage of this situation and pursued an agreement with Kim Il Sung aimed at keeping the IAEA inspectors at North Korea's nuclear center, marginalizing Kang's more assertive stance, and restarting bilateral talks without the use of coercive tactics, i.e., UN sanctions.

In doing so, however, Carter erred. He

assured Kim Il Sung that North Korea did not have to forgo the reprocessing of spent uranium into plutonium, the core ingredient of a nuclear weapon. Carter was correct that the NPT does not rule out reprocessing under IAEA monitoring. At the same time, however, North Korea in 1991 had joined South Korea in a Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This bilateral understanding did rule out the possession and production of plutonium by the two Koreas. Later, Kim Il Sung, alluding to the North-South agreement, rectified Carter's error by stating, "Let's move ahead to de-nuclearize the peninsula."

Creekmore attempts to minimize the significance of Carter's error, but even Carter recognized its gravity and moved promptly to rectify the situation. Kim Il Sung was surprisingly accommodating in this regard and did not attempt to exploit Carter's misstep, which preserved the Carter-Kim understanding to the benefit of all the concerned parties.

Washington, however, proved to be less forgiving. Creekmore recounts Carter's dismay when Clinton's closest foreign policy advisers reacted negatively to the understanding that Carter had forged. Relying on Carter's

notes made at the time, Creekmore laments that Clinton's closest advisers seemed more preoccupied with Carter's errors than the fact that he had set the stage for the resumption of bilateral negotiations. In Carter's view, these

yang would have to inform the U.S. government through diplomatic channels about the terms of the Carter-Kim understanding. He then subtly raised the bar for Pyongyang. Clinton, reading his advisers' statement, em-

Creekmore demonstrates that the United States, to succeed in negotiations with Pyongyang, **must avoid humiliating North Korea's leadership and engage North Korea as an equal worthy of diplomatic dialogue and negotiation.**

advisers' priority was blunting domestic political criticism that they were too lenient with North Korea, not concentrating on avoiding another Korean War. Creekmore describes how Carter adroitly took advantage of CNN to compel Clinton's advisers to give the Carter-Kim understanding tentative approval.

Clinton, closely advised by his chief negotiator, Robert Gallucci, then calmly reclaimed the initiative by telling the press that Pyong-

phasized that if North Korea was "genuinely and verifiably prepared to freeze its nuclear program while talks go on, then we [the United States] would be willing to resume high-level talks."

Creekmore is in a unique position to tell this story. He was at Carter's side throughout the odyssey. Creekmore's career as a diplomat and former ambassador instilled in him a concern for accuracy and a careful use of



Then-North Korean Leader Kim Il Sung meets with former President Jimmy Carter during Carter's June 15-18, 1994 visit to North Korea. Carter's meetings with Kim Il Sung were aimed at diffusing the North Korean nuclear crisis that spanned from 1993-1994.

words that is evident throughout the book. His avowed and obvious purpose is to provide the public a comprehensive understanding of this first North Korean nuclear crisis and how it was resolved. He does not glorify either Carter or himself. He writes with refreshing candor, admitting, albeit somewhat reluctantly, that Carter did make errors. He promptly points out, however, that they were minor relative to the potentially adverse consequences had Carter failed.

Given today's tense reality on the Korean Peninsula, *A Moment of Crisis* reads like *déjà vu*. Six-party talks to end North Korea's nuclear program remain stalled, although prospects appear to be improving for their resumption. UN sanctions have been imposed on North Korea. Fortunately, they have not triggered a second Korean War. Alas, they have neither deterred North Korea's drive for a nuclear capability nor halted the upward spiral of tensions in the region. North Korea's new nuclear status has intensified concerns, mostly in Washington, that Japan might eventually decide to develop its own nuclear capability. At the same time, South Korea, once a strong advocate of the NPT and IAEA, has opted to marginalize the significance of North Korea's disregard for the international nuclear nonproliferation regime so as not to disrupt its pursuit of reconciliation with North Korea. Meanwhile, the Bush administration persists in refusing to engage North Korea in bilateral talks and the exchange of concessions, a strategy that over the past six years has failed to bolster the international nonproliferation regime in East Asia.

A Moment of Crisis provides essential perspective on today's North Korean nuclear crisis. It enables us to compare the Clinton and Bush administration strategies for dealing with North Korea. In some respects, the Bush administration is repeating what the Clinton administration had done a decade ago. President George W. Bush, like Clinton, referred to a "military option." For Bush, this took the form of a "pre-emptive counterproliferation strategy" stated as a national policy in December 2002 and in his 2003 State of the Union speech. Clinton took steps to reinforce the U.S. military in South Korea and considered but ruled out a "surgical" air strike on North Korea. Also like Clinton, Bush has resorted to intensifying economic pressure and UN sanctions on North Korea in the hope of compelling Pyongyang to submit to U.S. demands.

Creekmore's book also allows us to decipher some of the key differences between the two presidents. Clinton pursued a strat-



Choo Youn-Kong/AFP/Getty Images

A North Korean border patrol guard escorts former President Jimmy Carter to the South Korean side of the demilitarized zone, June 18, 1994.

egy of engaging North Korea in bilateral negotiations and offered inducements in exchange for concessions. Bush has adamantly rejected such an approach. While calling for a "peaceful negotiated settlement," he has rejected bilateral negotiations and emphasized coercive tactics. Clinton engaged in direct, bilateral talks with North Korea while maintaining close consultations with key allies South Korea and Japan and key concerned parties, such as China and Russia. Bush has emphasized unilateral goals (complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of all North Korean nuclear programs) within a multilateral context. Instead of offering North Korea concessions, Bush strives to concentrate international diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea to compel its submission to Washington's demands. Thus far, Bush's approach has fallen far short of his goals.

The book also highlights another key difference between the two administration's nuclear nonproliferation strategies. Clinton, like Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, sought to sustain the credibility of a global nonproliferation regime as established by the NPT and the IAEA. Bush, however, has preferred to "regionalize" nonproliferation strategy. He has dealt separately with the clear or potential nuclear weapons ambitions of Libya (a negotiated accord), Iran (EU negotiations) and India (a bilateral deal on civil nuclear cooperation). The North Korean nuclear issue also has been regionalized in six-party talks that involve China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. Bush's approach has achieved mixed results in terms of nuclear nonproliferation. Libya has given up its nuclear ambitions, but the United States has agreed to aid India's nuclear program despite its possession of nuclear weapons. Meanwhile,

Books OF NOTE

the outcomes with respect to Iran and North Korea remain to be seen.

A Moment of Crisis essentially reaches the same conclusion as *Disarming Strangers* and *Going Critical*. History, as recorded in these books, teaches that the most effective way to achieve Bush's avowed goal of a "peaceful negotiated resolution" of the North Korean nuclear crisis is through direct diplomatic dialogue with Pyongyang. Also vital for success would appear to be diplomatic negotiations that encompass a carrot-and-stick strategy that includes the exchange of concessions between all parties. Most participating nations except for the United States have long argued in favor of direct dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang.

During a recent wait at Washington's Reagan National Airport, I searched book stores for *A Moment of Crisis*. My search began in the current affairs section, but the book was not to be found. Titles about Iraq and the war on terrorism dominated. I turned to the politics section but found only works on domestic political issues. I next went to the history section where at last it appeared sandwiched between books on twentieth-century European and Asian history. What happened in 1994 in North Korea, however, is not history.

It would appear that the lessons of 1993-1994 are finally being relearned. Advocates in Washington of the give-and-take negotiation have become increasingly audible. This emerging bipartisan consensus dates from early in the current administration when former Secretary of State Colin Powell urged bilateral talks with North Korea. Others who have joined the call include the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar (Ind.), and the senior Bush's former top advisers General Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of State James Baker.

Creekmore reminds us that the North Korean nuclear crisis is but one of several crises sparked by disregard for the international nuclear nonproliferation regime. The Bush administration's regionalization of nuclear proliferation has seriously eroded the effectiveness of the NPT and the IAEA. A single, consistent global standard has been fractured into inconsistent regional standards. One could argue that these inconsistencies have contributed to the quickening pace of nuclear proliferation of recent years. Consequently, whereas the world was once concerned about a second Korean War, now we face the possibility of nuclear war in Northeast Asia and possibly elsewhere. **ACT**