

**U.S. President Obama's
Foreign Policy Priorities and Strategy**

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April 2009

Introduction

The reality President George W. Bush bestowed on his successor President Obama when he assumed office on January 20, 2009 defines Obama's domestic and foreign policy priorities. Obama's personal philosophy and policy preferences cannot alter this reality, but they contribute significantly toward defining the strategies and tactics he will use to deal with the global financial crisis, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, international terrorism, halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), among other pressing matters.

Global Priorities

The Obama White House internet web site and the President's statements set forth a clearly defined and carefully considered set of global priorities (www.whitehouse.gov). As evident from the president's numerous statements and hectic schedule of his early weeks in office, dealing with the global financial crisis was his top priority. More than half his official statements during his first one hundred days in office dealt with economic issues, both domestic and foreign. It was for this reason that he dispatched Secretary of State Hilary Clinton to East Asia on her first official trip abroad and that his first foreign trip was to the G 20 Meeting in London. It also explains why the Obama Administration invited Japan's Prime Minister ASO Taro as its first foreign visiting head of state. Simply stated, the Obama Administration sought to promptly confirm that Japan, the world's second largest economy after the United States, would collaborate to deal with the global economic crisis. Likewise, Secretary Clinton made her first official trip abroad to East Asia to confirm China's continuing willingness to finance the United States' growing debt as well as the continuing cooperation of Japan and South Korea to address jointly the financial crisis..

In terms of national security, President Obama's foremost concerns are the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the worrisome situation in Pakistan. The president emphasized this in a February 17, 2009 statement (www.whitehouse.gov, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," February 17, 2009.)

President Obama's Nuclear Non-proliferation Policy

Closely behind these concerns is the issue of nuclear weapons proliferation. Since entering the U.S. Senate and becoming a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, President Obama has demonstrated a keen concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons. His initial interest apparently was motivated by concern that terrorists might use nuclear weapons to attack Americans. He joined with Republican Senators Dick Lugar (Republican – Indiana) and Chuck Hagel (Republican – Nebraska) in sponsoring legislation designed to detect and halt the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction as well as legislation to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism by reducing the global arsenal of nuclear weapons.

According to the White House web site (www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/foreignpolicy/), President Obama intends to "secure loose nuclear materials from terrorists, strengthen the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), and move toward a nuclear free world. In Prague, Czech Republic on April 5, 2009, President Obama declared in a speech to

a huge audience, “The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War.” He continued, “... as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, we can start it.” From his lofty rhetoric the president shifted to concrete steps, “... we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same.”

He pledged to “negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with the Russians this year,” a process he had initiated with Russian President Medvedev on April 1 at their London summit. He said his administration would “immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty,” Finally he proposed the building of “a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation.”

He closed by pointing to North Korea’s April 5 launching of a long range ballistic missile and declared, “broke the rules” and “Violations must be punished,” a reference to the UN Security Council’s 2006 resolution 1718 that urged North Korea to halt its development of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. He concluded, “North Korea must know that the path to security and respect will never come through threats and illegal weapons.” For President Obama, North Korea is not his priority concern. Rather, he used North Korea to illustrate the significance of his priority – the end of nuclear weapons proliferation. (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office, “Remarks by President Barack Obama, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic, April 5, 2009.)

Just before delivering this speech, President Obama had concretely demonstrated his priority goal regarding the reduction of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by agreeing with Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev to achieving a new Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START Treaty) before the end of 2009. (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office, “Joint Statement by Dmitriy A Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, and Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, Regarding Negotiations on Further Reduction in Strategic Offensive Arms,” April 1, 2009.). In their statement, the leaders of the world’s two most militarily powerful nations also agreed to “support the activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ...” and “... underscored the importance of the entering into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.” They also pledged to bring into force the bilateral Agreement for Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy. These are all matters that President George W. Bush had reservations about because they restrained the United States unilateral options regarding its nuclear weapons capability. Not surprisingly, Washington and Moscow also agreed to work through the Six Party Talks to achieve “the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula ...”

Other key priorities for the Obama Administration include: renewal of alliances and development of new partnerships in Asia, sustained quest for Israeli-Palestinian peace while maintaining the US-Israel Alliance, fight global poverty

Global Strategy and Tactics

President Obama favors the non-proliferation and disarmament strategies of his predecessors who served in the White House prior to President George W. Bush. The architect for such strategies was Henry Kissinger who served as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State to Republican President Richard Nixon. Kissinger reversed two and a half decades of containment strategy initiated by Democratic President Henry Truman in 1947.

Containment was designed to weaken America's adversaries by isolating them diplomatically and commercially from the rest of the world. The Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe plus the People's Republic of China and its allies North Korea and North Vietnam were the focus of containment until at least 1972. Kissinger determined that containment had failed to further US national interests. Rather than weakening its adversaries, containment strengthened them by pressing them to form a "bloc" or coalition knit together militarily, diplomatically and commercially.

To break this "bloc," Kissinger initiated a strategy of "engaging" selected communist nations. Rather than isolating them, he would engage them first diplomatically in the hope of enticing them with the promise of commercial ties to loosen their allegiance to the Soviet dominated "communist bloc." He began with China in 1972. His strategy worked and by 1976 China was beginning to open to the outside world and subsequently went so far as to allow gradual transformation of its economy. Engagement, in other words, converted China from adversary to commercial partner. President Reagan successfully employed engagement to entice the Soviet Union to engage in arms control talks and to initiate economic reforms, which set the stage for the end of the Cold War in 1990.

Another Republican President, George Bush, father of George W. Bush, initiated a strategy of engagement aimed at North Korea, something South Korea had already initiated in its dialogue with Pyongyang than commenced in 1989. Democrat Bill Clinton built upon South Korea's and his predecessor's success regarding North Korea.

President Obama thus is not initiating a new global diplomatic strategy. On the contrary, he is returning US foreign policy to the strategy of engagement as successfully employed by Republican Presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Bush, as well as Democratic President Clinton.

Engagement accents reliance on multilateral diplomacy and cooperation to promote national goals. As discussed above, President Obama declared in his April 1, 2009 joint statement with Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev the intention to negotiate by July 2009 "a new agreement" aimed at the "reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms." Four days later, President Obama declared on April 5, 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic the goal of achieving a "world without nuclear weapons." He declared that he would "reduce the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy ..." He tipped his hat to multilateralism by stating, "We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, ..." On the other hand, he recognized the need for preserving deterrence, "As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe,

secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary., and guarantee that defense to our allies ...” In the same speech, he pledged to “... immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.” Furthermore, he continued, “... we will strengthen the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty ...” and “... build a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation.” None of these goals are new, but all are reversals of his predecessor’s unilateral, military based national defense strategy.

Obama verse Bush

Multilateralism verse Unilateralism

President Obama, like his predecessor President Bush, will retain national security as his foremost priority. This is a fundamental responsibility of any American president as assigned him in the U.S. Constitution. National interests and domestic political concerns drive U.S. foreign policy. But the greatest difference between the two presidents could prove to be their approaches to ensuring the nation’s security. Both oppose isolationism, the United States’ disengagement from world affairs. They both believe that the United States must play a leading role in world affairs and oppose any retreat of American power and influence back to the pre-World War II situation. But here they part company.

President Obama will pursue a goal strategy that accents multilateral diplomacy, negotiation and pragmatism. We can expect the United States to play an increasingly active role in international organizations and the promotion of multilateral treaties and diplomacy. He has already turned to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to rally international criticism of North Korea’s violation of the UN’s Resolution 1718 that called upon North Korea to halt its testing of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. In doing so, President Obama worked with Japan, South Korea and permanent members Obama of the UNSC to achieve an agreed upon result.

President Bush saw the United States as the world’s most formidable power, economically and militarily. For him, regional geopolitical realities and the concerns of allies and friends played a secondary role in the formulation of his foreign policy strategy. (C. Kenneth Quinones, “Dualism in the Bush Administration’s North Korea Policy,” *Asian Perspective* (2003) Vol. 27, No. 1, 198. Also, Bob Woodward, “Ten Days in September – Inside the War Cabinet,” *Washington Post* (January 31, 2002). Steven Mufson, “The Way Bush Sees the World,” *Washington Post* (February 17, 2002.) He thus preferred unilateralism, or acting alone, over multilateralism. He believed multilateralism limited US options and weakened the deterrent effect of its military might. Thus President Bush reportedly once told the world, “Either you are with us or against us.” Regarding the anti-American insurgency in Iraq, Bush expressed his confidence in U.S. military might when he boldly but not too wisely declared, “Bring them on!” Rather than deterring the insurgents, this and similar comments appear to have intensified the insurgency.

Pragmatism verse Ideology

Obama’s pragmatism is defined by his multi-ethnic and multi-cultural background, yet it is tempered by his legal education. But President Bush during his first term in office frequently proclaimed that God had defined his policy priorities. This gave him

a sense of assertive self confidence that sometimes bordered on religious righteousness. He divided the world into “good versus evil,” and assigned himself, as the leader of the United States, the authority for labeling leaders and nations either good or evil. In the process he alienated some rulers such as North Korea’s Kim Jong Il, among others, by labeling them members of an “axis of evil.” (Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, p. 340.) Others he deemed it his responsibility to destroy such as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein. Only late in his administration did President Bush finally recognize the negative consequences of his self-righteous rhetoric and begin to restrain it.

Already President Obama has established a very different tone for his presidency. Unlike Bush, he relies on the advice of subordinates rather than God, Cheney and a small circle of advisers. Thus Obama has formed several advisory councils to address key issues such as the international financial crisis, and has already consulted with numerous world leaders in Europe, East Asia and Latin America. Although a Christian, Obama prefers to practice his religion in privacy rather than proclaiming it his primary motivating force. Rather than publicly belittle those with whom he disagrees, Obama prefers to invite them to sit down together to discuss their differences.

Military Option

President Obama is certain to continue to strive to maintain U.S. military supremacy around the world. But he clearly opposes the unilateral deployment of US military force. On the contrary, we can expect him to resort to military methods only when options cannot defend Americans or the United States as is the case with piracy off the Somalia coast and Taliban activities on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Already President Obama has moved to shift US military forces from Iraq to Afghanistan. But he appears determined to maintain a concentration of US military might in the Middle East. Consequently, his administration will continue the gradual withdrawal of US land forces from Northeast Asia while sustaining significant naval and air force power in the area.

As stated on the White House internet web site, the Obama Administration will strive to improve alliances around the world. (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office.) The key word will be “partnerships,” which means that nations with common goals also share obligations with the United States. President Obama has already turned to the NATO alliance and US allies in East Asia for increased contributions to the war against terrorism in Afghanistan and the promotion of nuclear weapons non-proliferation, among other things.

This is a reversal of his predecessor President Bush’s preference for unilateral US action based on superior military might. President Bush believed that the national security of the United States was best protected by strengthening its military deterrence capability and preserving its “military options.” This was reflected in his declaration of the so-called “Bush Doctrine” in December 2002 in which he declared that as president he had the authority to attack, using either or both conventional and nuclear weapons, any nation he deemed a threat to the national security of the United States. (White House, *National Security Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, December

2002, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/WMDStrategy.) He outlined this concept in his January 2003 State of the Union speech to the US Congress. In it he declared that there existed an “axis of evil” that consisted of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. He said that the United States had the right of self defense should he determine that any of these nations might attack it. (Hakan Tunc, “Preemption in the Bush Doctrine: A Reappraisal,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* (January 2009) Vol. 5, I. pp. 1-16.)

President Bush also moved to weaken the international treaty structure that countered nuclear proliferation and fostered arms control. He believed this was necessary to strengthen the United States’ ability to act unilaterally to defend itself against any perceived threat. He subsequently de-emphasized the importance of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in favor of a regional approach not subject to multilateral constraints. He thus dealt separately with each nation believed to be developing nuclear weapons.

His avowed primary reason for invading Iraq was to end its nuclear weapons program. In the process he dismissed the International Atomic Energy Agency’s assessment that Iraq had previously ended this program. Eventually Bush proved wrong and the IAEA correct. No evidence of a nuclear weapons program was found in Iraq.

Bush also sanctioned the United Kingdom’s successful negotiations with Libya to discard its nuclear weapons. At the time, President Bush adamantly refused to engage North Korea in negotiations aimed at achieving a similar purpose. Regarding Iran, Bush condoned the European Union’s negotiations with it aimed at ending its alleged nuclear weapons program. At the same time, the Bush Administration ignored Pakistan’s long involvement in the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and approved of India’s development of nuclear weapons and peaceful nuclear energy program but without it joining the NPT.

Regarding North Korea, President Bush wavered between extremes. First he refused to authorize any dialogue or negotiations with North Korea. He preferred coercive tactics such as diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions and warnings of a “military options” over dialogue and inducements. He joined the Chinese hosted Six Party Talks in the hope of using China as a hammer to pound North Korea into submission. When this failed, he reversed himself and adopted a much more conciliatory posture toward Pyongyang. Toward the end of his term, he commissioned the State Department to engage in intense negotiations with North Korea and offered diplomatic and economic inducements in exchange for cooperation. The endeavor proved too little too late. In the process, his hard line tactics initially alienated South Korea at the beginning of his presidency but then his shift to a conciliatory posture eventually angered Japan.

Regarding ballistic missile proliferation, Bush again preferred a unilateral military rather than multilateral diplomatic approach. (John Newhouse, “The Missile Defense Debate,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 80.No. 4 (July-August, 2001) 97-109, and Evan S. Medeiros, *Ballistic Missile Defense and Northeast Asian Security: Views from Washington, Beijing and Tokyo* (Monterey, CA: Stanley Foundation and Monterey Institute of International Studies, 2001.) He discarded the US-USSR Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty so that he could build a global US anti-ballistic missile defense system.

His plans to build anti-ballistic missile facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic alienated Russia and worried most European Union nations. He ruled out missile negotiations with North Korea and instead pressed the US Defense Department to quickly deploy anti-ballistic missiles on Japanese and South Korean naval ships as well as in Alaska. His goal of establishing a National Missile Defense (NMD) while in office fell short because his ambition outpaced the ability of scientists to build a reliable system.

President Bush accomplished little at the end of his eight years in office. Only Libya had ended its nuclear weapons program, but the United Kingdom deserves credit for this. His unilateralist policies and strategies had alienated allies and adversaries alike, and undercut prior progress toward the establishment of an international system of treaties designed to restrict and regulate the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), particularly nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Still there is no reliable anti-ballistic missile shield. The NPT and other non-proliferation treaties have been weakened. North Korea and Iran continue to pursue their nuclear weapons ambitions. Pakistan's prior proliferation of nuclear weapons technology has yet to be addressed. Consequently Bush's successor has found it necessary to invest considerable time and energy in repairing relations with nations around the world.

The Obama Administration's Regional Priorities

President Obama's words and deeds during his first 100 days in office clearly indicate that his concerns focus on: 1. Europe, 2. the Middle East, 3. East Asia, 4. Latin American and then other areas of the world. This concern is documented by the number of official statements that the White House has released in his name since January 20, 2009. Of the approximately 197 statements, 44 concerned foreign policy. Of these, half dealt with Europe, almost 23% with the Middle East, 20% with Latin American and 16% with East Asia. If we add to these statements those by Secretary of State Clinton, the ratio remains approximately the same except that East Asia's total rises to about 17%, replacing Latin America as the Administration's third priority area.

East Asia:

President Obama has made seven statements about the nations of Northeast Asia: China, Japan, North and South Korea. Secretary of State Clinton's remarks demonstrate an almost equal distribution of concern about each specific nation: Japan 8 statements, China 6, and the two Koreas each five statements as well as an additional 6 statements regarding the entire region.

The fact that Secretary of State Clinton's trip abroad was to East Asia under scores the significance that the Obama Administration assigns to the region. On the eve of her trip she addressed the Asia Society in New York on February 13, 2009. Clinton explained that her goal was to, "signal that we need strong partners across the Pacific, just as we need strong partners across the Atlantic. We (the USA), are, after all, both a transatlantic and transpacific power." (www.state.gov/secretary/rm.February_13,2009).

First she called on the region's nations to join with the United States as "partners" to deal with global issues such as the global financial crisis and global warming, terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, food shortages and energy vulnerability, etc. Then she turned to specific nations within East Asia. She expressed appreciation for the assistance that Japan and South Korea had already pledged to assist with the reconstruction of Afghanistan and with combating piracy near Somalia. She recalled that the US-Japan alliance will celebrate its 50th year in 2010 and called South Korea "one of our staunchest historic allies." As for China, she accented the positive by pointing to its hosting of the Six-Party Talks concerning North Korea's nuclear program and China's participation in international peacekeeping. She labeled North Korea's nuclear program "the most acute challenge to stability in Northeast Asia."

Japan:

President Obama indicated the significance he assigns to the US-Japan alliance by welcoming on February 24, 2009 (one month after becoming president) Japanese Prime Minister ASO Taro as the first official visit to the White House during his administration. In his short statement prior to the brief meeting, Obama reiterated the long held view that the US-Japan alliance "is the cornerstone of security in East Asia." (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-President, February 24, 2009). He emphasized that the two allies must "work together not only on issues related to the Pacific Rim but throughout the world, ... on issues ranging from climate change to Afghanistan."

Secretary Clinton emphasized Japan's importance to the United States by making it her first stop on her first official trip abroad to East Asia in February 2009. During her February 17, 2009 meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister NAKASONE Hirofumi, they reiterated that their alliance is the "cornerstone of security" in East Asia. (www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us, February 17, 2009.) Clinton confirmed that the United States will maintain its nuclear umbrella over Japan and other specifics of the US-Japan Alliance. They signed the agreement on the Relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps from Okinawa in which Japan agreed to pay much of the cost for relocating 8,000 Marines to Guam. The misconduct of US military personnel on the Japanese island of Okinawa and the US military's exclusive use of some of the island's most valuable real estate have long been contentious issues in the US-Japan relationship. The hope is that the new bilateral agreement and relocation of U.S. forces will end this friction.

The two nations agreed that North Korea's nuclear and missile development programs pose serious threats to the region's peace and stability. They pledged to work with the Republic of Korea through the Six Party Talks to continue efforts to achieve a diplomatic end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Clinton noted Japan's concern about North Korea's prior abduction of Japanese citizens and agreed that the issue should be resolved through the framework of the Six Party Talks. Clinton separately noted Nakasone's concerns about China's military modernization, its imbalanced economic development between the wealthy and the poor, and related issues.

Regarding Afghanistan, Nakasone pledged to continue Japan's refueling of NATO vessels in the Indian Ocean, to pay 50% of the Afghanistan police force's annual salary, to construct 500 schools, medical clinics and 650 kilometers of road, to build a new terminal at Kabut International Airport and to train 10,000 teachers.

On global issues, the two allies confirmed their shared concerns about: global warming, the international economic crisis, nuclear proliferation, especially involving North Korea and Iran, and the need for peace in the Middle East.

China:

President Obama on April 1, 2009 first met Chinese President HU Jintao on the margins of the G 20 Financial Summit in London. They reiterated what Secretary Clinton and Chinese Foreign Minister YANG Jiechi had agreed upon at their February 21 meeting (see below). Specifically, the two nations would "work together to build a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive U.S.-China relationship for the 21st Century ...". The two leaders established the "U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue." The White House Statement about the London summit explained that Secretary Clinton and Chinese State Councilor DAI Bingguo would chair the "Strategic Track" and U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner and Chinese Vice Premier WANG Qishan would chair the "Economic Track." (www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office. "Statement on Bilateral Meeting with President Hu, April 1, 2009.) Presidents Obama and Hu also agreed to "expand consultations on non-proliferation and other security issues, particularly regarding the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the Iranian nuclear issue.

Prior to the Obama-Hu meeting in London, Chinese Foreign Minister YANG Jiechi and Secretary Clinton had met in Beijing on February 21, 2009. At this meeting, Secretary Clinton listed three pressing priorities for US-China cooperation: 1. joint addressing of the global economic crisis, 2. clean energy and global warming, and 3. security issues. (www.state.gov/secretary/rm. "Remarks with Chinese Foreign Minister YANG Jiechi," February 21, 2009). They agreed to "build a cooperative relationship" that would encompass "the establishment of the China-U.S. strategic and economic dialogues mechanism, ..." (see above).

Foreign Minister Yang also concurred that "... to maintain the Six-Party talks process, and facilitate proper settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula is crucial to the early realization of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the enduring peace and stability in northeast Asia."

The two sides also pledged to cooperate regarding several other issues, including: counter-terrorism and military-to-military exchanges, trade, international law enforcement, exchanges in the areas of science, education and health.

When Secretary Clinton next met Chinese Foreign Minister Yang in Washington, D.C. on March 11, she first affirmed that the United States and China shared the goal of building "a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relations, and to work together ... to address common challenges and seize common opportunities." At this meeting, she explained that there was dialogue "about areas where we do not agree, including human rights." (www.state.gov/secretary/rm. [March 11](#), 2009.)

North Korea:

President Obama has repeatedly recognized North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions to be a threat not only to the United States and its allies in East Asia, but also as undermining international efforts to end nuclear weapons and ballistic missile proliferation. But whereas President Bush vacillated between confrontation and engagement of North Korea, President Obama has demonstrated a preference for a "carrot and stick" approach that offers Pyongyang diplomatic and economic inducements, and negotiated concessions without any reference to the possible use of military force.

As evident above, Obama will continue to pursue his predecessor's goals and reliance on the Six Party Talks, as reiterated by several high level meetings between the United States, Japan, South Korea, China and Russia, as well as the appointment of Ambassador Bosworth as Special Representative for North Korea Policy. But here he parts company with Bush. Obama will rely on trilateral coordination with Japan and South Korea, a tactic first developed during the Clinton Administration in the 1990s. President Bush preferred to deal separately with each ally. Also, Obama favors dialogue, both multilateral and bilateral, over confrontation and unilateral coercive measures. Notably absent from Obama's remarks regarding North Korea have been any reference to a "military option" or remarks that belittle North Korea's leadership, something President Bush voiced often.

The Obama Administration's first diplomatic overture to North Korea came on February 13 when Secretary Clinton, in a speech to the Asia Society in New York, offered,

If North Korea is genuinely prepared to completely and verifiably eliminate their nuclear weapons program, the Obama Administration will be willing to normalize bilateral relations, replace the peninsula's long standing armistice agreements with a permanent peace treaty, and assist in meeting the energy and other economic needs for the North Korea people. (www.state.gov/secretary, "Remarks at the Asia Society," February 13, 2009, p. 3.)

Some State Department officials termed the initiative "naïve," and subsequent developments have proven them to be correct. Already a month earlier, on January 17, 2009, North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs dismissed any possibility of ending its nuclear program in exchange for normal diplomatic relations with the United States and economic assistance. Pyongyang's official statement declared, "The issue of normalizing the relations and the nuclear issue are the two separate matters ..." It concluded, "Though the bilateral relations are normalized in a diplomatic manner, the DPRK's status as a nuclear weapons state will remain unchanged as long as it is exposed even to the slightest U.S. nuclear threat." (www.kcna.co.jp, "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Dismisses U.S. Wrong Assertion, January 17, 2009.)

Nevertheless, a patient Obama has persisted. In a formal statement issued on April 5, 2009 in reaction to North Korea's launching of a long range ballistic missile, President Obama stated, "North Korea's development and proliferation of ballistic missile technology pose a threat to the northeast Asian region and to international peace and security." (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office, "Statement by the

President from Prague, Czech Republic,” April 5, 2009.) He added, “The United States is fully committed to maintaining security and stability in northeast Asia and we will continue working for the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six Party Talks.” This held open the door to a negotiated deal with North Korea, but he cautioned that,

North Korea has a pathway to acceptance in the international community, but it will not find that acceptance unless it abandons its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and abides by its international obligations and commitments.

Obama later the same day responded firmly to North Korea’s provocative launching of a long range ballistic missile on April 5. (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office, US-European Council Joint Statement on the North Korean Launch, April 5, 2009.) He joined with European allies to press a dual track diplomatic approach to North Korea. First, North Korea’s defiance of UN Security Council Resolution 1718 required that the international community take the matter immediately before the UN Security Council to demonstrate firmly that Pyongyang cannot disregard UN Security Council resolutions “with impunity.” But the statement again kept open the possibility for a diplomatic end to North Korea’s “pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and policy of threats aimed at its neighbors ...”

Six Party Talks Plus Bilateral US-DPRK Dialogue

Obama’s statements reiterated points previously made by his Secretary of State Hilary Clinton during her February visit to Japan, South Korea and China, as well as Special Representative for North Korea Policy Ambassador Stephen Bosworth when he visited the region in early March 2009. Prior to her departure and each stop during her February visit to East Asia, Clinton emphasized the United States’ desire to continue working through the Six Party Talks to seek a diplomatic resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue. This was evident in joint and unilateral statements issued after meetings with the foreign ministers of Japan, South Korea and China. On February 19 in Tokyo she told journalists, “... the previous administration’s policy changed, as you know, over time. And I think the ending policy – that we had to engage in the Six-Party Talks and even bilaterally with North Korea – is where they should have started ... we have to work closely with the other partners, particularly Japan and South Korea, and engage with China and Russia to bring influence to bear on North Korea ...” (www.state.gov/press, “North Korea: Engaging in More Bilaterals and the Six-Party Talks,” February 17, 2009.) She added that she believed “the agenda for the Six-Party Talks is a comprehensive one, denuclearizing in a verifiable and complete way, dealing with their missiles, and the human rights agenda, which includes the [Japanese] abductees.”

On February 21, 2009 the State Department released a statement that named Ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth as Special Representative for North Korea Policy. (www.state.gov/press, “Appointment of Ambassador Stephen Bosworth as Special Representative for North Korea Policy,” February 21, 2009.) When Clinton introduced Bosworth on February 26, she explained, “... Ambassador Bosworth ... will be our senior official handling North Korea issues, and he will report to President Obama and me.” (www.state.gov/press, “Ambassador Bosworth to Lead Efforts on U.S. Engagement with North Korea,” February 26, 2009.)

No soon had Clinton introduced him that Bosworth said, “Well obviously, we plan to engage with North Korea. The question as to whether we’re going to engage with them on this particular trip remains to be decided. That will depend upon our consultations in the region, and it will depend upon what we hear back from the North Koreans.”

When visiting Tokyo on March 6, Bosworth said after discussions with his Japanese counterpart, “We agree that we would like to resume the Six-Party Talks as soon as possible.” (www.state.gov/press, “Address to the U.S. Global Leadership Campaign,” March 6, 2009.) He then clarified that he would not be visiting Pyongyang during his March 2009 trip. North Korea had rejected his offer for talks in Pyongyang. Bosworth next reiterated the US preference for the Six Party Talks during his March 9-10 visit to Seoul where he also consulted with his Russian counterpart who happened to be in Seoul.

Despite the Obama Administration’s diplomatic overtures thus far, North Korea has yet to moderate its statements and conduct. First it rejected Washington’s offer of bilateral diplomatic normalization as unworthy. Then Pyongyang on March 18, 2009 expelled an American humanitarian consortium from North Korea and halted South Korean access to the joint South-North Kaesong Industrial Zone. (www.BBC.com, “North Korea Refuses US Food Aid,” March 18, 2009.)

Soon after North Korea launched its third long range ballistic missile on April 5, despite international objections. When the UN Security Council approved a President’s Statement that condemned North Korea’s launch as a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1718, North Korea expelled American and International Atomic Energy Agency technicians from its Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center and restarted its nuclear program. North Korea’s intentions will be assessed in a separate paper.

Secretary Clinton told the U.S. House Foreign Relations Committee in testimony on April 23, 2009, “I think we have to be strong, patient, persistent and not give in to the kind of back-and-forth, the unpredictable behavior of the North Korean regime.” (Bloomberg News, “Clinton Says U.S. Won’t Bend to North Korea’s Unpredictability,” April 23, 2009.)

In other words, the Obama Administration has demonstrated some naiveté regarding its hopes of early progress with North Korea, yet its appointment of an experienced diplomat very experienced with dealing with North Korea clearly indicates that it does recognize the difficulty ahead in dealing with North Korea. At the same time, the Obama Administration appear equally determined to be patient and persistent in pursuing its “carrot and stick” strategy that accents multilateral diplomacy and dialogue.

South Korea:

President Obama first met his South Korean counterpart President LEE Myung-bak on the margins of the G 20 meeting in London on April 2, 2009. Before the meeting, Obama called South Korea “one of America’s closest allies and greatest friends.” www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office, “Remarks by President Obama

Before Meeting with President Lee Myung-bak of the Republic of Korea,” April 2, 2009.)

The White House statement issued after the summit made it clear that the US-South Korea alliance is solid. The two leaders agreed to work together to stimulate their economies, reform the international financial regulatory system and to enhance the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, something that Obama had criticized during his presidential campaign. They assigned priority to “continue close cooperation in the effort to peacefully and verifiably eliminate North Korea’s nuclear programs, weapons and material through the Six-Party Talks.” President Obama also thanked South Korea for its contributions and support to promote reconstruction in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. (www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office, Statement Following President Obama’s Meeting with President Lee of the Republic of Korea,” April 2, 2009.)

In mid-February, Secretary Clinton had praised South Korea as “one of our staunchest historic allies.” (www.state.gov/secretary, “Remarks at the Asia Society,” February 13, 2009.) A few days later in Seoul she met her South Korean counterpart Foreign Minister YU Myung-hwan. As with Japan and later with China, she gained agreement that the United States and South Korea that it would be mutually beneficial to cooperative on dealing with the international financial crisis, ending North Korea’s nuclear program by relying on the Six Party Talks, and by joining together to aid Afghanistan’s reconstruction. They also agreed that a bilateral trade agreement would promote their mutual economic interests. Surprisingly little was said either in Clinton’s meeting in Seoul or Obama’s meeting in London about the future of the US-South Korea alliance. Here some potentially contentious issues remain to be resolved.

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Key Personalities - USA

Gary Samore, National Security Council Adviser on Nuclear Proliferation

Issues, served as an adviser to the Ambassador at large for nuclear proliferation issues in the Department of State during the former Bush Administration. He retained that position in the early period of the Clinton Administration and then became a member of the US Delegation to the Nuclear Talks with North Korea between 1993 and 1996. He and Dr. Quinones held more than 30 negotiating sessions with North Korean officials in New York between 1993 and July 1994 aimed at getting the US-North Korea negotiations restarted. In 1997, he moved to the Clinton Administration's National Security Council where he served as assistant National Security Council adviser on nuclear proliferation issues. He left the government after President Bush's election and moved first to London's Institute for Strategic and Security Studies and then to the New York based Council on Foreign Relations. A highly intelligent, soft spoken person, he holds a Ph.D. in Saudi Arabian studies, is married and the father of one child.

Samore is a strong advocate of the NPT and other international treaties designed to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. He favors a strong IAEA and prefers negotiation using inducements but is an experienced and capable negotiator who has a deep knowledge of the global nuclear proliferation regime and the North Korea nuclear problem. He is the personal friend of Energy Department Deputy Secretary Daniel Poneman

Jeff Bader, National Security Council Adviser on Northeast Asia, was a career diplomat in the U.S. Foreign Service prior to his retirement to a position at the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC. Bader was Director of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs in 1993-95 when I handled North Korean affairs. A small, quiet man, he is highly intelligent, very knowledgeable about Northeast Asia, including North Korea, and quite affable. He believes US policy toward East Asia should assign first priority to fostering positive relations with China. He favors engagement over containment, negotiation over confrontation, and the use of economic and diplomatic inducements to promote US national interests.

Daniel Poneman, Department of Energy Deputy Secretary, is a liberal Republican who served as National Security Advisor for Nuclear Proliferation Issues in the Clinton Administration. Like Samore, his close colleague and personal friend, Poneman believes the best way to promote nuclear non-proliferation is through the promotion of international treaties and reliance on the IAEA. He is less comfortable than Samore with the use of diplomatic and other inducement to entice North Korea's cooperation and harbors a deep distrust of Pyongyang's leadership. He firmly believes North Korea cannot be trusted and that the US must maintain a resolute military deterrence capability and close, trilateral coordination with Japan and South Korea. Poneman, like Samore, advocate a rigorous verification process consistent with IAEA standards.

Stephen Bosworth, Special Envoy for North Korea, is an experienced and polished diplomat who built the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) into a stable multilateral organization during the later years of the Clinton Administration. Prior to his assuming its directorship, KEDO was on the verge of collapse. Bosworth rallied support from Seoul, Tokyo, the EU and Australia which stabilized KEDO. Bosworth also quickly won the confidence and trust of North Korea's diplomats. He shares with Samore and Poneman confidence that persistent diplomacy will achieve progress toward halting North Korea's nuclear program. But he is realistic in his assessment of North Korea and believes it cannot be trusted to comply with its promises. He favors internationally maintained monitoring and persistent, firm negotiation rather than harsh retaliation for faulty compliance.

Sung Kim, US Ambassador to the Six Party Talks, was born in Seoul, Korea to an official in South Korea's Korea Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) who was involved in the kidnapping of South Korean democracy movement leader and president Kim Dae-jung. Kim's father had a successful career under Presidents Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, both military dictators, but at the end of the Chun presidency, Kim's father received a special immigrant visa and moved to Los Angeles. Raised and educated in the United States, Sung Kim entered the U.S. Foreign Service in the early 1990s, served in China and Washington, DC and was eventually assigned to the US Embassy in Seoul as the political-military affairs officer before being appointed the Director of Korea Affairs in 2006. An extremely cautious person, he is noted for his calm, confident compliance with his superiors' wishes and conformity with established policies and practices. Sung Kim is a follower, not an innovator. He is firmly loyal to the USA but hopes his efforts will help pave the way for improved US-North Korea relations. He has little knowledge and understanding of Japan.

- **Frank Jannuzzi**, Senior Staff, Senate Foreign Relations Committee: he first entered the US government as a White House Fellow in the early 1990s after graduating from Yale University. He served in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research as an analyst focused on ballistic missile development by Pakistan, North Korea and Middle Eastern nations. In 1995 he shifted to the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where he has served since. Highly intelligent, affable and quite knowledgeable about Northeast Asia, he is a highly respected adviser to all members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He worked closely with President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton when they were members of the committee, and he is well known and respected by key Obama Administration advisers on foreign policy, particularly regarding Northeast Asia. Mr. Jannuzzi has visited North Korea three times and spent 2006-2007 in Japan.

Key Personalities – Republic of Korea

- **Ban Ki-moon**, UN Secretary General
- **Yu Myong-hwan**, Foreign Minister
- **Pak In-kuk**, Ambassador to the UN
- **Kim Sook**, Deputy Director, National Intelligence Service

Key Personalities – DPRK

- **Kim Gye-kwan**, First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
- **Li Gun**, Director General, North American Affairs, Foreign Ministry
- **Pak Gil-yon**, DPRK Ambassador to the UN
- **Kim Myong-gil**, DPRK Liaison with the US government
- **Cha Song-nam**, DPRK Ambassador to the United Kingdom