

**Nuclear Proliferation on the Korean Peninsula -  
A Global Problem in Need of  
A Regional Solution**

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## **Introduction**

Nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula has been a persistent problem since 1990. If left unresolved, one day we may discover that our only option to resolve it is a second Korean War. In Washington, D.C., the accepted explanation for the delay is the persistence of North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear capability and its failure to fulfill prior pledges. Undoubtedly, these are the most apparent causes, at least as the situation is viewed from Washington, D.C. But when the situation is viewed from a broader perspective, reality poses a much more complex scenario. After all, the problem has many dimensions. One of those is Pyongyang's perspective of the problem.

China has viewed the US-North Korean dispute from both sides and concluded it needed to take the unprecedented step of intervening to temper their increasing hostility and to reduce the risk of another Korean War. This set the stage for the Six Party Talks which have brought together for the first time all of North Korea's neighbors (China, Japan, the two Koreas, and Russia) plus the United States. After a year of intense diplomacy and three formal rounds of diplomatic dialogue, progress toward a resolution of the US-North Korea nuclear impasse remains tentative at best. But at the least, the effort has calm tensions, reduced the risk of war and opened the way for a peaceful diplomatic solution.

Doing likewise in the United States might prove similarly beneficial for our efforts to achieve President Bush's goal of a "peaceful diplomatic solution." The exercise will not necessarily insure that we achieve that goal, but it might better enable us to achieve it.

## **Vacillating Adversaries**

A review of the recent history of US-North Korea relations suggests several explanations for these two nations to normalize their relationship. The situation is indeed abnormal. The US restored full diplomatic relations with Germany and Japan in less than a decade after having engaged them in total world war. The normalization of relations between the US and its adversaries during the Cold War – Russia, China and Vietnam – is an historical fact. But US-North Korea relations have persisted in a technical state of war since 1950, almost for half a century.

North Korea prefers to deal with certainty. US and South Korean strategy for dealing with North Korea was relatively constant until 1988, but neither they or North Korea were ready to engage one another. Only when the Cold War seemed to be ebbing did both sides show any interest in pursuing possible diplomatic rapprochement. But the effort ever since has been delayed and disrupted by shifting strategies on both sides. Further complicating the situation, at least from Pyongyang's perspective, has the United States transfer of presidential power every four to eight years. Pyongyang feared that a commitment by one US presidential administration might not endure during the next.

Such hesitation is evident in Pyongyang's reaction to Washington's most recent offer at the June 2004 third round of the Six Party Talks. Since the talks commenced in June 2003, Washington has maintained a "take it or leave it" attitude toward Pyongyang. But

in June, it seemed to suggest that it might consider negotiating with North Korea. Observers, particularly in Pyongyang, promptly asked, “Is Washington making a temporary adjustment or a strategic shift in its strategy.” Until this is clarified, progress at the next round of talks in September 2004 is quite unlikely pending clarification of Washington position.

This vacillation has been going on since 1991, but in the US we are best acquainted with North Korea’s shifts. In 1991, it abruptly altered its long time strategy for dealing with the United States and South Korea. After the demise of its foremost ally, the Soviet Union, North Korea shifted from reliance on coercive diplomacy and a belligerent posture to seeking admission into the international community. This achieved remarkable results until the fall of 1992 when it was confirmed that North Korea appeared to be hiding the truth about its previous production of plutonium.

Once again, in March 1993, Pyongyang abruptly returned to its previous hostile posture by announcing its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Within weeks, however, Pyongyang sought to engage the United States in negotiations to resolve the first nuclear crisis, which led to the Agreed Framework of 1994. Over the next six or seven years, Pyongyang’s commitment to engagement seemed to wane. By 2001, the new Bush Administration was convinced that Pyongyang had reverted to the duplicity of claiming compliance with its pledges to discard its nuclear ambitions while covertly doing the contrary.

North Korea’s apparent admission in October 2002 that it had a clandestine nuclear weapons program may have been an ill conceived effort to restart negotiations with the United States, but it backfired. The Bush Administration promptly slammed closed the door to any future negotiations. Ever since it has demanded that North Korea either unilaterally “completely, verifiably and irreversibly dismantle” (CVID) all of its nuclear programs or else.

Predictably, North Korea’s response was negative. While taking increasingly provocative steps, Pyongyang demanded that a resolution to the escalating impasse would require direct, bilateral US-North Korea negotiations. It backed down only after China intervened which set the stage for the Six Party Talks. As indicated above, the US and North Korea remain far from achieving reconciliation. Pyongyang’s hesitancy about the United States’ offer at the June 2004 round of the Six Party talks reflects its perception of Washington and Seoul’s prior vacillation regarding strategy toward North Korea.

### **Washington and Seoul’s Track Record**

Previous vacillation by has caused similar confusion and delay. Here we concentrate on US and South Korean shifts of strategy. Former President Bush in 1991 teamed up with South Korea and initiated a nuclear counter proliferation strategy aimed at inducing North Korea to forego its conventional coercive diplomacy and hostile posture. In exchange, it would be admitted to and benefit from membership in the international community. This was a profound shift that ended four decades of “containment” and

initiated a process of “engagement” of North Korea. Pyongyang’s blunders, as discussed above, initially undercut the effort at rapprochement, but just as abruptly North Korea accepted the opportunity to negotiate with the United States.

President Clinton continued his predecessor’s engagement strategy. He too saw nuclear proliferation as a global threat to US security and world peace, and shared the conviction that the problem in Northeast Asia required a regionally oriented, negotiated political solution. This manifested itself in the US-North Korea nuclear negotiations that produced the 1994 Agreed Framework.

### **A Political Orphan**

The Agreed Framework, however, proved to be a political orphan, both in Washington and Pyongyang. The story of its critics in Washington is well known. Also fairly well known is the story of South Korean President Kim Yong-sam’s reluctant acceptance of the accord and hesitant support for its implementation. But this changed when South Koreans elected Kim Tae-jung president in 1998. His “sunshine diplomacy” toward North Korea was compatible with the Agreed Framework and prolonged its life.

But the political trend in Washington was the reverse. By 1998, Republican criticism in Congress of the accord had ballooned into a highly politicized and increasingly assertive chorus of protest. The Clinton Administration’s commitment to the Agreed Framework appeared to wane as indicated by the absence of supportive statements by ranking administration officials between 1997 and 1999. Only during the administration’s final quarter did the Secretary of State move to support the accord, but the effort proved to be too little, too late. Pyongyang opted to await the outcome of the 2000 US presidential election before making its next move.

### **Squabbling over Strategy**

The Republican victory in the 2000 election did not resolve the debate over US strategy for dealing with North Korea. If anything, the Bush Administration inadvertently perpetuated it debate by recruiting advocates of contending viewpoints into its ranks. Quickly two primary polarities emerged: “globalists” and “regionalists.” Both agreed that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was the foremost threat to US security and world peace, but they differed over how to deal with the problem.

The globalists advocated a global solution. They believed that the best response to WMD proliferation would be a unilateral strategy that accented decisive action, including pre-emptive armed attack on any nations believed to pose a threat to the United States. This is contrary to orthodox deterrence as practiced during the Cold War. Cold War deterrence was essentially defense, i.e. attack was to be deterred by maintaining military supremacy.

But the regionalists preferred traditional diplomacy backed by traditional, defensive style deterrence. They promoted the idea that proliferation in Northeast Asia could best be

resolved through diplomatic dialogue with North Korea backed by multilateral pressure from North Korea's neighbors, in addition to that of the United States. This dueling between factions in Washington further confused North Korea.

### **Reversion to Containment**

After a four month review of North Korea policy, President Bush in June 2001, moved to appease strategists by adopting a middle course. He initially adopted several half steps. The US would engage North Korea "any time, any where" in diplomatic dialogue, but not in diplomatic negotiations. It would not "reward" North Korea's alleged "nuclear blackmail" with concessions, but it would "consider" offering a "bold initiative" if North Korea complied with Washington's demands that it discard its WMD arsenal, demonstrate greater respect for the North Korean people, among other things. Parallel to this diplomatic initiative toward North Korea, the Bush Administration launched a campaign to belittle North Korea into submission. President Bush declared North Korea a member of the "axis of evil," its ruler ruthless, its political system despotic and the economy a "failed system." Again, predictably, Pyongyang reacted negatively.

The tragic events of "9/11" apparently convinced President Bush to adopt wholeheartedly his "globalists" strategy for dealing with WMD. We merged this with his "war on terrorism." As justification for adopting a unilateral pre-emptive strategy for countering WMD, he declared the existence of an "axis of evil" that included North Korea. North Korea's claims that the United State's "preemptive counter proliferation strategy" posed a threat to its national security basically fell on deaf ears in Washington, D.C.

### **Collision in Pyongyang**

Against this back dropped, the Bush Administration dispatched its first diplomatic mission to Pyongyang in October 2002. The encounter was a diplomatic disaster. North Korea first apparently denied, then admitted to having a clandestine highly enriched uranium nuclear weapons program. Rather than seeking confirmation of North Korea's apparent admission or asking for a copy of North Korea's statement, the US delegation simply departed. Soon the entire event became "history," as they stay in the State Department when something is over taken by over events.

By the end of October, US-North Korean relations reverted to where they stood in 1990 in an uncertain limbo between armed hostility and diplomatic rapprochement. The relationship soon moved toward armed hostility as both sides escalated tensions by engaging in saber rattling and exchanging threats. China's intervention in March 2003 fortunately tempered the hostility, and then set the stage for a resumption of diplomacy. A keener awareness of the political context, policy priorities and negotiating tactics of Pyongyang's diplomacy could improve prospects that the Six Party Talks will eventually yield a peaceful and mutually acceptable outcome.

## **The Political Context for Policy in Pyongyang**

North Korea has a split personality. Often we see its “hawkish” side, but it can also project a “dovish” posture. It would be simplistic to describe one as preferring war and the other peace. The fundamental distinction is not one of goals, but rather of tactics. Kim displays his “hawks” to deter attack and to assert his authority. He relies on his “doves” to achieve gains via diplomacy. Obviously the negotiating team that stepped off the airport at JFK in May 1993 represented North Korea’s “dovish” side. Both groups are totally loyal to Kim Jong Il and subscribe fully to his goal of regime survival

The visual contrast between Pyongyang’s “hawks and doves” is striking. North Korean generals literally wear their authority on their chests. Their uniforms are accented with broad, red strips and decorated with row upon row of bright brass medals, a display intended to excite awe and command attention. It is they who always flank Kim Jong Il on the reviewing whenever he shows off his “hawkish” side. Routinely this is done on Armed Forces Day and on July 27, the day the Korean War Armistice was signed. In North Korea, the date is celebrated as “victory over American Imperialism.” On these and other days of national commemoration, legions of North Korean troops goose step through Kim Il Sung Plaza, their rifles raised and pointed with shiny, razor sharp bayonets. Behind them rumble a multitude of polished tanks, mechanized artillery and freshly painted ballistic missiles. Next come wave upon wave Korean Worker Party members carrying thousands of fluttering red flags.

The scenes are provocative and captivating. Pyongyang invites international journalists to photograph and film these displays. This greatly magnifies the impact as the pictures are broadcast around the world. The scenes arouse concern and fear in the minds of viewers in the United States, Japan, South Korea and elsewhere. Visually and mentally, such displays are designed to contrast war’s potential cost with diplomacy’s dividends. Pyongyang’s aim clearly is to intimidate and to deter potential attackers, such as the United States.

Kim Jong Il, like his father, on occasion precedes a diplomatic offensive by flexing his military muscle. At the end of June, 2002, tensions between the United States and North Korea over the nuclear issue were intensifying. The United States was pondering the possibility of dispatching a diplomatic delegation to Pyongyang. Abruptly, a North Korean naval vessel sank a South Korean patrol boat. The brief battle took place off the Korean Peninsula’s west coast near the De-militarized Zone that has divided Korea since the end of the Korean War. Four South Korea sailors died and 19 were wounded. Many observers misinterpreted the incident as a prelude to a dangerous military escalation. Within days, however, North Korea’s foreign ministry offered to engage South Korea and Japan in diplomatic dialogue and invited Washington to send a diplomatic team to Pyongyang. The quick shift from muscle flexing to extending olive branches suggests Kim Jong Il is just as quickly influenced by his diplomats as by his generals. (5)

Pyongyang’s “dovish” side is much more subdued. Easily ignored during the massive displays of military might is the uninspiring gray, four story office building in Kim Il

Sung Plaza plaza's northeast corner. This is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The appearance of North Korea's diplomats abroad, like their building, is anything but awe inspiring. They usually appear in non-descript dark business suits decorated only with a single "Kim Il Sung" button on the lapel. Nothing about their appearance conveys authority or political potency. The international press tends to give these usually muted diplomats only brief notice. But, like so many things in North Korea, appearances can be deceiving. Appearances aside, both sides fit together to form a tightly coordinated whole that is unwaveringly loyalty to their "Supreme Commander," Kim Jong Il.

### **The Pyongyang Shuffle**

After the demise of North Korea's primary benefactor, the Soviet Union, in 1990, Pyongyang recast its primary goal from one of absorbing South Korea to prolonging the Kim dynasty. It subsequently adopted a double track strategy. One track accents the nation's martial readiness to defend Kim's domain, the other to engage in negotiations. After succeeding his father in 1994, Kim Jong Il quickly learned to shift between these "hawkish" and "dovish" tracks.

For example, at the end of the Clinton Administration in 2000, Kim Jong Il dispatched a diplomatic delegation to Washington for high level talks. The visit included a formal call on the US president, the first ever by a North Korean official. Kim sent as his chief representative general Cho Myong Rok. Cho, after calls on the Secretary of State, returned to his hotel room and quickly changed into the flashy, red and gold decorated dress uniform of a field marshal in the North Korean People's Army. North Korean officials later explained that the display aspired to remind the US president and the American people that, although the visit was a diplomatic venture, the two nations remain in a technical state of war. Meanwhile, Pyongyang's diplomats worked out of sight with their US counterparts to draft a joint communiqué designed to reaffirm earlier diplomatic understandings and to set the stage for possible new ones.

When relations between Washington and Pyongyang are tense, which is has been the case almost continuously since 2001, North Korea's "dovish" side is overshadowed by its "hawkish" alter ego. But being out of sight does not necessarily mean that they are out of Kim Jong Il's mind. On the contrary, Pyongyang's diplomats during such times are most likely campaigning in Beijing, Moscow, the United Nations and even South Korea to nurture doubts about United States intentions and policies toward North Korea. They are also intensely engaged in garnering the economic resources and access to the international market place that Kim Jong Il desperately needs to perpetuate his regime. Engaging in negotiations with the United States, in short, while highly significant, preoccupy only a small elite element of North Korea's Foreign Ministry.

The successes of Kim's diplomats in such pursuits keep them in business and Kim tuned to their advice. Since 1992, Kim's "doves" have greatly increased his nation's diplomatic and commercial ties around the world and brought home impressive amounts of humanitarian aid and new technology.

At times, Kim's generals and diplomats appear to be rivals. Some Pyongyang watchers see this as an indication that the regime may be losing its cohesiveness. Others contend that the regime is not a monolithic bureaucratic pyramid. They interpret the occasional friction between the "army and the party," the "military and civilians," or "hardliners and moderates" as being merely normal bureaucratic dueling over turf and tactics. North Korean officials' occasional comments in private tend to support this latter view. In other words, despite occasional rivalry, Pyongyang's "hawks" and "doves" remain two halves of a whole, despite their occasional, apparent rivalry. Regardless of which view one might favor, the supremacy of Kim Jong Il's authority remains unchallenged.

Consequently, it is Kim Jong Il's prerogative to decide which side of his nation's "personality" to assert at a particular time. This is not done whimsically. Civilian and military officials claim that Kim encourages them to assert their views, even if they differ. The process generally resembles that of the "inter-agency" process in Washington. Key officials debate and formulate formal recommendations which they submit to the "Supreme Commander." Such a practice is consistent with the national ideology, *juche*. It allows impressive pragmatism so long as the primary concern remains "serving the Supreme Commander" and furthering the nation's interests. But once Kim has decided his priorities and goals, the matter is settled. Further debate could be considered a challenge of his authority and result in dismissal or worse.

### **Diplomacy – High Treason or Salvation?**

Obviously Kim Jong Il is the "dream" team's "captain." Formulating a diplomatic deal between with the United States poses profound risks for Kim Jong Il. North Korea's leader, diplomats and generals agree that the United States is their worst enemy and greatest threat. President Bush's prior public calls for "regime change" in North Korea and forceful toppling of the Hussein regime have intensified this conviction. Given this perspective, the North Korean ideology's emphasis on loyalty to nation and Kim's father, and his generals' belief that they can again defeat "American imperialism" – as they believe they did in the Korean War - Kim must avoid any appearance of bowing to the United States.

Yet the Bush Administration now expects Kim to place his full trust in his foremost critic, President Bush. For three and one half years, President Bush has demanded that Kim unilaterally, "completely, verifiably, and irreversibly dismantle" (CVID) North Korea's entire arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. Washington further demands that Kim accept a so-called "Libyan" solution which means conceding to all of President Bush's demands without being assured anything in return until CVID is complete.

From Kim Jong Il's point of view, such a demand is unacceptable. It requires that he first trust his enemy more than his generals. It requires that he order his politically potent generals to unilaterally give up the awesome arsenal that Kim and his father ordered them to build to defend their nation and his regime. While Kim appears confident in his generals' loyalty, his hesitancy about striking a deal suggests uncertainty about two key

concerns: whether he can trust Bush and, secondly, whether he can trust his generals' longer term willingness to comply with the terms of such a negotiated settlement.

Nor would it seem politically astute for either Kim's hawks or doves to advocate unilateral disarmament. Any North Korean general or diplomat who might do so could promptly be deemed a traitor. Acceptance of Washington's terms would expose their nation to the unrestrained might of its most powerful enemy, the United States. Similarly, Kim could arouse doubts about his future intentions were he to ignore their advice and bow to Washington's demands.

Obviously, if a diplomatic deal is to be struck, North Korea's diplomats face formidable challenges. They must convince the United States and its allies to give them something of significance to their "Supreme Commander." Only then can they convince him and his generals that they are indeed working to promote the nation's security and to prolong the regime. Without their "Supreme Commander's" trust and political support, North Korea's diplomats are politically too impotent to strike any negotiated deal. Viewed in this context, CVID certainly is not an enticing option for North Korea's diplomats in that it requires that they give all for nothing.

Yet, in part because of a combination of pressure and economic inducements from Beijing, plus some from Seoul and Tokyo, Kim Jong Il since September 2003 has shown a preference for pursuing a negotiated settlement. A second, and possibly equally potent motivation, is Kim's realization that war with the United States would inevitably end his regime.

#### Pyongyang's Agreed Framework Critics

Frequently over looked, however, is Pyongyang's critics of the Agreed Framework, possibly because the chorus of critics was so loud in Washington. Even before the accord had been signed in October 1994, a North Korean delegation pressed their US counterparts in September 1994 in Berlin to have the United States substitute conventional non-nuclear, oil or coal fueled power plants replace the two light water reactors that North Korea had originally proposed, and that the United States had tentatively agreed to provide as part of the package deal that became known as the "Agreed Framework." At the Berlin talks, however, the US stood firm and North Korea gave up the idea of getting conventional instead of nuclear power plants.

But North Korea's military proved to be the accord's foremost critics. They saw it as undercutting their long time strategy of sustaining parity with the US deterrence capability. The North Korean People's Army had succeeded in building one of the mightiest conventional land forces in the world. Its more than million man force was equipped with the Soviet Union's most advanced mechanized equipment.

But parity ended in 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 chilled Pyongyang's relations with Moscow and ended the flow of military aid to North Korea. Within a year, the US use of "smart bombs" established US superiority over Soviet military technology by devastating Soviet tanks and other mechanized equipment on the battlefields of the first Gulf War. Most important was the end of the Soviet nuclear umbrella over North Korea. Since at least 1953, the two allies' alliance had ensured North Korea that it could rely on Moscow's nuclear deterrence capability. But in 1991, the new Russian government informed its old ally of its intention to revise their defense pact. In essence, North Korea lost its Soviet nuclear umbrella.

We cannot say for certain what has motivated North Korea in its persistent pursuit of nuclear weapons. Some have argued that it wishes to use its nuclear capability as a negotiating "card" to engage the United States. Others contend that North Korea remains committed to using coercive diplomacy backed by a nuclear capability to promote its national interests and to sustain its ruling regime. Both these views are quite credible, but they reflect conjecture in Washington more than strategic thinking in Pyongyang. North Korea's general's preoccupation with maintaining military parity with the United States and South Korea, however, is not conjecture. It has a highly visible and long track record. We would thus do well to at least incorporate this concern into our comprehension of the North Korean nuclear enigma.

### **Negotiating Tactics**

Some have contended that North Korea's negotiating style is best observed at Panmunjom, site of the Korean War Military Armistice Commission (MAC) meetings. These encounters, however, are neither diplomatic negotiating sessions nor intended to resolve outstanding bilateral issues. On the contrary, the MAC meetings of the past half century have and continue to be aimed at preserving the suspended state of war on the Korean Peninsula. They are not intended to achieve a durable peace, or to promote disarmament of any kind.

The best precedents for studying North Korea's diplomatic style are the US-DPRK negotiations of 1992 and 2000, North-South Korea dialogue of the past half century and the Japan-DPRK normalization talks that have occurred sporadically since 1990. These talks firmly establish that continuity characterizes North Korea's national priorities, diplomatic tactics and the membership of its diplomatic negotiating teams. This is particularly true regarding North Korea's engagement of the United States since 1992.

North Korea's basic goal in any negotiation is to achieve maximum gains for minimum concessions. The process begins by appearing "hard to get," that is by avoiding any appearance of being anxious to engage in negotiations. We saw this when China hosted the so-called "three party talks" in April 2003 that set the stage for the "six party talks" that followed. In such situations, Pyongyang initially maintains intentional ambiguity regarding its future intentions and goals. In the Six Party Talks, North Korea has retained this preliminary posture since the talks commenced in August 2003. Ambiguity still

surrounds its actual nuclear capability, whether it has reprocessed all 8,100 nuclear spent fuel rods, whether it poses a uranium enrichment program and whether it intends to test its nuclear weapons. (4)

All the while, Pyongyang has kept the door to negotiations open by proclaiming its willingness to “put everything on the table” in direct negotiations with the United States. This posturing has several purposes. Pyongyang is striving to keep Washington off balance while appealing to China and other nations’ concerns. Pyongyang also plays off the other side’s vulnerabilities. Pyongyang points to the United States’ reluctance to negotiate as the primary impediment to progress while declaring that it is the victim of US hostile policy and that it really would like to negotiate a peaceful resolution. Pyongyang also is searching for Washington’s “bottom line.” Given President Bush’s commitment to achieve a “peaceful diplomatic solution,” and continuing preoccupation with Iraq, Pyongyang knows that the Bush Administration will eventually engage in negotiations. The questions it wants answered are: when will bilateral negotiations begin and how much is Washington willing to give North Korea in exchange for giving up its nuclear ambitions.

North Korea’s diplomats always demand more than they can realistically expect to obtain. During negotiations, they “struggle” intensely to achieve these unrealistic goals. They do so less out of the expectation that they will get everything that they demand. Instead, their more likely goal is to impress their “Great Leader” Kim Jong Il with their sincerity and devotion to him. Ultimately, when the other side appears to have exhausted its flexibility, Pyongyang’s leadership directs that the “struggle” cease so it can consolidate its gains before starting a new negotiating cycle. But equally important to achieving its desired results is the “atmosphere” Pyongyang strives to create surrounding the negotiations. This process begins at home.

Arguably the best indication that Kim Jong Il is willing to engage in substantive negotiations to resolve the second nuclear crisis was his dispatch of members of North Korea’s “diplomatic dream team” to Beijing in February and June, 2004 to participate in the Six Party Talks. Heading the delegation was the soft spoken career diplomat Kim Gye Kwan, his deputy Li Gun and DPRK Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Han Song Ryol, all “dream team” members.

### **Making the Team**

Pyongyang’s most influential diplomats, titular head of state (and former foreign minister) Kim Yong-nam and his close deputy Kang Sok Ju, first vice minister of foreign affairs, hand picked the team members. Primary criteria includes: parents’ established loyalty and service to the nation and its leaders, an individual’s innate intelligence and demonstrated commitment to the nation, its leader and his ideology when a young member of the Korean (Communist) Workers’ Party. Once selected for the team, wavering in one’s commitment is disallowed and could result in prompt disbarment and ostracism.

Continuity is a common characteristic of the team's membership, like North Korea's primary diplomatic goal of achieving normal diplomatic relations with the United States. An equally apparent characteristic is their loyalty to Kim Jong Il and commitment to achieve his foreign policy goals. Team members are urged to master foreign languages, particularly English, and to learn how to deal with their foreign counterparts. Most learned diplomacy while serving at the United Nations in New York and in Europe, particularly Switzerland. The 1993-94 nuclear negotiations polished their skills. Ever since, most have risen to higher levels of responsibility in the foreign ministry. Several have served on North Korea's delegation to the Six Party Talks. Eventually, members are certain to negotiate and implement any peaceful resolution to the current nuclear impasse.

Team members must acquire a thorough understanding of international developments, institutions and practices, particularly pertaining to the United States, its people, politics and culture. They are authorized extensive exposure to foreign sources of news and information, including access to the internet. They can subscribe to several English language news magazines and academic journals. Their spouses daily produce Korean language summaries of newspaper reports culled from leading US, South Korea and Japanese newspapers. Access to international television broadcasts and the watching of foreign movies also is encouraged. During one visit, a North Korean diplomat asked me to take him to a hardware store so that he could buy a lock. I asked why he needed a lock. He said apartments in Pyongyang did not have locks. He claimed that he wanted to protect his VCR, television set and other means of learning about foreign nations and cultures by locking them up!

A congenial demeanor, sophisticated interpersonal skills and extensive experience dealing with the international community are also shared characteristics. I never witnessed a team member act in an unruly manner, except one time in North Korea. In July 1996, I and two US military personnel had been placed in "detention" at a guest house outside Pyongyang. When one of the "dream team" diplomats learned this, he became outraged and directed that a army officer immediately release us. When the officer refused, this diplomat discarded his diplomatic demeanor and grabbed the soldier by the shoulders and shoved him aside. Within ten minutes my colleagues and I were free to travel to our preferred lodging, a downtown hotel.

### **Staying on the Team**

Despite their extensive travel outside North Korea and relatively unrestrained access to information from all corners of the world, "dream team" members retain an unwavering loyalty to Kim Jong Il, his ideology and their nation. Their expressions of loyalty to Kim Jong Il and love of nation sound convincing and earnest. Rarely will a team member mention Kim by name, instead preferring the phrase, "the highest level of our government." Nor do they speak in the jargon of Marxism-Leninism or that of North Korea's *juche* ideology. Never do they convey the impression that they have been "brain washed." Often young "guides" aspiring to become "party members" do lecture at length about the superiority of the leader and his thoughts. Early in the US-North Korea nuclear

talks, North Korea's chief delegate opened each sessions with a long rambling political polemic. Obvious American boredom eventually halted the practice. In private conversations, North Korea's diplomats prefer discussions about issues of keener bilateral interest.

The team's world view is typical of all North Koreans. It is anchored in all Koreans' view of their nation as the focal point and victim of centuries of great power rivalry over control of the Korean Peninsula. In North Korea, this international rivalry is expressed in Marxist-Leninist jargon, i.e. the struggle between imperialistic capitalism and nationalistic socialism (i.e. *juche*). Domestically, however, North Koreans view their political and social systems in Confucian terms. Confucianism's goal is social harmony. This is possible only when individualism, the source of anarchy, is suppressed and one's aspirations and conduct merge with those of society as a whole to better serve the common good. (6)

North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung established a political system that blended selective elements of Marxism-Leninism with Confucianism. He placed himself at the apex of this highly stratified socio-political pyramid. Reinforcing this philosophical outlook is an extensive array of "carrots and sticks." In North Korean society, those who pursue the "common good" are rewarded with access to positions of political influence, social prestige, and economic reward. Those whose parents are themselves demonstrate despised individualistic impulses and wavering loyalty are deemed unworthy and denied privileges or punished accordingly. Kim's successor and son Kim Jong Il has perpetuated this system with only slight modification.

For Pyongyang's diplomatic dream team, like all members of North Korean society, there is no "gray" area. Either one is entirely without the system that the Kim dynasty perpetuates, or one is excluded from it. On the other hand, looking from the inside out, there is little reason for an individual North Korean diplomat to part company with his nation.

Family ties further reinforce team members' commitment to the "system." The family, after all, remains the basic social entity in North Korean society. An individual diplomat's loyalty to the North Korean system, one's expertise and innate abilities have gained them extensive benefits that they share with their kinsmen. These include prestige as diplomats, their children's access to the nation's best educational institutions, employment for their spouses either in the Foreign Ministry in Pyongyang or at diplomatic posts abroad, and ample economic compensation that includes access to modern living quarters in Pyongyang, the best food and clothing available in North Korean society and, of course, frequent travel abroad. Breaking with the "system" would exclude one from these "carrots" and expose both the individual and their family to the "sticks" of possible ostracism, even imprisonment.

North Korea's socialist society accents, at least theoretically, service to the group over individual gain. Thus, from the North Korean government's point of view, it has more to gain than lose by keeping the "best and brightest" diplomats on its negotiating teams

because continuity in a government position is seen as reinforcing an individual's ability to serve the nation.

### **Strings on the Team**

Like so much in North Korean society, the “dream team” is hierarchical. Members are divided into groups similar to the “strings” on an athletic team in the United States. Again, appearances in can be misleading in North Korea. There appear to be at least three “strings. The first string works directly with Kim Jong Il in the formulation of policy and strategy for dealing with the United States. String two now represents Pyongyang at the Six Party Talks and is responsible for liaison with the United States. The remaining string provides various types of support to the other two teams.

Overseeing the entire team is the “first string” which consists of titular head of state Kim Yong Nam and first vice minister of foreign affairs Kang Sok Ju. Kim Yong Nam is as Kim Jong Il's mentor and most trusted civilian adviser. Kang is Kim Yong Nam's closest deputy and Pyongyang's chief negotiator and master tactician regarding dealings with the United States. Kang reports directly to Kim Yong-nam, who served for over one decade as North Korea's foreign minister. Whenever US delegations have called on Kim Jong Il, both Kim Yong-nam and Kang Sok Ju have been present. The current Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun plays an influential role in foreign policy, except when it comes to policy toward the United States. This is Kang's “turf,” a claim Kang earned as North Korea's chief negotiator in the 1993-94 US-DPRK nuclear negotiations.

The second string is headed by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Gye Kwan (North Korea has several “vice ministers,” but they distinguish themselves based on their area of expertise. Highest ranking of the vice ministers is “first” vice minister Kang). His deputies are Li Hyong-chol, former Director of North American Affairs, and Li Gun, the current Director of the same office. Both served together in New York as deputy permanent representatives to the United Nations. The current DPRK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, Han Song-ryol, is on the second team.

Jung Tae-yong and Pak Myung Kuk are prominent members of the “third string.” Like Han Song-ryol, they have accompanied Kim Gye Kwan and Li Gun to the Six Party Talks. Jung's formal title is “Acting Director General” for American Affairs on the Flood Damage Relief Committee (FDRC). Formed in 1995, this inter-agency committee coordinates humanitarian relief matters between North Korea and international relief agencies, foreign governments and private groups. Jung oversees the coordination of all related humanitarian activities between his government and US official and private humanitarian aid agencies. Pak Myung Kuk, or “Big Pak” as he is known because of his height, is an expert in consular affairs. This includes coordination of the issuance of visas for all Americans seeking entry into North Korea.

Some former and still closely affiliated American team members are:

- Pak Gil Yon – current Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and DPRK Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador who has served for more than ten years in New York, but who concentrates on areas other than the United States.
- Ho Jong, current Ambassador at Large to Southeast Asia and former DPRK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador,
- Li Yong Ho, current Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Ireland, and former Director of the Foreign Ministry's International Organizations Division,
- Kim Myong Gil, Desk Office for United States affairs,
- Cha Song-nam, Political-Military Affairs officer in the North American Affairs Division. Cha served for two years, 2001-03 at the DPRK's mission in New York.

Ho Jong, Li Yong Ho and Kim Myong Gil all served on the DPRK negotiating team during the 1993-94 talks with the US. Ho Jong was Kim Gye Kwan's deputy during the DPRK negotiations with the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) between 1995 and 2000. Li Yong Ho, former deputy director of the international affairs bureau, is currently North Korea's ambassador to the United Kingdom and Ireland. Kim Myong Gil, a young but rising diplomat, works closely with Pak Myung Kuk. Cha Song Nam continues to provide coordination between the Foreign Ministry and the DPRK Korean People's Army Mission to Panmunjom. (7)

### **The “Military String” - Korean People's Army (KPA)**

Pyongyang's leaders like to keep the business of war and peace separate. As mentioned earlier, meetings of the Korean War Military Armistice Commission (MAC) are no diplomatic encounters. Their purpose is to enforce an existing agreement, the armistice, not to negotiate a new arrangement. Military personnel are never present at diplomatic negotiations, but a diplomat usually is assigned to a military delegation. Even Field Marshal Jo Myong Rok did not attend the negotiating sessions held during his visit to Washington, DC in the fall of 2000. Nor were military officials present during the US-DPRK ballistic missile negotiations held between 1995 and 2000.

In December 1994, a US Army helicopter strayed into North Korean territory and was promptly shot down. The heightened tensions threatened to undermine the recently concluded Agreed Framework. Kang Sok Ju promptly invited the US to dispatch a diplomatic team to Pyongyang to negotiate a resolution to the matter. No DPRK military officials attended the subsequent talks near Pyongyang, although the North Korean army continued to hold one captured US Army pilot and the body of his deceased colleague.

Instead, the North Korean People's Army since April 1994 has sought to open its own, separate channel of direct communication to the US Army. Its aim is to replace the long established channel through the Military Armistice Commission to the United Nations Command (UNC). The effort thus far has been in vain despite occasional general to general talks between both armies.

Separately, under the banner of “humanitarian” issues, the US and DPRK armies decided in May 1996 to conduct joint recovery operations of the remains of US military personnel

who died in North Korea during the Korean War. Despite the UNC's opposition, the agreement opened a direct channel between the two armies but for this single purpose.

In short, the North Korean military asserts strong influence on North Korea's foreign policy and negotiations, but is not allowed to be present during actual negotiations. Instead, the Foreign Ministry does keep its military counterparts fully informed. General Li Chang Bok, head of the North Korean People's Army mission to Panmunjom, maintains close communication with Foreign Ministry Vice Minister Kim Gye Kwan via Cha Song Nam, the political military affairs specialist on the "diplomatic dream team."

### **The Decision Maker - Kim Yong Nam**

Kim Yong Nam, whose official title is Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, links the team to the "Supreme Command." Born in 1925 in North Hamgyong Province, Kim's father reportedly worked for the railroad during the Japanese colonial period (1910-45). Kim graduated from Kim Il Sung University, North Korea's leading university, in Pyongyang before going abroad to study in Moscow during the Korean War. Upon his return home in 1954, he began working in the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) International Affairs Department. Kim rose steadily through the KWP's ranks. By 1970, he was elected to the Central Committee and in 1978, he became a member of the Political Bureau.

Early in his career, Kim caught the attention of North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung. Appointed vice minister of foreign affairs in 1963, the junior Kim accompanied Kim Il Sung on trips to the Soviet Union, China and Romania. It is believed that Kim Yong Nam has made at least fifteen trips to foreign nations. By the 1980s, Kim Yong Nam served as foreign minister, a post he held until Kim Jong Il promoted him to Premier after his father Kim Il Sung's death in 1994.

Kim Yong Nam is a paradox. As foreign minister, he acquired extensive awareness of reality outside North Korea during frequent trips to foreign lands. In the 1980s, as the Soviet Union faltered, Kim concentrated on rallying the Non-aligned Movement's (NAM) diplomatic support for his nation, its leader and his "*juche*" ideology. The NAM, as it was then known, was an association of developing nations that formed the so-called "third world." This loose confederation sought to fill the diplomatic and ideological middle ground between the Soviet Union's communist bloc and the United States led "western" bloc of capitalist nations. Kim's successful promotion of his nation's ties with NAM members, especially in Africa and the Middle East, combined with his adroit diplomatic skills and ardent loyalty to Kim Il Sung won him the "Great Leader's" and his son's unwavering trust.

After the Soviet Union's demise in 1991, Kim Yong-nam visited New York in September 1992 to represent North Korea at the United Nations' annual gathering of the General

Assembly. At the time, the abrupt reunification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet led “communist” bloc in Eastern Europe, and the bankruptcy and evaporation of the Soviet Union had discredited the communist ideology. Even China, in the wake of the Tienanmen uprising and welcoming of foreign investment, appeared destined to turn to capitalism.

Prospects for the North Korean regime’s survival and its nationalistic brand of socialism seemed bleak. Kim Yong-nam, however, confidently asserted during his fall 1992 that North Korea would preserve. I was the first American diplomat to meet and engage him in substantive conversation. During lunch together in September 1992, I asked him the reason for his confident prediction. He responded with the claim that North Korea’s leadership was superior to that of all other communist nations.

Unwavering loyalty to North Korea’s Kim dynasty and conviction in its “juche” ideology motivate Kim Yong-nam. But he is also capable of impressive pragmatism, so long as it serves his motivations. National reunification was Kim Il Sung’s foremost goal from the birth of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea until the late 1980s. The Soviet Union’s demise and South Korea’s democratization and industrialization compelled Kim Il Sung to adjust his priorities. Regime survival became his foremost preoccupation.

Kim Il Sung by 1990 seems to have settled on a dual track strategy to ensure his regime’s longevity. Secretly he began to build an arsenal of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Simultaneously, Kim dispatched Kim Yong-nam to defuse international hostility. Central to Kim Yong-nam’s diplomatic game plan was and remains the normalization of relations with the United States.

### **Kang Sok Ju – the Strategist**

Kang Sok Ju has long served as the First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, a position he is very proud to hold. He has also held several ranking positions in the KWP and serves as the vice chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Supreme People’s Assembly. Born in Pyongyang in 1939, is intensely loyal to North Korea’s leadership and ideology, just like his mentor Kim Yong-nam.

Kang followed the same career path as his mentor Kim Yong-nam. After graduation from Kim Il Sung University, Kang rose through the ranks of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) International Affairs Division during the 1970s and 1980s. He began dealing with foreign diplomats in 1986, and has worked for more than thirty years with Kim Yong-nam. Kang is thoroughly acquainted with the United Nations. He delivered North Korea’s acceptance of membership speech at the UN when his country was admitted in 1991. Kang is believed to speak English, but rarely uses it in the presence of foreigners and never during negotiations.

Kang’s long time alter ego in the Korean Workers Party (KWP) was Secretary for International Affairs Kim Young Sun (no relationship to Kim Yong Nam). Until 1992, the KWP, not the Foreign Ministry, had primary responsibility for contacts with the

United States. Kim Yon sun represented North Korea at the first US-DPRK diplomatic talks in New York in January 1992. But at the end of 1992, it was Kang who engaged in the first formal negotiations between the US and North Korea regarding the recovery of the remains of 8,100 US military personnel left behind in North Korea during the Korean War.

### **Meetings in Geneva**

After the inconclusive negotiations of December 1992, Kim Yong-nam entrusted Kang Sok Ju with responsibility for North Korea's diplomatic effort aimed at the United States. Kang proved to be a shrewd and tough negotiator during the 1993-94 negotiations with the United States that culminated in the Agreed Framework.

Early in the talks, the chief negotiators struggled to display mutual respect. On June 11, 1993, the date North Korea planned to officially announce its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, chief US negotiator Robert Gallucci invited Kang to lunch at the UN Plaza Hotel. Earlier Kang had asked about Gallucci's ethnic background and I had explained that he was of Italian decent. At lunch, Kang ordered spaghetti to demonstrate respect for Gallucci. But then Kang dismayed his American host by asking for Tobasco Sauce which he then dumped all over his noodles.

Gallucci's height and patience early on seemed to unnerve Kang. Even seated, Gallucci towered above the much shorter Kang. Kang sought to buttress his shelf confidence by occasionally blowing smoke in Gallucci's face or by making bluntly phrased remarks that be asked not be translated. Putting national interest above his superior's ego, the American translator complied. But eventually Gallucci's patience impressed Kang and he discontinued the practice.

But the smoking was a bigger problem. It is now allowed in US diplomatic missions. At the end of the first round of talks in the US mission to the UN in New York, the US agreed, for the sake of keeping the talks moving, to alternate future sessions between the US and DPRK missions in Geneva. At the US mission, occasional breaks were allowed so that the North Koreans could retire to a special "smoking room." But smoking during face to face discussions was disallowed. At the DPRK mission, however, the talks were held in a large smoke filled room. Much to the joy of the North Korean government, the South Korean government expressed official displeasure with the US government over its willingness to concede this arrangement to its arch adversary, North Korea.

In October 1993, then the talks were stalled, an American Congressman visited North Korea to meet Kim Il Sung. During the meeting and luncheon, Kim Il Sung and Kim Yong-nam demonstrated complete confidence in Kang Sok Ju by repeatedly calling upon him to respond to the Congressman's questions regarding the negotiations. Each time that Kim Il Sung called on him, Kang would rise slowly, look toward Kim, bow and begin his response by uttering the honorific Korean phrase used in pre-modern times to address the Korean monarch.

Kang shares Kim's deep distrust of the United States. When I first met Kang in 1992, he told me that he and his family had survived the US bombing of North Korea's capital during the Korean War. After one raid, Kang recalled, his father sent him back into Pyongyang's still smoldering ruins to retrieve the family's genealogy. Kang, speaking with obvious bitterness toward Americans, said the city was so devastated that he could not even locate the neighborhood where his family had once lived.

### **Kim Gye Kwan – Chief Delegate**

Kim Gye Kwan heads North Korea's delegation to the Six Party Talks. Appearances are misleading, particularly when it comes to Kim Gye Kwan. Kim and Kang appear to be opposites. Kang looks tough and talks tough. Kim appears to be meek and speaks quietly. Kim, in short, is soft on the outside, but tough on the inside. But like Kang, Kim is always calculating how he can sway his foreign counterpart to give him more for less. Together, they form a formidable team of negotiators.

Kim Gye Kwan is one of North Korea's most experienced negotiators. Prior to 1993, Kim traveled widely in Europe. Fluent in French, he served as ambassador at large and maintained ties with socialist parties in Western Europe. Then in 1993 Kang designated Kim his deputy in the first nuclear talks with the United States. At the first round of those talks, while Galucci and Kang were dining in a private room, Kim Gye Kwan teamed up with his American counter part, East Asia Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas Hubbard, in a separate private room. During their entire time together, Kim Gye Kwan spoke in fluent French while Hubbard struggled to recall the French he had learned but not years for many years. Fortunately, the more significant conversation had taken place between Gallucci and Kang with the help of accomplished interpreters.

Eventually Kim headed the North Korean team that negotiated the light water reactor understanding with the United States. He also headed North Korea's delegation to the inconclusive "Four Party Talks" that brought together representatives from Seoul, Beijing, Pyongyang and Washington to address Korean Peninsula issues. Patient and calm, he prefers persistence persuasion over confrontation to achieve his goals. He prefers pragmatism over dogmatism, realism over idealism, characteristics shared by all of North Korea's best diplomats. Kim also shares with Kang a taste for fine wine and food, preferences apparently acquired during his travel in Europe.

### **Li Gun – Kim Gye Kwan's Deputy**

Li Gun is Kim Gye Kwan's deputy on North Korea's delegation to the Six Party talks. He is the opposite of his colleague Li Yong Ho. Li Gun tends to talk tough but he can be disarmingly candid and occasionally humorous. Li apparently learned his English while stationed in Havana, Cuba where he listened to radio stations in Miami, Florida. Li Gun knows how to solve problems and to get things done. From 1994 to 1996, as Deputy Director of North American Affairs, he excelled implementing aspects of the Agreed Framework.

Beginning in 1996, his efforts proved invaluable in opening the way for the US Army to return to North Korea to locate and recover the 8,100 remains of American soldiers who had died and been left in North Korea during the Korean War. In 1997, Li teamed up with his mentor Li Hyong-chol and came to the United States to open the DPRK liaison section at North Korea's UN mission in New York. Li Gun accompanied Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok, Kim Jong Il's special envoy, to Washington in October 2000. After the new Bush Administration had assumed office in January 2001, Li Gun teamed up with Li Hyong-chol to return to Pyongyang. There Li Gun continues to serve as the Director General of North American Affairs at the Foreign Ministry. He also headed the DPRK delegation to April 2003 so-called "three party talks" between Beijing, Pyongyang and Washington that set the stage for the Six Party Talks.

### **Han song-ryol – Link to Washington**

Han is the junior member of Kim Gye Kwan's team at the Six Party Talks. Han, like DPRK Ambassador to London Li Yong Ho, is a rising star in the Foreign Ministry. He first served in the United States as an assistant to Ambassador Ho Jong at the DPRK UN Mission beginning in the fall of 1993. He also served on the DPRK delegation to the nuclear talks between 1993 and 1994. Han remained in the United States until 1997 to assist with implementation of the Agreed Framework. He then returned to Pyongyang to serve as the deputy director of the Foreign Ministry's North American Affairs Division. Between 1997 and 2002, Han proved an astute liaison between his government and Americans visiting North Korea. Late in 2001, Han returned to New York to head up the US liaison office in North Korea's mission to the United Nations and was promoted to Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN. Soft spoken, Han speaks fluent English and has developed a comprehensive understanding of US politics, policy and trends in American public opinion.

In August 1994, after both sides had agreed to an outline of the Agreed Framework, Han asked me to meet him after the formal announcements in the parking lot of the US Mission in Geneva. It was 1 AM when the chief delegates had completed their announcements and the subsequent press conference. Han nevertheless met me. He handed me a Kim Il Sung lapel pin, a prized ornament of all members of the North Korean People's Workers Party, and said, "This is a small token of appreciation for having informed our delegation of the death of our Great Leader Kim Il Sung."

On July 8, 1994, I had learned of Kim's death from a Japanese diplomat who had learned it from Japanese journalists. Unable to call Pyongyang directly (American diplomats were forbidden to call North Korea at that time), I contacted CNN correspondent Mike Chenoy and asked him to call a Tass reporter in Pyongyang that I had met on a previous visit there. Shortly after, Mike called to confirm that Kim was indeed dead. I first notified the State Department's Operation Center and then the Presidential Operation Center in Rome where President Clinton was then visiting. Next I called Bob Gallucci. On his orders, I notified the DPRK delegation at its mission. Pyongyang had not

informed its mission in Geneva! My call had saved their diplomats from considerable embarrassment.

Han subsequently has risen through the ranks of the foreign ministry's American team and seems destined, like his other young colleagues, for increasingly responsibility.

## **Reflections**

Diplomatic negotiations are fragile endeavors, particularly when they involve the United States and North Korea. Most negotiations are built upon a firm foundation of mutual trust and understanding between the advocacies. Even the United States and the Soviet Union shared trust. They had experienced alliance during World War II. Americans and Russians had never engaged in killing one another in warfare. During the Cold War they had frequent encounters at international gatherings and engaged in numerous, lengthy negotiations. Their leaders were linked by telephone. Additionally, there existed large and impressively educated groups of professionals who were well verse in each side's language, history, culture and politics, and could serve as a pool of advisers.

But the legacy of the Korea War continues to haunt the US-North Korea relationship. Until the 1993-94 negotiations, the war and a half century of quarreling at Panmunjom were their only shared experiences. US diplomats were not allowed to even smile at any North Korean until 1982. North Koreans were not allowed to visit the United States until 1988. Until 1992, no US government official had been allowed to visit North Korea. Even during the nuclear negotiations, only one US diplomat was allowed contact with the North Koreans, and this contact was closely monitored and managed.

Americans often describe North Korea as a closed society, but the United States did not begin to open itself to North Korean until 1988. US officials and private American citizens began to make substantial progress toward building mutual trust with their North Korean counterparts during the 1990s. But the Bush Administration's approach to North Korea remains rooted intense mistrust of North Korea, and Pyongyang harbors similar sentiment. President Bush closed the door to official contact in 2001 and has kept the door closed ever since. Nor has the administration seen any benefit in accepting the advice of the small group of Americans knowledgeable about North Korea, including former secretaries of state and defense, as well as former US ambassadors, including career civil servants Charles Kartman and Donald Gregg. All of those with at least some knowledge of North Korea have or will soon leave government service.

The Bush Administration has further disadvantaged its negotiators by rejecting the need for a period of conciliatory rhetoric and contact. President Bush from the beginning of his administration has insisted that he would not "reward North Korea's past misbehavior" with negotiations. Next he closed all channels of communication and berated the government in Pyongyang as a "failed Stalinist system" and a member of the "Axis of Evil." Then he repeatedly urged North Korea to give up everything without any expectation of concessions. This relegated his diplomats to the role of delivering his messages when ever they met their North Korean counter parts. Such rhetoric may reflect

reality, and the strategy may appeal to domestic political constituencies, but it is not conducive to the pursuit of diplomatic dialogue and successful foreign policy.

When the Bush Administration finally sent a diplomatic delegation to Pyongyang in October 2002, it lacked experience and knowledge of North Korea. Most unfortunate was its inability to present a united front. It was widely known at the time that the administration remained deeply divided over its strategy for dealing with North Korea. This was reflected in the team's composition. State Department Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly was the apparent head of delegation, but he was accompanied by a two star army general from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). This sent mixed signals to the North Koreans. Had the delegation been dispatched to negotiate or to issue an ultimatum?

Once the Chinese hosted Six Party Talks process began in August 2003, the US delegation's composition remained largely the same, as did their instructions. In short, they had come to tell the North Koreans what to do, not to engage them as equals in negotiations. Predictably, the outcome ever since has been disappointing, at least on the US side. (8)

But finally at the June session, the Six Party Talks process appears to be moving Washington and Pyongyang away from confrontation and toward negotiation with one another. Given the slow pace of this movement and Washington's lingering reluctance to engage Pyongyang, any bilateral negotiations are unlikely to commence until after the US presidential election of November 2004. They might even be put off until after the new Bush or Kerry administration has settled into office. But such negotiations are essential for achieving the "peaceful diplomatic settlement" President Bush claims he wants. As for presidential hopeful John Kerry, he has already made known his readiness to engage North Korea in direct bilateral negotiations with North Korea.

But once bilateral US-DPRK talks commence, North Korea's diplomats will have the upper hand, at least initially. They are experienced negotiators while their American counterparts have been denied the opportunity to negotiate. The North Koreans are well versed in US diplomacy, strategy, culture and language. The Americans are novices when it comes to North Korea. The North Koreans will share a common goal and strategy. The Americans, however, may not be able to do the same. Their goal of disarming North Korea is shared, but not necessarily the strategy for attaining that goal.

Ultimately, any future US-DPRK negotiations will labor under the legacy of mutual distrust and suspicion. Until some mistrust has been erased by mutual trust, the negotiations cannot go forward. The building of trust can commence only on an individual basis. That process has not even begun.

## END NOTES:

(1) Eighteen months earlier representatives of North Korea's Korean (Communist) Workers Party visited New York for a one day discussion with US government officials in January 1992. This was the first ever meeting of ranking civilian officials from both sides, but the sole purpose to provide each party to describe to the other, face to face, their stand on unresolved bilateral issues. There were no negotiations. For a concise review of US-DPRK relations see: C. Kenneth Quinones, "The United States in North Korean Foreign Policy," forthcoming in: Byung Chol Koh, editor, *North Korea's Foreign Policy*. Seoul: Kyungnam University Institute for Far East Studies, 2004. For an assessment of the Bush Administration's policy toward North Korea see: C. Kenneth Quinones "Dualism in the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy," *Asian Perspective* (Vol. 27, No. 1) 2003.

(2) The content of this article reflects the author's experiences between 1992 and 2004 in dealing with North Koreans. His extensive experience in this regard began in September 1992 when he assumed the duties of the Department of State's sole officer responsible for North Korean issues, continued through the 1993-94 US-North Korea nuclear negotiations, as the first US official representative posted to North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Research (where in lived and work during much of 1995), political adviser and negotiator detailed to the US Department of Defense's negotiations with the North Korean People's Army concerning the recovery of US soldiers' remains left behind in North Korea during the Korean War, and, since retirement from the Department of State in 1997, adviser to and representative of the American humanitarian effort regarding North Korea. His private contacts with North Korean diplomats continue on a regular and frequent basis.

(3) An extensive library is available regarding the US-DPRK nuclear impasse. Most authors have focused on the dynamics of policy formulation, particularly in Washington; US and North Korean negotiating tactics, and the nature of North Korea's nuclear programs. All these works are based on second hand impressions and sources except those by C. Kenneth Quinones (see below) and Robert Gallucci, et.al. (see below). Until now, only brief and scattered references have been available in print (English, Korean and Japanese) about North Korea's diplomats.

Some of the more widely read sources on the North Korean nuclear issue are: Peter Hayes, *American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea*. Toronto: Lexington Books, 1991; Mitchell Reiss, *Bridled Ambition – Why Countries Constrain their Nuclear Capabilities*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995; C. Kenneth Quinones, "North Korea: From Containment to Engagement," in Dae-sook Suh and Chae-jin Lee, *North Korea After Kim Il Sung*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998; Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers – Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1999; C. Kenneth Quinones, *North Korea's Nuclear Threat – Off the Record Memories*. Seoul and Tokyo (in Korean (*Hanpanto unmyong*) and Japanese (*Kita chosen – beikokumusho tantokan no koshyo miroku*), 2000; Clay

Moltz and Alexander Mansourov, *The North Korean Nuclear Program*. New York and London: Routledge, 2000; David Albright and Kevin O'Neill, editors, *Solving the North Korean Nuclear Puzzle*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Science and International Security, 2000; Henry Sokolski, editor, *Planning for a Peaceful Korea*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001; Selig Harrison, *Korean Enggame*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002; and Robert Gallucci, Daniel Poneman and Joel Wit, *Going Critical*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2004.

(4) C. Kenneth Quinones, "Prospects for the Six Party Talks and North Korea's Negotiating Tactics." *IFES Forum* (February 17, 2004) Seoul, Institute for Far Eastern Studies. Also see: C. Kenneth Quinones, "North Korea's Multilateral Strategy in the Six Party Talks," *Sekai shuho* (in Japanese) May 2004; and C. Kenneth Quinones, "Pyongyang Playing Beijing Against Washington," *Yomiuri Daily* (June 1, 2004)..

(5) Disaster Response News, "North Korea: Koreas Accuse Each Other of Firing First in Battle," (July 0, 2002). [drnews@INTERACTION.ORG](mailto:drnews@INTERACTION.ORG).

(6) For a comprehensive discussion of North Korean society, ideology and politics see: C. Kenneth Quinones, *Understanding North Korea*. New York: Penguin Group (USA), 2004. For a discussion of North Korea's ideology and changing priorities see: C. Kenneth Quinones, "Beyond Collapse – Continuity and Change in North Korea," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* (Volume 11. No. 2) 2002.

(7) Most of the biographical information about individuals mentioned in this essay was gathered personally. Specific dates and titles were confirmed in published directories such as: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *East Asia – Biographical Information on DPRK Figures*. Washington, D.C.: FBIS, 1995; and, *North Korea Directory*. Tokyo: Radiopress, Inc. 1989-2002.

(8) For a critic of the Bush Administration's handling of the Six Party Talks see: James Clay Moltz and C. Kenneth Quinones, "Getting Serious About a Multilateral Approach to North Korea," *The Nonproliferation Review* (Spring 2004).

**About the Author:** Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones is a retired diplomat and the author of numerous articles and three books about US relations with North and South Korea. He worked with all the North Korean diplomats discussed in this article while the State Department's North Korea Affairs officer from 1992 to 1994 and then defacto liaison officer with North Korea from 1995 to 1997. He was the first US diplomat to live and work in both North and South Korea, to visit North Korea in 1992, to meet North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, and to cross the Demilitarized Zone from North to South Korea. He was a member of the US team to the nuclear negotiations with North Korea from 1993-94, lived and worked at the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center for several months between 1995 and 1997, and served as the political adviser to the Defense Department's Defense team that negotiated the first bilateral agreement with the North Korean Army regarding joint operations to recover the remains of 8,100 US Korean War Missing in Action (MIA). His books include: *The North Korean Nuclear Crisis - Off-the-Record*

*Memories, 1992-94 and, Beyond Negotiations: Implementation of the Agreed Framework - 1994-1998* (both published in Japanese by *Chuo koron shinsha*). His third book, *Understanding North Korea*, was published this year in English in the United States.

## **Initial Encounters**

At the end of May 1993, North Korea's "diplomatic dream team" first arrived at JFK airport outside New York City to engage in the first official US-DPRK negotiations. (1) North Korea's foreign ministry has several diplomatic teams, each with regional expertise in the bilateral issues, language, politics and culture of a given geographical area. *Le crème de la crème* of these teams is the "dream team" that concentrates on dealing with the United States. This reflects Pyongyang's priority of pursuing regime survival either via armed deterrence or diplomatic and commercial engagement of its foremost enemy and perceived threat, the United States. Here we focus on the American "dream team."

Arrival arrangements for May 1993 had consumed three hectic days of coordination. As the Department of State's sole North Korea affairs officer, I was at the airport to greet the delegation. All went well until the North Korean officials appeared at the arrival gate. The delegation's chief, First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Sok Ju, immediately recognized me, smiled and extended his hand in greeting. Abruptly, however, he pulled back and exclaimed, "Why does the man next to you wear a gun? Are we being arrested? Why have we been separated from the other passengers?" Obviously a major and potentially disruptive breakdown in communication had occurred. Its severity was compounded by a half century of mutual distrust and armed rivalry between the United States and North Korea. Subsequently, a decade of intense effort began to bridge the gap of mutual mistrust, but only temporarily. Today, that bridge has collapsed in the wake of North Korea's renewed drive for a nuclear arsenal, and the process of rebuilding it has yet to begin anew.

In May 1993, I was directed to take the initial steps toward bridging the gap between Washington and Pyongyang. On the US side, I was the only US diplomat authorized at that time to initiate dialogue with North Koreans. In those days, no US diplomat was allowed to initiate any conversation with a North Korean counterpart. But under the rules of "smile diplomacy," a US diplomat could reply politely but briefly when approached by a North Korea. Also, in 1992, a single Foreign Service officer handled all matters pertaining to North Korea. My superiors had sent me to New York because of my earlier encounters with several of the North Korean delegates during my first visit to North Korea in December 1992. That visit was the first by a US diplomat since the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's establishment in 1948. (2)

Looking back, I still wonder whether my assignment was a demonstration of official US trust in my abilities as a diplomat, or simply because no other Foreign Service officer relished the opportunity to deal with North Korea. After all, the United States then and now remains in a technical state of war with North Korea. Dealing with the "enemy," both then and now, is not a career enhancing assignment, as they say at the State

Department. In May, 1993, there was no time to ponder my options a decade ago. In my best Korean, I assured the North Korean delegation that the armed and uniformed men at my side were there to ensure the delegation's security and to expedite its passage through customs and immigration.

Kang's deputy, then Ambassador at Large Kim Kye Gwan (since promoted to vice minister and the chief of North Korea's delegation to the Six Party Talks), smiled. We had met in New York in September 1993 and exchanged views about the nuclear issue over dinner at the Sung Dynasty Restaurant across the street from the Astoria Hotel. Kim indicated that his colleagues should trust me. I asked my armed colleagues to step aside and invited the North Korean delegation to follow me down the narrow, dimly lighted and poorly ventilated corridor to the immigration processing area. They followed.

Once the processing was complete and the baggage loaded in the DPRK UN mission's vehicles, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ho Jong (former DPRK representative to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization or KEDO, and now DPRK representative to various Asia regional organizations) invited me to join him and the delegation for the drive to Manhattan.

Ambassador Ho and I had met several times, including a secret October 1992 meeting at George Washington University and another at President Carter's Library in Atlanta in January 1993. Disregarding State Department instructions to avoid any show of friendship, I accepted Ho's invitation. After all, in my view, successful negotiations required replacing mutual distrust with trust. Our nation's goal was to promote peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. This required convincing North Korea to discard its nuclear ambitions. It seemed, then as well as now, that without dialogue and the forging of mutual trust, achieving this goal would prove impossible.

En route to the Manhattan Helmsley Hotel, Ambassador Ho drove and Kim Kye Gwan rode "shot gun." My champions in the back seat were then deputy director for international organizations Li Yong Ho (currently DPRK Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Ireland) and my North Korean counterpart, American Affairs officer Li Gun (now director general for North American Affairs in Pyongyang).

Li Gun asked, "Is that the World Trade Center?" pointing to the twin towers on the distant horizon. "Yes," I responded. He then asked, "Would it be possible to visit that place and see New York from the top of the building?" One of Li's colleagues interrupted by cautioning Li Gun in Korean, "Don't ask so many questions. He will think you are a North Korean terrorist planning to put a bomb in the building." (Only a few weeks earlier a bomb had exploded in the building's basement causing extensive damage.) In Korean, I assured Li and his colleagues that tourists were still able to visit the building and a tour could be arranged for the entire delegation. Li Gun assured me that he would prefer to make the tour when relations between our two nations had improved. Alas, that will never be possible.