

**War or Engagement –  
Options for Dealing with North Korea**

**by**

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## Introduction

Thank you for being present today, and to the conference's organizers, thank you for the invitation to participate in this very important international gathering. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you my personal views.

My purpose is not to frighten, nor to shock you. Yet I feel a responsibility to be candid. Important international problems merit immediate attention. Otherwise, they can explode into an international crisis. We confront such a situation now in Northeast Asia. The United States government under the leadership of President George W. Bush continues to assert that there is no crisis in Northeast Asia. He contends that North Korea's continuing development of a nuclear arsenal has yet to reach crisis proportions. He has also proclaimed his determination to find a "peaceful, diplomatic resolution" to this issue.

Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's nuclear ambitions remain unrestrained. Since December, 2002, North Korea has discarded all of its pledges to the international community not to develop nuclear weapons. Kim Jong Il ordered the expulsion of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors from North Korea's nuclear research center in December 2002. A month later, North Korea pulled out of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and subsequently renounced its agreements with the United States and South Korea neither to develop nor to acquire nuclear weapons.

Behind the calm that now prevails on the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. intelligence community agrees that North Korea appears to be very close to assembling and, quite possibly, testing a nuclear weapon. Should this happen, a crisis will surely ensue. Certainly such news would not auger well for the future of peace and stability in Northeast Asia, and possibly elsewhere in the world.

I would like to emphasize that the source of this disturbing situation is not the 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea. That agreement, in the view of President Bush and his administration, is responsible for the present situation. He and his closest advisers claim that engaging North Korea in diplomatic negotiations in 1993 and 1994 rewarded it for past misbehavior. Resumption of diplomatic negotiations with North Korea now, in the Bush Administration's view, would similarly award North Korea for its irresponsible misconduct. Not addressed by President Bush is how he hopes to achieve a "peaceful diplomatic solution" to the nuclear impasse with Pyongyang without engaging in diplomatic negotiations.

I contend that this current situation is a consequence of the Bush Administration's refusal to negotiation with North Korea, and the Kim Jong Il regime's equally adamant insistence on engaging in negotiations.

As for the Agreed Framework, it did not fail. Rather, it was quite successful for a number of years. The agreement both prevented war and nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia. Developments subsequent to the agreement's signing, specifically shortcomings regarding both sides' implementation of the agreement, gradually eroded the accord's credibility.

Now, unfortunately, in spite of the Six Party Talks recently held in Beijing, we remain in one of the most dangerous situations since the first Korean War of 1950 to 1953. I am concerned that, if North Korea proceeds with the development of nuclear weapons and successfully tests them, this will change the balance of power in Northeast Asia. North Korea would then be in a position to single-handedly threaten peace, not only in this region but elsewhere in the world. At the same time, the Bush Administration's preoccupation with "punishing" Pyongyang for having broken its previous promises has proven ineffective in halting North Korea's nuclear weapons development program. Either Pyongyang restrains its program and Washington agrees to negotiations, or a second Korean War could prove inevitable.

### **Source of the Problem**

It is in our common interest to halt North Korea's ambition for a nuclear arsenal. It is in our common interest to preserve peace, not just the *status quo*. We need a durable peace in Northeast Asia to replace the unsteady one that has persisted since the Korean War. The problem is not whether we should punish North Korea for its past wrongdoing. Rather, the question it is how to prevent a recurrence of both war and nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula by building a durable peace.

Responsibility for the current situation belongs to the sons of two very prominent and previously powerful politicians: Kim II Sung's son Kim Jong II and former President Bush's son, the current President Bush. Both men belong to the post-Korean war generation. They represent a new generation of leaders who have not suffered from war, and who do not fully appreciate the consequences of not engaging in diplomacy.

I would also suggest that both share a similar political weakness. The only reason that Kim Jong II rose to power is because he inherited it from his father. He accomplished little of significant by himself. In his youth, his is known to have been something of a playboy. Nor did he acquire real

experience in international affairs. He therefore must prove, not to us, but to the powerful North Korean generals, such as Jo Myong Rok whom Kim sent to Washington in October 2000 as his representative to meet President Clinton, that he can stand up to the American “imperialists.” His father had rallied political support by resisting the Japanese “imperialists” prior to 1945, and then the American “imperialists” during the Korean War. These “anti-imperialism campaigns,” as they are labeled in North Korea, garnered political power for Kim Il Sung.

Kim Jong Il now seems to be pursuing a similar anti-imperialism campaign to consolidate his power and to preserve his kingdom. His focus is the United States, and his strategy is to deter a perceived threat from the United States by equipping his massive conventional army of one million soldiers with nuclear weapons. This suggests that Kim Jong Il is neither incompetent nor irrational. Instead, he seems to be very insecure, but calculating. Domestically, he may be uncertain about his generals’ support while internationally he is concerned about the perceived threat from the United States. This suggests that, if he appears to bow to Washington or to President Bush, it is conceivable that he could risk losing the support of his generals. At all costs, he must maintain a rigid, hard, and consistent stance toward the United States. Consequently, he appears to have calculated that North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons would effectively secure both his political power and his regime’s survival. This makes North Korea a very real, potential threat to peace.

President Bush may share some similar patterns of thought. As you know, the only reason he became president was because the US Supreme Court, not the American people, put him in power. The popular vote clearly was not in his favor. I think that ever since, he has been trying to prove to the American people not only that he should be president, but also that he is just as good as his father. This too makes him defensive. I think what appears to be arrogance is actually insecurity. If you look behind Bush’s smile, the confident look and so forth, again we see an insecure man who is attempting to use military power as a way to assert his priorities. This too makes him potentially dangerous because, if he senses that his position is threatened next year in the presidential elections, he too may take some drastic measures contrary to the interest of US allies in East Asia and Europe.

### **Washington’s Adjusted Posture**

I am pleased to be able to say that Washington has made a constructive shift in its approach to North Korea. President Bush on October 19, just after his brief meeting with Prime Minister Koizumi in Tokyo, officially confirmed this. Actually, the shift dates from early September. First, a high ranking State

Department official, in a so-called background briefing, on September 4 indicated that the United States was considering providing North Korea security assurances. The next day, Secretary of State Powell publicly and officially confirmed the essence of the previous day's off the record briefing.

Powell, instead of emphasizing punishment of North Korea and refusal to negotiate or provide it concessions, expressed confidence that the Bush administration would adopt a more flexible and moderate posture. This adjusted approach would emphasize a step by step, diplomatic process aimed at bringing North Korea in line with the international community. Once North Korea indicated that it was "prepared to undertake a process to verifiably dismantle" its nuclear program, Secretary Powell stated, the United States would "... give them the kind of assurance that they say they need." He further confirmed that the US was willing to work with Tokyo and Seoul, possibly Beijing as well, to design such assurances. This was a very substantial change from the administration's previous stance. It suggested that Washington was willing to engage in the exchange of concessions with Pyongyang.

When I first saw these reports, I thought, "Oh, good!," but then I asked, "Is this a temporary tactical shift, or is this a long-term strategic shift?" I decided in September that it was a temporary tactical shift. Basically, I think Bush has decided, at least temporarily, to put diplomacy in front of his military option.

Subsequent developments tend to substantiate my initial instincts that the shift was a tactical one. At the end of September, five of the six participants in the Six Party Talks gathered for an informal discussion in New York. Present at this unofficial gathering were officials from China, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia and the United States. Topping the agenda was security assurances for North Korea. North Korea's representative indicated that his government no longer insisted that such assurances be expressed in either a "legally binding" treaty or US Congressional resolution. Rather, Pyongyang reportedly would accept a joint statement similar to the October 2000 statement signed by US Secretary of State Albright and North Korean General Jo Myong Rok in Washington, D.C.

The senior US representative, despite Secretary of State Powell's September 5 statement, instead offered verbal assurances. These have come to be known as the "three no's." They consist of:

1. No US threat to North Korea,
2. No US intention to invade Korea, and
3. No US intention to promote regime change in North Korea.

Such verbal promises are significantly less than the assurances that Secretary Powell had indicated Washington was willing to offer a month earlier. President Bush's October 19 remarks, however, affirm that Washington remains willing to provide written, "multilateral" security assurances.

Pyongyang, equally fortunately, has indicated its willingness to give serious consideration to President Bush's offer. This suggests to things. First, this is a concrete indication that North Korea is willing to halt, and even eventually dismantle its nuclear programs. But, secondly, Pyongyang's price for doing so has yet to be negotiated. Thus, while prospects for continuation of the Six Party Talks have brightened, we are still far from a resolution of the nuclear impasse.

If Bush's recent shift is indeed tactical and temporary, how long will he allow diplomacy the opportunity to deal with the North Korean issue before he resorts to his military option? Six to eight months might be a reasonable estimate because of the following reasons. But if North Korea tests a nuclear weapon, Bush could abruptly revert to his military option.

Our answer begins with a question, why did Bush adjust his approach to North Korea early last September? Is it because of what happened at the Six Party Talks last August? Is it because of pressure from Beijing, or fear of North Korea? I believe the answer has little to do with international reality, and much more to do with domestic US politics. Since August, the American public's attitude toward President Bush, as reflected in the US Congress and public opinion polls, has shifted from very positive to increasingly negative

### **Bush's Blunders**

My daughter is one of thousands of young Americans who have been called to active duty in the US Army to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like my daughter, their education, work and family life have been disrupted. Despite President Bush's declaration last May that the US mission in Iraq had been "accomplished," sadly, the number of American casualties continues to increase. Despite the Bush Administration's claims that significant progress is being made toward Iraq's democratization, increasing numbers of Iraqi people demonstrate in favor of an end to the US occupation. Despite the administration's claims that Al Qaeda has been weakened and "is on the run," major incidents of terrorism continue around the world. These developments are frustrating and angering Americans. The Americans serving in the US armed forces and their families are particularly impatient with President Bush because they have any idea how long it will be before their lives can return to normal.

What Bush has done, I believe, is made a series of serious political errors. First he and his advisers pursued a public information campaign that inflated the American people's expectations about what the Administration could accomplish. Reality and results, however, have not substantiated these expectations. It began early this summer with the credibility problem regarding the Bush Administration's pre-Iraq invasion allegations of weapons of mass destruction. For most Americans, this was not a serious concern. Rather, it is a problem that primarily concerns the journalist community and Bush's critics in the US Congress. It will gradually go away. But when the American casualty figures in Iraq continue to climb, and when the American people find out that the Bush Administration has not been revealing how many American soldiers are being wounded, this creates a very serious credibility problem.

The Bush administration refused to reveal to the American people its estimate of the cost to rebuild Iraq. This is a pocket book issue that concerns all Americans. On September 8, just after returning to Washington from a one month working vacation, President Bush in a Sunday night speech to the American people estimated for the first time that the cost would be another eighty six billion dollars. Before his speech, the American public had been expected to hear sixty five billion dollars. The next day, the Defense Department announced that all tours of duty for US military personnel in Iraq would be extended. That outraged tens of thousands of American mothers, fathers, husbands and the wives.

Additionally, the US economy continues to encounter difficult problems. Again, Bush created inflated expectations. He claimed his reduction of income taxes would prompt economy recovery. So far, the recovery has been slow to materialize. At the same time, the majority of Americans learned that a small percentage of the wealthiest Americans benefited the most from the tax cut.

Obviously, President Bush does not need another crisis. For him, his first priority is Iraq, and the US economy's problems are consuming increasing attention. He appears intent on keeping North Korea low on his priority list. These domestic political concerns probably are the foremost reasons that he adjusted his approach to North Korea. A secondary consideration may have been the fact that the United States found itself almost isolated at the August Six Party Talks. No nation was completely comfortable with the United States' reluctance to negotiate with North Korea.

Bush's adjusted approach to North Korea addresses the Administration's most pressing concerns. It allows the Administration to remain focused on

Iraq and the US economy, improves prospects that the North Korean situation will not explode, at least for the time being, and diminishes chances that the United States might find itself isolated at the Six Party Talks. It also allows more time for refinement the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and related military option.

If, however, after six months or after 2 or 3 more rounds of the Six Party, there is no positive sign from North Korea that it will end its nuclear programs, we could see a return to an assertive US strategy that accents PSI and the military option. By that time, President Bush will likely be attempting to use the Korean situation to promote prospects for his reelection next fall. In US domestic politics, Americans can be counted on to rally behind their president when ever he is playing the role of commander-in-chief of the US Armed Forces. We saw this after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. This does not make war on the Korean Peninsula more likely next year. On the other hand, it suggests that if North Korea does not move soon to reverse its nuclear weapons development programs, President Bush will be increasingly prone beginning early next year to assume a much more assertive stance that accents his military option.

### **Draw A Red Line?**

North Korean leader Kim Jong II, unfortunately, could convince President Bush to give up diplomacy and revert to his military by testing a nuclear weapon sometime in the next 4-6 months. The US intelligence community appears convinced of this possibility. Such an agreement among intelligence agencies is very unusual in Washington because the US intelligence community is very complicated. I have participated in such meetings while serving in the State Department. You have many agencies such as the CIA or Central Intelligence Agency, the DIA or Defense Intelligence Agency, etc. Despite their usually different views, they have essentially come to the conclusion that North Korea has acquired all the technology it needs, primarily from Pakistan, to conduct a nuclear test underground. My hope is that North Korea will not do so.

My humble recommendation is that the five participants of the Six Party Talks (China, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the United States) should tell the sixth party, North Korea, that there is a red line it must not cross. It must not test a nuclear weapon while engaged in diplomatic dialogue and negotiations. Failure to do draw this red line could lead Kim Jong II to assume that there is no red line. He could conclude that he has all the time he needs to make and to test nuclear weapons. This would create a very dangerous situation.



In 1994, the Clinton Administration, urged by Secretary of Defense Perry and supported by Ambassador Galluchi, drew a red line. The US told North Korea that it must not remove the nuclear fuel rods from its reactor at Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center

In this letter, the United States told the North Koreans, “If you start to reprocess the nuclear spent fuel rods, you could cause a war. We will go to the United Nations and seek economic sanctions.” Earlier, North Korea had declared that it would consider as an act of war any effort by the United States to win approval of UN sanctions.

The Clinton Administration responded by preparing to pursue sanctions at the UN. Quietly, China indicated that it would neither approve nor oppose UN sanctions. Rather it would abstain if the issue came before the UN Security Council for a vote. For the United States, this was a green light to seek UN sanctions. Then while former President Carter was meeting with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang in June 1994, the White House prepared detailed plans for war on the Korean Peninsula.

The Clinton Administration really did have a red line, and it did prepare for a war against North Korea. I believe that this “red line,” more than President Carter’s visit, prevented war on the Korean Peninsula in 1994. The red line convinced Kim Il Sung and his generals that North Korea had too much to lose from continuing his nuclear program. They knew they could not win a war against the United States. Only then did they decide to resume negotiations. President Carter’s visit to Pyongyang was of value because it gave Kim Il Sung a face saving way out of this situation.

I think if diplomacy is going to work for the Bush Administration, it too must have its stick or military option. We cannot only speak softly and diplomatically. But we should do not use the stick, nor frequently wave it at North Korea. Instead, we should just put it on the negotiating table by telling Kim Jong II that if he crosses the red line and tests a nuclear weapon, he will face the consequences. Why risk this? I think that once North Korea tests a nuclear weapon, and if it works, Pyongyang will not give up its nuclear capability.

Furthermore, it should be China that draws the red line. China, after all, is North Korea’s foremost benefactor. Beijing shares with Washington, Tokyo, Seoul and Moscow a desire to keep the Korean Peninsula nuclear free. If Washington were to draw the red line, Pyongyang would whine that it is threatening North Korea. Of course, the other participants should immediately, and without reservation, fully support China’s declaration of the red line.

## **Trust or Change North Korea?**

At the same time, we cannot trust North Korea. They have broken all their promises regarding nuclear weapons. Instead, we must first remove the reasons why they want nuclear weapons. This means pursuing a step by step process that begins by giving them security assurances in exchange for North Korea dismantling its nuclear programs and allowing inspections. Eventually, the process should lead to a complete normalization of relations, including a peace treaty. Along the way, we should promote change in North Korean society, beginning gradually using economic inducements. Our goal must remain a durable peace on the Korea Peninsula. The eradication of North Korea's nuclear weapons programs and the eventual phased reduction of its conventional military capability are steps toward this foremost goal.

Ultimately, no matter what agreement we might make with North Korea, we are going to have to change North Korean society. At the same time, North Korea is intent upon modernizing its economy. This provides a common meeting ground in which we facilitate Pyongyang economic modernization in exchange for its phased disarmament. Those who believe that North Korea might disarm to save itself from war are not being realistic. No political leader can surrender his nation's ability to defend itself without concrete compensation and security guarantees. After all, no nation in history has done so unless defeated in war.

We do not want war. That is what President Bush has assured the international community. But for America, war is relatively cheap. For the nations of Northeast Asia, however, they would pay a terrible price, particularly the people on the Korean peninsula. But the war could be almost as devastating for Japan. In 1993 and 1994, North Korea did not have the ballistic capability that it now possesses. If there is a second Korean War, all the communities near American bases in Japan and South Korea would become the priority targets of North Korea's ballistic missile arsenal.

Secondly, what will happen to the international economic situation? Just the threat of war on the Korean Peninsula could cause severe damage to all the economies of Northeast Asia. There also would be profoundly negative economic implications around the world. North Korea knows this. All it would have to do is threaten to test their ballistic missiles and test their nuclear weapons to disrupt international commerce.

I say this in the hope that the situation does not get this bad. Let us not allow the North Koreans to have the option of testing their nuclear weapons.

We need to draw a red line to tell them clearly not to escalate to the point of testing their nuclear weapons. Yes, we will negotiate, I believe. Yes, we can reach an agreement with North Korea, I believe. But we should not put our faith in North Korea's implementation of any agreement. Then what do we do?

### **Engagement's Promise**

I would suggest that we pursue the models of our engagement with the Soviet Union and China. When I began studying Asia in the 1960s, China was the big, red, ugly, dangerous dragon. In the US, we were taught that it was spreading communism. Then came "ping pong" diplomacy in 1972. All of a sudden, the American people fell in love with China. We turned 180 degrees in the exact opposite direction. Ever since, even though China remains a dictatorship with a horrendous human rights record and massive arsenal weapons of mass destruction, the United States and Japan have normalized diplomatic and commercial relations with Beijing. Today, if you go to China, it is changed profoundly over the past decade. The change began slowly, in an almost silly way with the opening of McDonald's hamburger restaurants and so forth. I can remember when capitalism in Beijing in 1992 meant selling small items arranged on a piece of cloth spread out on a side walk. Now China's economy is a booming capitalist economy. China does not want war because it cannot afford war. It wants peace so it can continue to pursue prosperity.

The Soviet Union has had a similar experience. It was the conservative, anti-communist, pro-capitalist Reagan Administration that engaged the communist Soviets. The Reagan Administration had extensive disarmament negotiations with the Soviet Union. These eventually led Reagan's successor, the first President Bush, to begin providing Moscow large amounts of aid and financial compensation in exchange for Russia's destruction of its nuclear arsenal. As Russia destroyed its weapons of mass destruction, it reformed its economy by converting it from a military dominated communist to a civilian oriented capitalist system.

Commercial and diplomatic engagement has radically altered communist societies. Ultimately, we face similar options regarding North Korea. Either we forcefully disarm North Korea, or we can engage it the same way we did with the Soviet Union and China. I hope that the Six Party Talks have at least paused the escalation of tensions between the United States and North Korea. I hope the talks can shift the focus away from confrontation and towards negotiation. Given enough time, North Koreans and Americans can again sit down and calmly come to some reasonable understanding. Otherwise, if Kim Jong II does test his nuclear weapons, we will be on an inevitable track to a second Korean war.

This is a rather pessimistic forecast, but a realistic one. If we continue to “kick the can down the road,” as they say in Washington when delaying action on a problem, we will wake up one day to discover that North Korea has joined the nuclear club.