

**North Korea -
Two Failures Do Not Equal Success**

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By**

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Double failure does not add up to success. North Korea's Supreme Commander Kim Jong Il and US President George Bush claim they want a "peaceful diplomatic solution" to the Korean Peninsula's nuclear woes, but their strategies have been dismal failures. Obviously, new, more effective strategies are urgently needed if a "peaceful diplomatic solution" is to be achieved. But before we can define a solution, we need to figure out what really is bugging both sides.

Kim claims he is trying to defend his domain from Washington's "hostile policy" and instead really wants "friendly relations" with the United States. But on February 10, 2005, his government finally confirmed that it broken all its previous promises and built nuclear weapons. But it blamed this on its nemesis, the United States, by declaring that it will return to the Six Party Talks, but not until the Bush Administration "switches to a policy of peaceful co-existence." Justifiably, the international response to Kim's pronouncements has been intensely negative. North Korea's coercive strategy obviously is not the way to foster friendship and defuse hostility.

Nor have President Bush's "pre-emptive" nuclear non-proliferation strategy and moralistic assessments promoted progress toward a peaceful solution. Common sense dictates that a diplomatic solution requires diplomacy. But Bush began with the opposite - by declaring the unilateral right of "pre-emptive" nuclear attack on members of his self proclaimed "axis of evil." He also demanded North Korea's total capitulation (complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement) as a precondition to direct diplomatic dialogue. Also, labeling an adversary a "pygmy, tyrant and outpost of tyranny," etc. certainly is not conducive to promoting mutual understanding.

If both sides persist with their present strategies, the outcome is more likely to be a second Korean War than a "peaceful diplomatic solution."

Maybe the real problem is that both sides are still fighting the first Korean War, 1950-53. After half-century, its legacy still haunts the US-North Korea relationship. The Korean War "armistice" halted the combat but not the hostility. The war's legacy profoundly shapes both sides' strategies even now.

North Korea's insistence on having a nuclear "deterrence" capability may reflect the North Korea People's Army's (NKPA) conviction that the United States will eventually

seek revenge for the NKPA having defeated (in its view) and humiliated the mighty US military. Pyongyang's generals view the present through their distorted perception of the past. They claim their victory in that war justifies their domination of Kim Jong II's regime and their pursuit of armed parity with the United States. These generals seem blind to the fact that today's reality is an opaque reflection of the past. Contrary to their expectations, North Korea's nuclear "deterrence" has not and never can secure the regime's survival. This could be possible only if North Korea were to garner international respect, something that might no longer be possible.

President Bush's strategy for dealing with North Korea remains equally embedded in the Korean War. Four years ago he chose containment over engagement to deal with North Korea. He did so to distinguish himself from his Democratic predecessor, Clinton, who had pursued engagement. Paradoxically, Bush had reverted to Democratic President Truman's way of dealing with North Korea and rejected his own father's preference. Truman first imposed economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, the cornerstones of containment, on North Korea because it had invaded South Korea. Bush's father later began removing the sanctions and opening diplomatic channels to Pyongyang. In any event, incumbent President Bush restored the Korean War era hostile bilateral relationship with North Korea.

If Kim and Bush really want a diplomatic solution, both need to demonstrate "sincerity" and contribute to building a "mature atmosphere." Pyongyang can do this by promptly returning to the Six Party Talks, without preconditions. President Bush can authorize US diplomats to engage their North Korean counterparts in diplomatic dialogue, without preconditions. This will not ensure a peaceful diplomatic outcome, but at least it will be a step away from further movement toward a second Korean War.