

Korean Peninsula Policy of the Obama Administration: Focus on Security Issues

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Contrary to expectations created during the U.S. presidential election campaign of 2008, the Obama administration has not succeeded in creating the foundations for sustained diplomatic engagement with North Korea during the first two years of its administration. Instead, the Obama administration's policy toward North Korea has been shaped initially by the need to respond to North Korean provocations, including North Korean missile and nuclear tests in April and May of 2009. This circumstance has led to a sanctions-oriented approach toward North Korea as the primary prong in the Obama administration's policy approach toward North Korea. Despite apparent easing in the latter half of 2009 that enabled a visit by Special Representative Stephen Bosworth to Pyongyang, the message Ambassador Bosworth carried with him insisted that North Korea take actions to show its commitment to denuclearization before a return to six party—not bilateral—dialogue, although bilateral dialogue was envisioned to take place “within the framework of the Six Party Talks.”² The *Cheonan* incident and its aftermath have served to add a second prong to the Obama administration's policy approach; namely, an emphasis on deterrence of North Korean provocations and an insistence on solidarity with South Korea in response to North Korean behavior.³ These elements of U.S. policy are understandable, and indeed necessary, but sanctions and deterrence alone are unlikely to achieve the denuclearization of North Korea, especially in the absence of regional cooperation necessary to convince North Korea that the only possible path that might guarantee survival is one which involves denuclearization.

This paper will review two decades of U.S. efforts to prevent North Korea's

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² Briefing on Recent Travel to North Korea, Stephen W. Bosworth, Washington DC, December 16, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/12/133718.htm>.

³ Joint Communique, The 42nd U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting, Washington DC, October 8, 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20101008usrok.pdf>.

nuclear pursuits as a means of understanding the primary ‘lessons learned’ that U.S. policymakers are applying as they consider the current challenge of dealing with North Korea. In so doing, it must be recognized that the dimensions of the challenge posed by North Korea have also changed qualitatively as a result of North Korea’s two nuclear tests, which pit the objective realities posed by North Korea’s de facto capabilities against a refusal to accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state. The paper will also address the apparent shift in North Korean policies that has resulted from its nuclear achievements-to-date, and how those achievements complicate the task of assuring the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The paper will also explore current U.S. options to prevent North Korea’s nuclear development and the implications for the United States and its neighbors if North Korea were to take the final step in its nuclear development by developing a reliable delivery capacity to expand its nuclear threat to its neighbors, including South Korea, Japan, China, and the United States.

American Efforts to Deter North Korea’s Nuclear Development: Two Decades of Failure

Given that there is a rich and exhaustive literature recounting U.S. policy efforts toward North Korea, this paper will only summarize the main characteristics of the U.S. policy approach toward North Korea and provide my interpretation of the major lessons the U.S. policy community, rightly or wrongly, has taken from each experience.

First Bush Administration

—High-Level Dialogue and Drift toward Confrontation

Concerns about North Korea’s nuclear weapons development initially emerged as a matter requiring policy attention at the end of the Cold War, as inter-Korean relations began to ease and South Korea had success in normalizing relations with Soviet bloc countries in the wake of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. A prime-ministerial level inter-Korean dialogue resulted in the negotiation of the landmark Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchanges, and Cooperation at the end of 1991.⁴ In September of that year, President George H. W. Bush announced the withdrawal

⁴ Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Cooperation and Exchange between the North and the South, Seoul, December 13, 1991, http://www1.korea-np.co.jp/pk/011th_issue/97100101.htm.

of land-based nuclear weapons from foreign territory, and North Korea responded by joining the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in early 1992. In January of 1992, the Under Secretary of State Arnold Kanter had an unprecedented bilateral meeting with Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) International Affairs Secretary Kim Young Sun in New York. But IAEA inspections held in the summer of 1992 yielded evidence that North Korea's declaration regarding the operating history of its five megawatt nuclear reactor at Yongbyon was incorrect. Following revelations in the aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf War that Saddam Hussein had proceeded further than anticipated in pursuing nuclear weapons, the IAEA sought unprecedented special inspections in North Korea, setting up a confrontation between North Korea and the IAEA, backed by the United States. The emergence of the crisis also brought to a halt implementation of inter-Korean exchanges under the Basic Agreement, largely at the insistence of the United States. The clock ran out on the Bush administration as the crisis was building, setting the stage for an early confrontation between the United States and North Korea at the start of the Clinton administration.

The Bush administration utilized a global policy decision to withdraw U.S. nuclear weapons from foreign territory to make gains in addressing concerns with North Korea, succeeding in drawing North Korea into IAEA membership. The Bush administration's one-time high-level meeting came at a high point in inter-Korean relations, but U.S. unfolding concerns about the IAEA's discovery of inaccuracies in North Korea's declaration resulted in pressure to hold back on development of deeper inter-Korean ties through the implementation of the Basic Agreement. Bush administration diplomacy succeeded in drawing North Korea into the international inspections regime but the clock ran out on Bush administration efforts to manage the ensuing crisis between the IAEA and the DPRK that dominated the early part of the Clinton administration.

Clinton Administration I

—Crisis Management and The Geneva Agreed Framework

The Clinton administration inherited a brewing standoff between the IAEA and North Korea, which rapidly escalated with North Korea's March 1993 threat to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) within ninety days of its announcement. The threat of North Korea's NPT withdrawal and the North's construction of two larger reactors capable of churning out hundreds of kilograms

of plutonium each year led the IAEA to refer the matter to the UN Security Council, which called upon all parties to make efforts to address the issue. After having resisted North Korean overtures for direct negotiations with the United States for decades out of deference to South Korean allies, the Clinton administration opted to negotiate bilaterally with North Korean counterparts in an attempt to stem the crisis. A series of negotiations over the course of eighteen months led to North Korea's suspension of its withdrawal from the NPT and the negotiation of a deal whereby the North agreed to suspend construction of new reactors and to freeze the operation of the existing reactor in return for 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil per year and the construction of two new proliferation-resistant light water reactors in North Korea, a project that would be undertaken by a quasi-public international consortium named the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). Although South Korea and Japan had been cut out of the negotiations, the United States requested that both countries play significant or central financial and technical roles in the supply of the reactor under the consortium.

Although the 1994 bilateral agreement, known as the Geneva Agreed Framework,⁵ halted North Korea's efforts to produce plutonium for use in a nuclear weapons program, it established a mechanism for capping and eventually ending North Korea's nuclear weapons development program, and set a framework for possible improvement of U.S.-DPRK relations at a relatively modest overall cost to the United States (especially since South Korean and Japanese allies were essentially footing the bill), there were a number of drawbacks to this experience. First, the United States cut out South Korea from participating in discussion of an issue that is arguably critical to its national security. Second, the agreement kicked the can down the road, but would likely face severe practical obstacles to its full implementation, including the challenge of gaining essential Congressional support to operate the reactors constructed in North Korea. Third, it was not clear whether the North would live up to the agreement or might find an alternative covert path by which to continue its program, an option it apparently did pursue with Pakistan from the later 1990s through experimentation on a uranium enrichment path to developing nuclear weapons capabilities. Fourth, the agreement was contested along partisan lines, especially by those who objected to the moral hazard of potentially 'rewarding' North Korea for having cheated on its obligations by using the incentive of providing heavy fuel oil and constructing light water reactors in North Korea.

⁵ Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Geneva, October 21, 1994, <http://www.kedo.org/pdfs/AgreedFramework.pdf>.

*Clinton Administration II**—Drift in Implementation; Diplomatic Reengagement via the Perry Process*

The Clinton administration faced several obstacles as it proceeded in implementing the deal it had signed with North Korea. First, the administration lost interest in an implementation process that required continued attention and momentum on a host of technical issues. Second, the administration's limited financial commitments to the project remained a source of active opposition among Republicans. Third, satellite surveillance detected suspicious North Korean activities at Keumchang-ri that led to administration doubts that North Korea might be pursuing a covert nuclear program. Fourth, the administration lost credibility with Congress regarding its ability to certify that North Korea was adhering to the Agreed Framework. The U.S. Congress called for a review of policy and the Clinton administration appointed former Defense Secretary William Perry to conduct a high-level review of policy toward North Korea.

Secretary Perry's review laid the basis for an improved political environment surrounding policy toward North Korea while providing the Clinton administration with an opportunity to adjust its policies in line with a more engagement-oriented policy adopted by Kim Dae Jung, popularly known as the Sunshine Policy. By establishing a high-level Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) and testing North Korean intentions with his own visit to North Korea, Secretary Perry revived attention to engagement with North Korea and provided negotiating space necessary to resolve the controversy over the Keumchangri site. During this period, a Four Party Talks initiative among the United States, China, and the two Koreas designed to address the issue of a permanent peace on the Korean peninsula convened but made no significant progress. Following the June 2000 inter-Korean summit, the Clinton administration ended its time in office with an exchange of high-level visits led by DPRK National Defense Commission Chairman Cho Myung-rok and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. This exchange produced an extraordinary offer by Kim Jong Il to settle all outstanding issues in U.S.-DPRK relations if President Clinton were to visit Pyongyang, but time ran out to do the staff work necessary to ensure that such a visit would serve U.S. interests.

The following lessons can be drawn from this period. First, high-level U.S. neglect of the details of implementation provided North Korea with an advantage as it sought to shift the terms of the agreement to suit its own needs. Second, the value of trilateral

U.S.-Japan-ROK coordination was finally realized and formalized during this time. Third, ongoing efforts would be required to hold the North Koreans accountable for implementation of the nuclear aspects of the agreement, while the North Koreans surely felt the same way about the failure to make progress on the promise of improved bilateral diplomatic relations included in the Agreed Framework. Fourth, difficulties and troubles with KEDO implementation began to engender cynicism that the deal as constructed would not force the North Koreans to a clear decision point on giving up its program in light of the difficulties the United States was likely to face with the U.S. Congress and others in ensuring the completion of the project. Fifth, despite all this, Kim Jong Il had a clear interest in improved U.S.-North Korean relations (but probably did not recognize the necessity of quid pro quos or North Korean performance on key issues as a means by which to improve the relationship.)

George W. Bush Administration I

—Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis and Malign Neglect

President George W. Bush came into office skeptical about Kim Jong Il and past deals with North Korea. He resisted efforts to maintain policy continuity with the Clinton administration and rejected Kim Dae Jung's Sunshine Policy. Despite Kim Dae Jung's effort to keep U.S. engagement going in line with his own efforts, the Bush administration took a deliberate approach to the North. The Bush administration conducted a policy review and stated a willingness to meet with North Korea anytime, anywhere, but made no effort to revive Clinton-era bilateral diplomacy with the North. When a special envoy finally did travel to Pyongyang in October of 2002, he came armed with the accusation, based on U.S. intelligence, that North Korea was covertly developing a uranium-based path to attain nuclear weapons, a violation of the intent if not the letter of the Agreed Framework. In the ensuing weeks, the KEDO project was scrapped, North Korea kicked out nuclear inspectors from the IAEA and reloaded its reactors, and reprocessed spent fuel rods that had been placed in dry storage as part of the Agreed Framework implementation but had never been removed from North Korea. Reprocessing provided North Korea with an additional 30-40 kilograms of plutonium, and the breakdown of the Agreed Framework meant that North Korea was unconstrained from producing more. The Bush administration attempted to create a multilateral negotiating framework that eventually became the Six Party Talks, a venue where the Bush administration sought to mobilize international pressure for "comprehensive, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization," but at the same time

remained unwilling to hold bilateral diplomatic dialogue or negotiations with the North, based on its own view of North Korea's mendacity as a negotiating partner and a belief that direct talks with North Korea also rewarded North Korean bad behavior. The Six Party Talks stalled, North Korea gained unfettered and unmonitored access to a stash of 30-40 kilograms of plutonium, declared itself a nuclear power, insisted on mutual disarmament talks, and eventually tested a nuclear device on October 9, 2006.

The Bush administration was vindicated in its view that North Korea was cheating on the agreement, but by allowing it to be destroyed, the administration also removed restraints on North Korean behavior that had served as an effective obstacle to North Korea going nuclear through the first path of using plutonium for a bomb. The termination of delivery of heavy fuel oil to North Korea meant as a practical matter that the North no longer had anything to lose by breaking away from the agreement, but it was also politically impossible to continue to provide economic benefits to a cheating North Korea. The dissolution of the Agreed Framework provided North Korea with direct access to fuel rods stored in North Korea under IAEA supervision. The idea behind the Six Party framework was that a multilateral framework put greater pressure on the North and to promote transparency and greater ability to hold North Korea accountable, but it also contributed to North Korea's sense of isolation, making North Korea a recalcitrant participant in the on-again, off-again forum.

George W. Bush Administration II

—North Korea's Nuclear Test and Christopher Hill's Denuclearization Effort

Having been on watch when the horses were let out of the barn, the Bush administration assigned a new point person the task of rounding up the North Korean nuclear capability and putting it back in the barn, despite the unprecedented degree of difficulty such a task entailed. Absent a military option, the only means that nuclear envoy Christopher Hill had was to use the Six Party Talks and the 2005 Joint Statement in which the North Koreans committed themselves to denuclearization as a means by which to coax North Korea down the path of denuclearization by pursuing an "action for action" set of quid pro quos designed to provide North Korea with diplomatic benefits including better relations with the United States in return for North Korean actions designed to abandon nuclear weapons.⁶ Despite vigorous diplomatic efforts by Christopher Hill, the North

⁶ Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing September 19, 2005, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/dslbj/t212707.htm>.

Koreans had the upper hand since they maintained control over their overall program. The North Koreans focused most of their efforts on gaining benefits in return for limited concessions that fell short of an overall commitment to give up a nuclear weapons capability. Although the United States insisted in the veneer of the six party framework, the real action in this process was through U.S.-DPRK bilateral channels, a fact that became a point of friction with both South Korean and Japanese allies as well as with the Chinese. North Korea also proved able to set the terms for exchange, with the United States offering concessions even in return for partial steps on the part of North Korea.

Obama Administration Lessons Learned From the Negotiating Record, Policy Options and Priorities

The Obama administration came into office with several lessons in mind based on the experience of the second Bush administration.⁷ First, the Obama administration was determined to place alliance consultations first and pledged not to make irreversible material concessions in return for reversible North Korean pledges and actions. Second, the Obama administration envisioned the possibility of a higher-level dialogue with North Korea and appointed Stephen Bosworth as a special representative with the idea that Bosworth would have sufficient rank to reach higher into the North Korean leadership than Christopher Hill had been able to do. Third, the Obama administration in its initial stages focused on the necessity of continuing denuclearization and indicated its strong support for the Six Party Talks as the primary vehicle for pursuing that objective, despite the fact that the Six Party Talks was a creation of the Bush administration. Thus, the Obama administration adopted a policy that was initially intended to build on the approach established at the end of the Bush administration, but that would strengthen alliance cohesion and Six Party Talks as the best means by which to shape the environment in support of denuclearization. Despite campaign pledges suggesting a willingness to place high-level diplomatic engagement as a priority, the Obama administration saw policy toward North Korea primarily through the lens of its nuclear proliferation policy, and the need to reinforce the moral force of the NPT through enhanced compliance.

The Obama administration was not expecting North Korean provocations such as a multi-stage missile launch or a second nuclear test in the early stages of the

⁷ Charles L. Pritchard, John H. Tilelli Jr., and Scott Snyder, *U.S. Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula*, Independent Task Force Report No. 64, Council on Foreign Relations, June 2010.

administration. These escalatory steps by North Korea combined with the sinking of the ROK warship Cheonan in March of 2010 to make the U.S. policy reactive and focused on strengthening sanctions as a means by which to strengthen counter-proliferation and on strengthening deterrence in order to prevent future North Korean provocations. These actions by North Korea had likely strengthened the wariness of Obama administration officials regarding entering negotiations on the past pattern of interactions with North Korea, whereby the North has perceived as having succeeded in securing material gains without reciprocating or adhering to its own commitments. At the same time, the Obama administration has not foreclosed the possibility of dialogue, and did respond, albeit reluctantly, to North Korean efforts to improve the atmosphere for diplomacy in the fall of 2009. Ambassador Bosworth traveled to Pyongyang as special representative of President Obama in December of 2009, but the gap between U.S. interest in holding bilateral talks within the framework of the Six Party Talks and in focusing the agenda on denuclearization was at odds with the North Korean interest in bilateral dialogue on the agenda of pursuing peace talks.

Although there appeared to be movement in the direction of getting the Six Party Talks back on track in the form of approval for an unofficial visit by Kim Kye-gwan to the United States that was designed to set the stage for the resumption of Six Party Talks, the sinking of the Cheonan upended that process. Instead, as the investigation unfolded and the investigating team focused on the North Koreans as the most likely perpetrators of the sinking, it became clear that the Cheonan would become a major obstacle to the near-term resumption of dialogue with North Korea. At the same time, one might argue that the absence of serious prospects for pressuring North Korea to return to the path of denuclearization has served to cement the idea that the only choice for the international community is acquiescence to the reality of North Korea as a *de facto* nuclear weapons state.

The primary focus of the Obama administration in managing the response to the Cheonan has been to emphasize support and solidarity with South Korean allies in all phases of the incident. The United States joined the international investigating team, supported South Korean efforts to gain a strong statement of condemnation of North Korea at the UN Security Council, and joined in a robust set of anti-submarine warfare exercises over the summer designed to send a clear message to North Korea regarding the capacity of the alliance to deter future submarine provocations. This support has also been extended at a political level through the

decision of the two presidents to delay the implementation of operational control transfer from April of 2012 to December of 2015, a strong statement of solidarity by the Secretaries of State and Defense with their counterparts in Seoul in July to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Korean War,⁸ and most recently during President Obama's visit to Seoul earlier this month, at which time the two presidents reiterated the need for North Korea to show tangible steps to prove its commitment to denuclearization and the U.S. expectation for an improved inter-Korean relationship as prerequisites for returning to talks.⁹

Although prospects for Six Party Talks appeared to recover ahead of the Seoul G20 Summit in November 2010 when President Lee suggested that a North Korean apology would not be a precondition for a return to talks, the North Korean artillery attack on Yeonpeyong Island weeks after the summit, along with revelations of Pyongyang's new uranium enrichment efforts, served to reverse the exit process toward resumption of talks.¹⁰ The United States dismissed strong Chinese calls for consultations among members of the Six Party Talks in immediate response to the attack, convening instead with South Korean and Japanese counterparts for trilateral foreign ministerial talks in December in Washington that produced a trilateral statement against North Korean provocations.¹¹ While the run-up to the U.S.-China summit between Presidents Obama and Hu in Washington in January 2011 drew apparent renewed support from China and South Korea of both six party and inter-Korean dialogue, it remains to be seen whether such developments are sustainable given continued gaps regarding conditions for the resumption of talks as well as immediate domestic and regional factors that make such dialogue efforts appear more tactical rather than likely to translate into real progress.¹²

⁸ Joint Statement of ROK-U.S. Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Korean War, July 21, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/07/144974.htm>.

⁹ Press Conference with President Obama and President Lee of the Republic of Korea in Seoul, November 11, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/11/president-conference-with-president-obama-and-president-lee-republic-kor>.

¹⁰ See-Won Byun, "North Korea's Provocations and Their Impact on Northeast Asian Regional Security," Center for U.S.-Korea Policy, The Asia Foundation, December 2010, <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/ByunNorthKoreasProvocationsDec2010.pdf>.

¹¹ Statement by Japan, South Korea, United States on North Korea, December 6, 2010, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/December/20101207112222su0.6681896.html>.

¹² Scott Snyder, "China's Call for Six Party Talks: Cynical or Naive?" Asia Unbound, Council on Foreign Relations, November 29, 2010, <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2010/11/29/china%e2%80%99s-call-for-six-party-talks-cynical-or-naive/>.

North Korea's Nuclear Test and Kim Jong Il's Plans for Political Succession

North Korea's ongoing efforts to consolidate its nuclear status since it asserted its nuclear status in February of 2005 has engendered an active debate over the intentions behind North Korea's development of a nuclear capability. North Korea's longstanding pursuit of nuclear weapons suggests that development of a nuclear capacity has long been seen as a potentially valuable instrument by which to strengthen both North Korea's deterrence capabilities and its national power. Pursuit of the program has also proved to be economically beneficial to North Korea, in the sense that the North has received material benefits in the context of international efforts to convince North Korea to freeze and abandon its nuclear program.

The most significant element of the debate over North Korean nuclear intentions as it relates to U.S.-DPRK relations is the question of whether or not North Korea's nuclear development has proceeded so far that the North no longer considers the improvement of relations with the United States to be a compelling diplomatic priority. If North Korea no longer prioritizes improvement in relations with the United States, the prospect for achieving denuclearization of the Korean peninsula through diplomatic means will have declined, but U.S. acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear weapons state would have negative implications both for regional stability and for the credibility of U.S. alliance commitments to Japan and South Korea. North Korean foreign ministry statements in January of 2009 separating the issue of North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities from the question of normalization of relations with the United States directly challenge the regional consensus linking denuclearization and diplomatic normalization that was contained in the Six Party Talks Joint Statement of September of 2005.¹³ The unwillingness of North Korean leaders to do more than to reiterate a vague commitment to denuclearization as an objective of the Six Party Talks further casts doubt on the likelihood that this forum will be able to make tangible achievements.

Another background factor that has drawn close attention is the question of whether Kim Jong Il's apparent stroke in the fall of 2008 and the subsequent months of recovery might have influenced North Korea's diplomatic strategy and handling

¹³ "DPRK Foreign Ministry's Spokesman Dismisses U.S. Wrong Assertion," *Korean Central News Agency*, January 17, 2009.

of the nuclear issue. The emergence of a hardline edge to North Korean actions in early 2009, as evidenced both by the missile and nuclear tests and by North Korean military involvement in efforts to curtail the number of South Koreans present in the Kaesong Industrial Zone and in the months-long detention of a South Korean working at the zone. It is not clear the extent to which North Korean provocations in early 2009 were related to internal political changes precipitated by Kim Jong Il's illness.

A third factor related to North Korea's nuclear strategy is the question of domestic political maneuvering in North Korea over leadership succession. From the perspective of U.S. policymakers, this issue has at least two dimensions: a) the extent to which North Korea's development of nuclear capabilities and conduct of a nuclear test is being used for domestic purposes as a means by which to signal the power and legitimacy of the regime diminishes the likelihood that North Korea is willing to bargain away such a capacity, b) the leadership succession process itself focuses the leadership on internal issues rather than external issues while creating an environment in which no internal constituency is likely to argue for constraining an existing capability that has been used to heighten international attention to and concern about the North.

The Potential Impact of A North Korean Nuclear Delivery Capacity on U.S. Policy Toward North Korea

The international community failed to apply the tools necessary to prevent North Korea from attaining the materials, technologies, and experience that enabled them to undertake two tests of a nuclear device in September of 2005 and May of 2009. However, there is a situation that is more dangerous to regional and international stability than the current one, in which North Korea is a de facto nuclear weapons state. If North Korea were to miniaturize a warhead and mount it on top of a missile, then North Korea would have the delivery capacity to make its own threats of nuclear use credible. This development would have serious implications for U.S. extended deterrence strategy including the credibility of U.S. defense commitments to its allies in Japan and South Korea, planning for a North Korean contingency, and potentially for the shape of diplomatic strategy with North Korea. It is a scenario that is in the best interests of the United States and its allies to forestall if possible; however, failures of U.S. diplomacy in allowing the North Korean program to reach

its current stage do not bode well for future success without a much more rigorous assessment of North Korea's current situation and its implications.

The implications of a North Korean delivery capacity for U.S. extended deterrence commitments are serious precisely because the attainment of such a capacity can be used to introduce new tensions and strains into the alliance. The clearest precedent for the likely emergence of such tensions is the Cold War debate over Soviet intermediate/regional nuclear missile delivery capabilities that ensued between the United States and Europe in the 1980s. Soviet intermediate nuclear delivery capabilities introduced tensions into the U.S.-European relationship over the U.S. stationing of nuclear weapons in the regional theater and a debate over arms control arrangements designed to restrain development of such forces, but potentially in ways that increased perceived risk to allies without providing commensurate or adequate assurances in the eyes of Europeans that the United States would prioritize a nuclear counter-response to an attack in Europe in the same way it would be likely to respond to an attack on the United States. The outlines of a similar debate over the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence are already apparent in Japan, but the North Korean missile delivery threat remains hypothetical at this time. If it were to be realized, there would likely be a much more severe and ongoing debate in Japan and South Korea over the credibility, capability, and political will of the United States to utilize nuclear weapons in response to a North Korean attack--or to prepare adequately to prevent a North Korean nuclear tipped missile from landing in Japanese territory by using missile defense capabilities and preemption.

Second, North Korea's realization of a missile delivery capacity for nuclear weapons would necessitate changes in war plans to respond adequately to North Korea's expanded threat capacity. The United States and its allies would have to be prepared to take tremendous casualties in the context of a nuclear detonation and to launch a commensurate counter-strike capability that would in effect be designed to end the North Korean regime. In this context, priorities would be on intelligence capabilities to assure early detection and options for preemption. One aspect of the military response that is particularly worrisome is that North Korean nuclear use in any military conflict is probably a higher probability as a result of the growing gap in conventional military capabilities in the North versus the South or the United States. In other words, how does one cope with the possibility that military doctrines in North Korea may increasingly regard nuclear use in a military

contingency not as an insurance policy, but as the first line of defense?

Third, the most challenging aspect of responding to an expanded North Korean nuclear delivery capability might be the task of managing an effectively coordinated response to North Korean threat diplomacy designed to blunt the potential effects of North Korean efforts to utilize nuclear threats for purposes of blackmail or extortion of economic benefits from the international community. The diplomatic task of addressing the core underlying objective of achieving denuclearization of the Korean peninsula will also be complicated by the development of a full-fledged North Korean nuclear capability. Given the complexities of national and regional politics as influences on diplomacy and the challenges of developing a coordinated political and diplomatic response to North Korea's growing capabilities thus far, it is easy to imagine that diplomatic conflicts might grow even more severe, both between and among allies and between the United States and China. This is why there is real danger in the current prospect that diplomatic drift—in the absence of an effective channel for addressing these issues with North Korea—could lead to acquiescence, and the possibility that collectively all states in the region may find that deferral of this hard issue leads to an even more intractable and mutually disadvantageous situation should North Korea complete its pursuit of a nuclear weapons delivery capability.