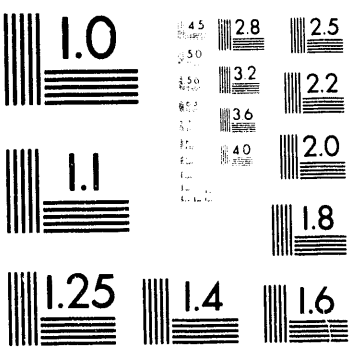
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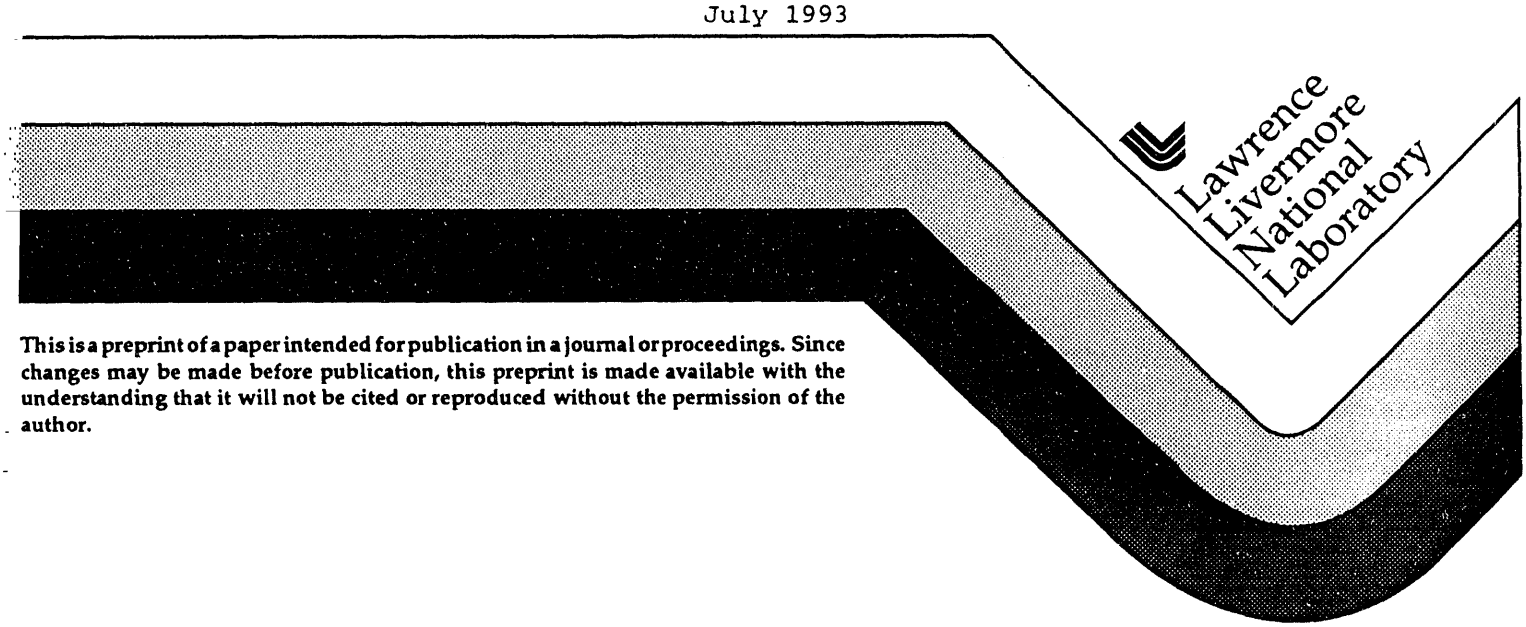

Implications of a North Korean Nuclear Weapons Program

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1. Introduction

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is one of the Cold War's last remaining totalitarian regimes. Rarely has any society been as closed to outside influences and so distant from political, economic, and military developments around the globe. In 1991 and in 1992, however, this dictatorship took a number of political steps which increased Pyongyang's interaction with the outside world. Although North Korea's style of engagement with the broader international community involved frequent pauses and numerous steps backward, many observers believed that North Korea was finally moving to end its isolated, outlaw status. As the end of 1992 approached, however, delay and obstruction by Pyongyang became intense as accumulating evidence suggested that the DPRK, in violation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), was seeking to develop nuclear weapons. On March 12, 1993, North Korea announced that it would not accept additional inspections proposed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve concerns about possible violations and instead would withdraw from the Treaty.

Pyongyang's action raised the specter that, instead of a last act of the Cold War, North Korea's diplomatic maneuvering would unravel the international norms that were to be the basis of stability and peace in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, the discovery that North Korea was approaching the capability to produce nuclear weapons suggested that the nuclear threat, which had been successfully managed throughout the Cold War era, could increase in the post-Cold War era.

2. The Korean Totalitarianism

Predicting behavior in Pyongyang has never been easy. Decision making in the DPRK is probably the least transparent policy process of any national government. Over the years, a highly ideological and heavy handed North Korean public line has been supplemented by extensive use of deception plans and secret operations. The overall thrust of North Korean

foreign policy, however, has been amazingly consistent since the inception of the regime of Kim Il Sung. Highest priority has been to maintain tight political control internally through isolation and repression; second highest priority has been to destabilize South Korea.

Pyongyang's foreign policy reinforced these local priorities by building a network of relationships with entities which had few qualms supporting such oppression. North Korea sought to balance its relationships with the People's Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, even during the Sino-Soviet split. Pyongyang maintained close ties with other pariah regimes such as Cuba and with revolutionary movements. North Korean intelligence still operates in a number of troubled regions, and arms sales have remained an important element in North Korean security policy. Nevertheless, Pyongyang's nearly all-consuming focus has been on the Korean peninsula. Its strategy has centered on self-reliance, thus reducing Pyongyang's sensitivity to political and economic changes around the world.

Despite North Korea's self-isolation, the interplay between domestic political developments and international events has been significant. Indeed, the partition of Korea was a product of post-World War II great power diplomacy, and Korea's continued division was one of the central symbols of the superpower Cold War. Kim Il Sung himself came to power in the context of the Soviet occupation, overpowering other Korean communist factions differentiated in part by their relationships or attitude toward interests outside North Korea. The "cult of personality" built around Kim Il Sung is almost the embodiment of the political strategy of isolation, yet this, too, was given impetus by developments on the international scene. The exaggerated cult of personality was in part a response to fears that the de-Stalinization taking place in the Soviet Union would generate comparable threats to Kim Il Sung's own leadership within the communist elite in Pyongyang. It was also a response to dissatisfaction within the population, which had suffered greatly during the Korean War. Many North Koreans had extensive contact with United Nations forces during the war, and millions had "voted with their feet" by fleeing to the south.

The same Kim Il Sung responsible for the 1950 invasion of South Korea remains in power in Pyongyang long after even the youngest veterans of that war have retired from military service. Few leaders around the world remain from the Cold War era, and only Kim Il Sung remains among those "present at the creation". In this twilight of the Cold War, however, even North Korea is in transition. Day-to-day responsibilities in North Korea have increasingly been transferred to Kim Il Sung's son, Kim Jung Il.

Although the younger Kim's name has been associated with many of his father's most hard-line policies and terrorist activities, some western analysts view this transition as an opportunity for positive political change either through Kim Jung Il himself or as a result of further changes in political leadership in Pyongyang. In particular, the stagnation and decline of the North Korean economy has further increased the hardships of life in North Korea. Economic decay has called into question the ability of the Pyongyang regime to maintain the highly militarized state which has been the basis of both domestic control and leverage on the South.

Forty years after the Korean War, the Korean peninsula remains one of the most heavily militarized regions in the world. North Korea's forces of over one million active duty personnel are about the size of Iraq's before the Persian Gulf War and are exceeded only by those of China, Russia, the United States, and India. South Korea, with a population twice as large as North Korea and a gross national product some 7-10 times as large, maintains slightly over 600,000 active duty military personnel. By any measurement, both Koreas maintain formidable military power, and both are arms exporters as well as arms importers. The military burden, however, is heavier on the North than on the South. North Korea maintains nearly 50 active military personnel per 1,000 citizens. By comparison, South Korea maintains 15, the United States 9, and Japan 2.[1]

The Korean War accelerated the militarization of the Korean peninsula and shaped the attitude of the international community towards North Korea. North Korea invaded the South only after post-World War II American forces had been withdrawn. The military response by the United Nations consisted of a multilateral force including diverse contingents such as those from Turkey and Ethiopia. Today, the senior American military officer in South Korea remains dual hatted as the Commander of the United Nations command.

3. The International Dimension

North Korea's decision in 1991 to accept a "two Koreas" approach to membership in the United Nations involved more than a shift in its public policy; it required a major shift in the relationship between North Korea and the United Nations. Today, as in 1950, events in Korea present major challenges to the ability of the United Nations to live up to expectations of the international community as the world looks to the U. N. Security Council once again to play a more significant role in a changing world order.

North Korea's impact on international security goes beyond the threat Pyongyang' large conver ional military forces pose to stability in a region which includes three nuclear powers and four of the largest countries in the world. Political violence has been a weapon of the North Korean regime since its earliest days. Infiltration of commando groups and terrorists from the North into the South has been a frequent occurrence, as symbolized by the large underground tunnels dug under the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The extension of terrorism against the South to other countries reached its high point with the assassination by bomb blast of several members of the Republic of Korea's cabinet while they were traveling abroad. Although South Korea has been the primary target of such overseas activities, North Korean secret police, military advisors, and agents have played a significant role in a number of the civil wars, insurgencies, and Marxist dictatorships which emerged during the Cold War. Indeed, North Korean involvement in the nether world of regional and ethnic crisis helped establish the network for North Korean arms exports.

In the post Cold War, post Gulf War era, organized opposition to terrorist groups and state terrorism has become increasingly multinational. This increase in international cooperation is even more evident in efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. North Korean arms sales have frequently been noticeable in the world's hot spots, but the North Korean role has become far more significant as Pyongyang sells ballistic missiles such as the SCUD to Iran and others. Concern that North Korea might become a conduit for technologies related to chemical, biological, and even nuclear weapons has grown in recent years.

Even if North Korea itself were not pursuing nuclear weapons its conduct has been increasingly at odds with the emerging international norms. Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear weapons has accelerated this inevitable confrontation. One year after the United Nations Security Council declared at the head of state level that proliferation was a threat to international peace and security, Pyongyang announced that it was withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Thus, as the international community believed that it was moving towards strengthened international norms dealing with human rights, non-aggression, and the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, North Korea, a nation particularly immune to international pressures, remained a central concern of the international community on all fronts.

4. Global Influences on North Korean Policy

To say that international events have a limited impact on North Korea is not to say that there is no impact at all. The momentous changes taking place around the globe today will inevitably have a far reaching effect on developments in North Korea, especially as rapid changes in economic, political, and security environments reinforce each other.

Pyongyang has had to deal with changes in the Marxist-Leninist world before. The Sino-Soviet split of the 1960's required a series of adjustments in Pyongyang's domestic and foreign policies. Similarly, US-Soviet détente and normalization of relations between the United States and the PRC increased stress on North Korean decision making. None of these developments can compare, however, with the global collapse of communism. The demise of the Warsaw Pact, the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the disappearance of Marxist-Leninist regimes in most countries with regular ties to North Korea has undermined Pyongyang's status and influence at home and abroad. The PRC, undergoing its own political evolution and economic revolution, has introduced greater flexibility into its own policies and appears to be advocating a similar strategy to Pyongyang. Thus, no veto on behalf of Pyongyang's policies will be automatically forthcoming from Russia or China at the United Nations Security Council.

The collapse of communism coincides with an international transformation which presents further challenges to Pyongyang. The emergence of the global market place and the growing economic clout of the Pacific Rim nations has significantly altered international politics. North-South differences remain between the developed industrial nations and developing nations, but ideological disputes with an East-West dimension are being placed on the back burner. Trade relationships are increasingly becoming the central element in the realignment of influence among nations. To be a significant player on the new international scene, a nation is strengthened if it is perceived to be moving in the same direction as the broader international community, that is, in the direction of democracy, the rule of law, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the nonproliferation of particularly dangerous weapons. These are all areas where North Korea would be rated at or near the bottom.

In contrast, South Korea is increasingly seen as riding the waves of the future. Both China and Russia see Seoul as a major trading partner. Strong economic development and a maturing democracy have allowed the Republic of Korea (ROK) to become a significant diplomatic presence within the region and globally. Current trends are running in favor of South Korean policies. All this has enabled South Korea to show greater flexibility in dealing with Pyongyang and the Korean dialogue.

South Korea's success stands in sharp contrast to North Korea's decline. The dynamics of the modern global economy suggest that so long as North Korea continues its isolation, the disparity will grow at an ever increasing rate. Although many developing nations have a lower GNP per capita than does North Korea, evidence is increasing that the North Korean economy may be in decline in real terms. The North Korean people have long endured extreme hardship, and worsening conditions cannot help but have political significance. North Korea has already sought outside economic assistance. A small amount of trade has begun with South Korea, and Pyongyang is seeking outside investment in the Tumen River Project. Also, North Korea has sought to normalize relations with Japan, in part to reach agreement on reparations from World War II and in part to permit influx of investment. Such developments are threatened, however ,by increased international concern that North Korea is seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

5. The North Korean Nuclear Program

Little is known of the decisions made by North Korea to pursue nuclear technology. The North Korean nuclear program has always had an economic and political as well as a security dimension. Nuclear energy plays an important role in economic development and has always been viewed as a source of political status. This is particularly true within socialist regimes where the collective nature of the endeavor can be highlighted. High technological success is a source of national pride and can strengthen the existing leadership. Nuclear technology, however, is inherently dual-use. The legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki precedes the North Korean nuclear program. "Atoms for Peace" immediately suggests the possibility of "Atoms for War".

In its early days, the North Korean nuclear research and development program relied primarily upon assistance from the Soviet Union. To establish the foundation for an extensive nuclear research and energy program, significant resources were required. By all accounts, North Korea invested heavily in creating the conditions for self-sufficiency even during the period in which it was almost entirely dependent on outside help for its nuclear program. Long after the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was opened for signature, North Korea's self-imposed isolation and the infant status of its nuclear program resulted in little international focus on the possibility that a nuclear weapons program might emerge in North Korea. Outside restraint on the North Korean nuclear program was initially bilateral, but after 1977 the IAEA safeguarded and inspected nuclear

material imported from the U.S.S.R. As a result of its assistance to China, the Soviet Union had experienced how technological cooperation could lead to the spread of nuclear weapons. In 1982, the Soviet Union and the United States began bilateral consultations on the problem of proliferation of nuclear weapons. This created additional incentives for Moscow to place restraints upon its cooperation with North Korea.

6. International and Bilateral transparency and constraints on the North Korean Nuclear Program

In 1985, under pressure from the U.S.S.R., North Korea acceded to the NPT. Pyongyang's quick ratification of the NPT after signature was widely heralded as a significant, positive event. Nevertheless, it came at a time in which the effectiveness of the NPT and of the International Atomic Energy Agency were increasingly subject to debate. From the beginning, the NPT has been praised as the centerpiece of the international nonproliferation regime, but the NPT has also been criticized for facilitating the spread the nuclear technology which could ultimately lead to the development of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, after a certain level of accomplishment, nuclear research programs become difficult to restrain from the outside.

When North Korea joined the NPT, it undertook as do all parties an obligation to implement an IAEA safeguards agreement within 18 months. This agreement provides for IAEA inspectors to visit nuclear facilities. By 1987, an undeclared and unsafeguarded nuclear reactor was being operated by North Korea at its Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center. As the world learned more about undeclared nuclear activities and as North Korea delayed negotiating with the IAEA on a safeguards agreement, concerns of the international community grew.

These concerns were heightened as a result of the Gulf War and the discovery that the Iraqi nuclear program was far broader and far deeper than had been anticipated. Iraq relied heavily on outside sources to build its nuclear weapon program. As a result, analysts thought they had a relatively good understanding of how advanced the Iraqi program was. After the war and with the UN resolutions requiring the most intrusive inspection regime ever implemented, these analysts were surprised at the gaps in their knowledge of the Iraqi nuclear weapons program.

At the time of the Iraqi confrontation, the international community became aware of additional unsafeguarded activities taking place in North Korea about which much less was known. The United States had identified

construction of a large plutonium reprocessing facility at Yongbyon. This reprocessing facility seemed inconsistent with any declared peaceful purpose of the North Korean nuclear program but involved the use of massive resources. In September 1991, the IAEA Board of Governors voted to call upon North Korea to sign and implement an IAEA safeguards agreement.

As expressions of concern throughout the international community grew, North Korea abandoned assertions that it did not have unsafeguarded facilities and instead focused on threats it claimed were posed by the United States. This rationale for non-compliance, unconvincing in the context of global détente and U. S. military reductions in the Pacific, served only to increase alarm. In fact, the United States, which had been reducing its defense spending for a number of years, was in the midst of the greatest arms control revolution in history. Bilaterally with the Soviet Union it was concluding the START I Treaty, and multilaterally in Europe, it was party to the treaty on conventional armed forces which was reducing conventional forces. The U. S. had programmed phased reductions in U. S. troops in the Republic of Korea, and the decision by President George Bush to remove, on a global basis, all ground-launched and sea-based tactical nuclear weapons from any overseas deployments under normal circumstances was announced on September 27, 1991. Furthermore, the United States had made clear that assurances given to parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty would apply in the case of North Korea. In an address to the Asia Society on January 17, 1991, Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Solomon, had said:

> "We pose no nuclear threat to North Korea. The United States has provided a solemn assurance that it will not use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear weapons state party to the NPT. This assurance applies except in the case of an armed attack on the United States or its allies by such a state associated with a nuclear weapons state. We have stated that the assurance applies to all non-nuclear weapons states parties to the NPT, including the DPRK, if they meet the assurances criteria."

Thus, the climate should have reinforced positive reasons why North Korea should live up to its obligations under the NPT. At the same time, the negative consequences of a failure to comply with the NPT were also growing. As the IAEA considered how to deal with Pyongyang's delay on an IAEA safeguards agreement, Defense Secretary Richard Cheney announced in late 1991 that the United States, in consultation with the Republic of Korea, would postpone future reductions in U. S. forces in Korea until there was greater clarification of North Korean intentions.

Increasingly, nonproliferation experts debated whether or not North Korea would pose the same serious threat that had been presented by Iraq. The debate over parallels between the Iraqi experience and the North Korean developments demonstrates how the nuclear question cannot be divorced from events outside the Korean peninsula. Nuclear concerns also cannot be divorced from developments on the Korean peninsula itself. The admission of the two Koreas to the United Nations was expected to give greater momentum to the on-again, off-again bilateral North-South dialogue. South Korean President Roh Tae Woo had proposed in August of 1990 that the two Koreas begin discussion of measures, including arms control, which might eliminate the threat of war on the Korean peninsula. Several talks, including the first meeting between prime ministers of the two Koreas, took place in late 1990. The resumption of these high level talks at the end of 1991 coincided with increased concern over the Korean nuclear question around the world. Diplomatic activities began to accelerate.

On October 24, 1991, the prime ministers of North and South Korea announced they would address a comprehensive agreement on reconciliation, non-aggression, exchanges, and cooperation at a mid-December meeting in Seoul. As that meeting approached, Pyongyang stated that it would accept international inspections of its nuclear facilities if U. S. installations in Korea could be inspected for nuclear weapons. The United States rejected the notion that existing international obligations could be made contingent upon newly imposed conditions. Nevertheless, on December 11, South Korea proposed that the two Koreas conclude an agreement that would ban plutonium reprocessing on the Korean peninsula and would permit inspections of both civilian and military facilities on a reciprocal basis. The United States confirmed that, in the context of a North-South agreement permitting such inspections, it had no objections to North Korean inspections of U. S. bases in South Korea. Two days later, the two Koreas signed an agreement on "reconciliation, non-aggression, and exchanges and cooperation". This was followed by the dramatic announcement by President Roh on December 18 that there were no nuclear weapons in South Korea.

On December 31, 1991, the two Koreas initialed the "Joint Declaration for De-Nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" under which the two nations agreed to forgo plutonium reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities and not to test, manufacture, produce, possess, store, deploy, receive, or use nuclear weapons. Thus, North Korea had again signed agreements designed to reassure the world, but neither the multilateral or bilateral implementing agreements had been concluded. The necessary inspections seemed quite distant.

During his January 1992 visit to Seoul, President Bush highlighted American willingness to accept inspections at U. S. bases in accordance with the North-South agreement opening all installations. The annual "Team Spirit" military exercise involving US and South Korean forces was suspended, and on January 22 the American Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Arnold Kanter, met in New York with Kim Yong Sun, the international secretary of the Korean Workers Party of North Korea. The stage seemed set for movement on the nuclear question. On February 19, umbrella agreements on reconciliation and on denuclearization entered into affect. Still, at its February 24 meeting, the IAEA Board of Governors was compelled to set June as a deadline for IAEA inspections in North Korea. Furthermore, the Board raised the possibility of taking the case to the United Nations Security Council.

For a while, many analysts in the West believed that North Korea was pursuing the bilateral nuclear track in order to avoid implementing an IAEA safeguards agreement. New conditions were raised as negotiations continued. Subsequently, North Korea did conclude its safeguards agreement with the IAEA and, after considerable delay in ratification and after a visit by IAEA Director General Hans Blix, North Korea did permit the first IAEA inspections under that agreement. During this period, however, no progress was made on the bilateral inspection regime. This prompted speculation that North Korea would now move to substitute IAEA inspections for the agreed bilateral inspections.

The IAEA inspections, however, provided no relief for North Korea. The inspections confirmed that North Korea had been operating unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and, indeed, had been building a plutonium reprocessing facility at Yongbyon. Furthermore, samples taken by the IAEA indicated that nuclear activity may have taken place which was not consistent with the DPRK's official declaration. When the IAEA sought further inspections to deal with these discrepancies, North Korea refused. On March 12, 1993, Pyongyang announced its intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty citing the upcoming Republic of Korea/United States annual "Team Spirit" exercise for 1993 as a threat and asserting that the IAEA was not impartial in its investigation of the nuclear question. The 90 day notification period for withdrawal under the NPT would expire on June 12, 1993.

As the most recent "Team Spirit" exercise neared completion, and in the context of signs that Pyongyang was keeping open options on the North-South dialog, the international community began to consult on its next steps

without a sense of immediate crisis. Seoul chose to look to the international community to address the dispute between North Korea and the IAEA. The United States also sought to avoid the creation of a bilateral confrontation. In public statements, the US did remind the world, and indirectly Pyongyang, that in the context of resolution of the nuclear question and with progress in the North-South dialog, bilateral relations between the US and the DPRK could evolve. In that process, some of North Korea's particular concerns might be addressed. Some flexibility on the nature of political and economic contacts seemed clear. Statements continued to be nuanced, but in the context of the North-South Inspection Agreement, inspectors from the North clearly could inspect American bases in the South. The new Clinton Administration seemed to go even further than the Bush Administration to clarify the absence of American nuclear weapons in South Korea. In low-level meetings in Beijing, the U.S. Government reemphasized that important improvements in relations would be possible, but only in the context of resolving the world's concerns about the North Korean nuclear program.

The response of the DPRK was largely a reiteration of its charges that it was faced with an imminent threat of attack. Military readiness was increased, and alarmist statements continued to be broadcast. As the end of the 90 day period for withdrawal neared, Pyongyang called for all foreigners to leave by June 15, three days after the deadline would run out.

With the UN Security Council pre-occupied with Somalia, Cambodia, and Bosnia, consultations on UN sanctions against Korea continued. Several nations with ties to Pyongyang highlighted the broad international concern, and the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for North Korea to reverse its decision on withdrawal. The United States also decided to take steps to clarify its position directly with representatives of North Korea and at a higher level than the Peking talks. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci met with Kang Sok Chu, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, at the United Nations in New York on June 2. The fact that the meeting took place was of some significance, but the results were uncertain. Gallucci again met with the North Korean delegation on June 10 and 11.

On Friday, June 11, with only hours to go before the 90 day withdrawal period would come to an end and as North Korea was conducting provocative ballistic missile test launches, the DPRK announced that it would "suspend" its withdrawal from the NPT pending additional efforts to resolve its differences with the IAEA over inspections it considered biased. Pyongyang had been asserting that the IAEA was being manipulated by the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). DPRK Vice

Minister Kang made clear that the North believed it was reserving a right to withdraw immediately if it were not satisfied with developments. Pyongyang indicated that routine IAEA inspections could continue, but did not make any statements indicating that it would change its position on the IAEA request to visit certain undeclared sites.

For its part, the United States welcomed this announcement as a means of gaining time to address differences, but emphasized that this did not resolve the international community concerns. To gain this additional time, the United States had taken the unprecedented step of negotiating a joint statement in which the two sides reiterated some past statements. North Korea and the US restated their commitment to a non-nuclear Korean peninsula and to the non-threat of force, including the use of nuclear weapons. The North's statement referenced the North-South Denuclearization Agreement. Thus, the United States has sought to facilitate North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear weapons program. U.S. policy has supported the IAEA and the North-South dialogue while seeking to avoid making the nuclear question a bilateral issue or a US-DPRK confrontation. North Korea has sought to provoke just such a confrontation as a means of gaining time for its nuclear program and leverage in its various negotiations.

When Pyongyang suspended its withdrawal from the NPT, the immediate international reaction was one of relief. Nevertheless, the situation remains extremely dangerous. In certain respects, the situation is worse than it was when the North Korean government asserted that it was withdrawing from the NPT. The North has had yet more time to work on nuclear weapons, and Pyongyang has been successful in once again defusing efforts to forge collective international action. Arguably, the United States has used a number of its bargaining chips for little gain. North Korea has continued to act as if its withdrawal from the NPT would make moot the question of responsibility for any non-compliance while it was a party to the Treaty. Certainly, the political pressure for action against North Korea has been diminished, and this lessor level of interest coincides with an international focus on problems elsewhere in the world.

On the other hand, the decision not to complete withdrawal from the NPT may permit the process of resolution of disputes with the IAEA and aspects of the North-South diplomacy to continue. The U.S., forthcoming in its engagement with the North, has at least once again reduced the pretexts used by the North to avoid a straight forward resolution of the nuclear question.

7. What are North Korea's Intentions?

More time will pass, but that time can be used to pursue nuclear weapons as well as negotiations. What is really behind the continued North Korean brinkmanship? Why does Pyongyang string out every deadline to the last possible moment? Why does the DPRK move forward on the bilateral North-South track while it stalls on the multilateral IAEA track and then take positive steps in the multilateral area as it stonewalls in the bilateral?

The most obvious and worrisome explanation of North Korean behavior is that its nuclear scientists have needed more time to perfect an atomic bomb. Those who are now convinced that Pyongyang has made an irreversible decision to obtain nuclear weapons as quickly as possible view each positive diplomatic step merely as the minimum North Korea believed necessary to gain access to technology or time to pursue nuclear weapons. According to this theory, North Korea only joined the NPT after it faced a termination of cooperation with the Soviet Union. Thus, Pyongyang may have hoped to avoid implementing an IAEA safeguards agreement until it could covertly acquire sufficient plutonium to build a small arsenal of nuclear weapons. The plutonium reprocessing facility at Yongbyon is seen as reflecting the very advanced state of the nuclear weapons program. Perhaps, had not Pyongyang feared that China might support economic sanctions or that the United States might put together a Gulf-style coalition of military action following the wave of anti-proliferation sentiment that grew up immediately after the defeat of Iraq, the DPRK would have withdrawn even earlier from the NPT. Under this scenario, Pyongyang is considered to be very close to at least its first bomb and is simply maneuvering to buy time to finish the job and to reveal its nuclear weapons status in the most effective way. Advocates of this view do not necessarily believe that the DPRK sees the pursuit of the atomic bomb as inconsistent with an effort to obtain improved relations with the outside world. Rather, they see Pyongyang as determined to shore up its regime politically against internal and external security threats so that it can then engage China, Russia, and even South Korea, Japan, and the United States in a more equal détente which might follow the initial negative international reaction. Alternatively, a "bomb in the basement" posture might also cause the outside world to show greater caution in making demands of the North even as trade increases and talks on unification proceed.

Not all analysts believe that Pyongyang has made a firm decision to produce nuclear weapons, and some believe that Pyongyang clearly has decided not to go ahead. Because North Korea needs aid and trade and a

reduction in its isolation so as to limit Seoul's emerging international strength and support, these analysts believe that Pyongyang is simply maneuvering while it uses uncertainty over the nuclear question as a bargaining chip. Indeed, they argue that the ability to demonstrate that South Korea and the United States are making concessions helps counter hard-liners in the North. This could make it easier for the new leadership that will follow Kim Il Sung, and maybe quickly Kim Jung Il, to pursue a Chinese model of remaining in control even as economic contact with the outside world increases. Diplomatic achievements by the DPRK could, according to some analysts, enhance the prospects for reform and facilitate movement away from a nuclear weapons capability.

A related possibility is that North Korea, facing turmoil and transition is simply keeping its options open. Like Pakistan, it may move ever closer to a capability with final steps to be subject to specific decisions. Analysts who believe that this is the Korean game stress the importance of increasing contacts and avoiding painting North Korea into the wrong corner. This strategy seeks to ease North Korea into the modern world while encouraging Pyongyang to move away from a nuclear weapons program.

Whether the DPRK has committed itself to obtaining nuclear weapons or not, the technological base for a nuclear weapons program seems sufficiently comprehensive. Even a moderately paced program may now be within quick striking distance of completion. Experts have not been able to rule out the possibility that North Korea may already have obtained sufficient plutonium for one or a few nuclear weapons. Thus, whatever North Korea's intentions, its capabilities will leave it very close to a nuclear weapons capability throughout the period of political engagement.

8. Implications of North Korean nuclear weapons

Fear of conventional military defeat at the hands of North Korea is no longer a major concern of South Korean security strategy. Although Seoul's military forces are smaller and have fewer tanks and combat aircraft, South Korean military forces are well equipped and highly trained. They retain some combat experience from Vietnam, and morale is high. Strong American ground, sea, and air forces remain on and around the Korean peninsula, but the Korean military self-confidently plays the central role today, especially now that American ground forces have been moved off the DMZ.

The emergence of a North Korean nuclear capability alone will not immediately alter the conventional military equation, but it would inevitably

lead to a military buildup in the South as well as by other nations in the region. More dangerous, non-linear responses would also be likely. A nuclear North would inevitably be provocative and would destabilize the region. Nations in the region would fear attempts at coercion and increased support for terrorism, even if they were to assess the risk of direct nuclear attack as small. Fear of nuclear attack, however, could rise to high levels in time of crisis, particularly if the existence of nuclear weapons were to strengthen the hand of hard-liners in Pyongyang who wish to unite the two Koreas by military force. Even if preemption were not to be a favored option, military alert levels would rise along with regional tension. The danger that a confrontation or crisis could spin out of control would be greater and chances of armed conflict would increase significantly. North Korean nuclear weapons status would not create a new stabilizing balance of power; it would increase the risks of miscalculation and conflict in a volatile region where key nations are experiencing major political and economic change and countries such as Russia, China -- and potentially North Korea -- are facing growing pressures for revolutionary change.

In the short term, US and ROK common concerns would likely bring those two nations closer together. In the long run, however, the nuclear threat could foster divisive forces acting upon their relationship. Isolationist forces within the United States would increasingly seek disengagement from the burgeoning nuclear risk. Also turning inward, many nationalist forces within South Korea would seek an independent nuclear deterrent or accommodation to accelerate unification, or both. Not all political thinkers in the South have rejected the notion of a united nuclear Korea, and that nuclear status can come sooner from the North than from the South. Even if the South were to remain true to its nonproliferation commitments and move to shore up its ties with other nations, however, a regime in Pyongyang with nuclear weapons would destabilize Northeast Asia and other regions creating disturbing dynamics which would in turn increase dangers on the Korean Peninsula.

After the Sino-Soviet split, big power dynamics in Northeast Asia evolved from bipolar to tri-polar, adding complexity to the adversary relationships of the Cold War. The political and economic ties of a more cooperative post-Cold War era have been increasingly multipolar, with Japan, Korea, and other Pacific Rim nations becoming more actively engaged across once impermeable ideological borders. These relationships have benefited from expectations that the security environment will improve. At the centerpiece of such expectations has been the strong U.S. - Japan security links, the growing American political ties with Russia, and increased economic ties with China.

A nuclear North Korea would complicate diplomatic and security calculations for all nations in the region. Although the great powers in the region have expressed similar concerns about North Korean nuclear activity and have cooperated to dampen that activity, differences exist as to how far to push Pyongyang. Dissatisfaction with the PRC's restrained approach to North Korea has already been a source of U.S.-Chinese tensions. If joint efforts are not successful in removing the nuclear danger, pressures will build for governments in the region to take unilateral measures and measures with like-minded partners. Increased military deployments in the region could have unintended consequences as other parties react to developments. In addition to an increased emphasis on conventional military capability including strategic and tactical defenses against ballistic missiles and aircraft, some nations such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan would begin to rethink their own non-nuclear status, especially if they had doubts about American resolve in the face of the North Korean nuclear threat. The anti-nuclear allergy in Japan remains strong, but Japan's own advanced nuclear industry could permit that country to have nuclear weapons relatively quickly should such a decision be made.

A nuclear North Korea would have a significant impact on other regions around the globe. North Korea has been a major supplier of missiles to the Middle East and has been an arms trading partner with a number of pariah nations in that region. The prospect of such trade in nuclear weapons or related technologies would accelerate weapons programs of a number of proliferants. In South Asia, what restraint has been demonstrated by the governments of India and Pakistan could be diminished. In the former Soviet Union, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan could swing away from their commitments under the Lisbon Accords to become non-nuclear weapons states parties to the NPT. With such political developments could come increased military posturing and heightened risk.

The world at large has been moving toward a strengthening of international norms against the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, and revolutionary arms control agreements have been reducing the nuclear weapons associated with the United States and the republics of the former Soviet Union. Over 150 nations are party to the NPT. Argentina and Brazil, significant non-parties, have been working to bring the Treaty of Tlatelolco -- a Latin American regional equivalent to the NPT--into effect. South Africa's dramatic revelation that it had assembled a small number of nuclear weapons but has since dismantled them has served as a warning and as a sign of hope in the international community that the spread of nuclear weapons could be reversed.

The North Korean nuclear program poses a fundamental challenge to the non-proliferation objectives of the world community in the post-Cold War era. Although the DPRK has generally cited the United States as the source of its security concerns, the specific focus of Pyongyang's dissatisfaction has been two multinational institutions believed critical to any "new world order:" the United Nations and the IAEA. North Korea only reluctantly accepted a "two Koreas" approach to membership in the United Nations, an organization whose presence on the Korean Peninsula is a reminder of international resolve against Kim Il Sung's aggression in 1950. Likewise, it is the IAEA which has identified and pursued discrepancies in Pyongyang's reporting on its nuclear programs.

More than any other country today, North Korea seems to be at odds with the principles, practices, and institutions of the contemporary international order. Were it not for North Korea's support of terrorism, spread of dangerous weapons such as ballistic missiles, and quest for nuclear weapons, the international community would largely acquiesce in Pyongyang's self-imposed isolation despite its totalitarian regime and the economic hardships experienced by its people. North Korea is neither Bosnia nor Somalia. Nor is North Korea Iraq, but the comparison is much closer. If the United Nations Security Council truly believes that further proliferation of nuclear weapons is a threat to international security, then North Korea's quest for the atomic bomb may constitute the most immediate such threat. That Pyongyang does so in defiance of the very international institutions established to enhance the common security and does so in violation of its own international commitments makes the challenge even greater. If South Africa gives us hope that proliferation can be rolled back, North Korea presents the danger that the enforceability of the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime will be destroyed.

9. What can be done?

Because of North Korea's high degree of economic self-sufficiency and the indigenous nature of its current nuclear program, many analysts believe that little can be done to curtail or delay the emergence of a nuclear weapons capability in North Korea and that even less will be possible once it is a fait accompli. Certainly, Iraq has highlighted the importance of military options, but also the difficulties. Precision strikes against nuclear-related facilities were conducted in Iraq during the Gulf War. In some cases, there was the danger of the release of some radiation, in other cases there was the risk of collateral damage. Overall, one still had uncertainty as to whether or not the capacity to possess a small number of nuclear weapons had been

eliminated, even if one were certain that nuclear weapons were not yet possessed.

If nuclear proliferation is a threat to international security, then the international community should never rule out the possible use of military force on its terms rather than on those of a nuclear aggressor. This is a message that should be clear to Iraq. Nevertheless, an international order based upon the peaceful resolution of disputes will not, and should not, lightly resort to military solutions, especially when risks are high.

Against advanced proliferants, no approach -- military or diplomatic -- can succeed without a follow-on regime which can determine the full nature of the threat and establish the transparency and controls necessary to eliminate the danger. This is the objective of current international approaches to non-proliferation. And it should be central to the resolution of the immediate problem with the DPRK. The following steps would seem appropriate.

The United Nations must make clear its own commitment to nonproliferation and its own support for international institutions such as the IAEA which are under attack by Pyongyang. A show of unity at the UN Security Council and at the IAEA is essential. This, of course, means that China must assume its proper role as a responsible global leader.

The international community must insist upon strict compliance with the NPT. Nations have a right to withdraw from the NPT with 90 days notice, but they have no right to violate their treaty obligations and then escape the consequences by withdrawal. To accept such an approach would be to turn the NPT into a regime for accelerating proliferation by giving proliferators easier access to nuclear technology and more plausible deniability of the intent to acquire nuclear weapons. Persuading Pyongyang to remain within the NPT is important, but even more important now is compliance.

Furthermore, given that Pyongyang's behavior has already increased international concern, a "Non-Proliferation Treaty Plus" regime deserves the support of the entire international community. The basis for such an NPT Plus standard already exists. North and South Korea have concluded a number of agreements designed to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula. These include the North-South Agreement on Denuclearization. Strong international support for implementation of the inspection regime required by that agreement is especially warranted now that North Korea has created doubts about its intentions with respect to nuclear weapons.

The DPRK must permit the inspections necessary to determine whether or not it is in compliance with the NPT and whether or not it has diverted nuclear material to weapons purposes. Where discrepancies exist, it must resolve them sufficiently that the IAEA can have confidence that all material is under control and that activities related to the development of nuclear weapons are not taking place covertly. Special inspections by the IAEA and bilateral North-South inspections will be necessary. A return to limited routine inspections alone, knowing what we now know, would be inadequate.

Likewise, permitting Pyongyang to escape the consequences of non-compliance by the mechanism of withdrawal should not be condoned. Pyongyang must renounce withdrawal from the NPT, and it must demonstrate that it is complying with the spirit and letter of the NPT. It should also take other steps to address international concerns by becoming a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and by taking other steps to show respect for international arms control and non-proliferation efforts. Pyongyang should also engage constructively South Korea on their joint arms control and confidence-building agenda.

Furthermore, all proliferators must come to understand that time will not heal the proliferation wound. The international community must make clear that no "détente" will follow for proliferators: no legitimization of nuclear weapons status; no rewards later for those who violate treaties now and do not correct the violations.

Given the serious threat posed by North Korea's recent behavior, the international community needs to prepare for strong steps which can be taken soon if North Korea fails to address its concerns. The legal and procedural basis for action by the United Nations and by other groups of countries should be established immediately. An economic embargo on trade to include a quarantine and naval blockade is not too severe a step to consider. If fully implemented it would deny North Korea some essential materials such as petroleum products which support its economy and war machine, and it would end the trade in arms and ballistic missiles to areas such as the Middle East. The time has come to review "sticks" as well as "carrots". Military action, if necessary and effective, can be an appropriate response to threats to international security and, as a matter of policy, should not be ruled out. Certainly increased preparedness will be necessary.

International concerns will never be completely erased so long as the North Korean regime remains dictatorial and militaristic. Fears that the

DPRK might obtain nuclear material from non-indigenous sources will always remain. In the long run, political and economic change in the North will bring with it greater assurance on security questions. The consequence of saying no aid and no trade to a noncompliant North Korea is to say aid and trade will be possible with a Korea that has addressed international concerns. For its part, the United States has said that resolution of the nuclear question and progress in the North South political and economic dialogue could lead to a more normal relationship with the United States.

The Korean nuclear question, however, is not a bilateral issue or even a trilateral issue with Seoul. The North Korean nuclear weapons program is a threat to global security and global institutions and also to many other nations. Those nations need to take action in support of the international community. Japan has made clear that formal normalization of relations, war reparations, trade, and economic assistance are dependent upon resolving the nuclear question. Russia and China have also stressed the importance of resolving the nuclear question. More than any other nation, China is in a position to help the DPRK come to the right conclusion. North Korea must come to realize that the consequences of continued efforts at nuclear proliferation are severe and continuous, but that moving away from the nuclear threshold will bring opportunities to find its way peacefully to a better, more prosperous Korea in the north as well as the south.

10. Conclusion

The North Korean nuclear program constitutes a severe threat to international security. Pyongyang's recent behavior is a challenge to the authority of international law, multinational institutions, and the multilateral non-proliferation regime. A world currently preoccupied with Bosnia and Somalia must not assume that the most critical nonproliferation issues will wait for the NPT Review Conference in 1995. Long before the formal debate over extension of the Treaty begins among parties almost entirely committed to its objectives, the real fate of nuclear nonproliferation may have been determined in South Asia, the Middle East, Ukraine, or more immediately, North Korea. If we are to reduce the need for a military response in the future, the United Nations must take a strong diplomatic stand now.

Notes and References

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[1]U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers: 1990 (Washington, D.C. , 1991), pp. 35-45.

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