

# **China, North Korea and the United States**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will begin with a discussion of China's priorities in dealing with the denuclearization of North Korea and will then suggest how the United States can work more effectively with China, South Korea, Japan and Russia in negotiating a definitive end to the North Korean nuclear weapons program.

My observations are based on extensive discussions in Beijing concerning North Korea from April 10<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> and December 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004, together with four decades of study of the Chinese role in Northeast Asia as Senior Fellow in charge of Asian Studies at the Brookings Institution from 1963-1965; as Northeast Asia Bureau Chief for the *Washington Post* from 1968-1972; and as a Senior Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace from 1974-1996. I am currently a Senior Scholar of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Director of its Project on Oil and Gas Cooperation in Northeast Asia, and Director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy. (see bio sketch attached).

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In earlier testimony before this Commission, Ambassador Stephen Bosworth declared on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003, that “China has basically three fundamental objectives in the Korean peninsula: no nukes, no war, no collapse.” I endorse this assessment. Of these three priorities, the most important in Chinese calculations is to forestall a war by keeping the United States engaged in six-party negotiations with North Korea of indefinite duration.

The danger of a war resulting from a U.S. effort to promote regime change in Pyongyang is taken seriously in Beijing in the context of two related factors: a) a war in Iraq in which the United States has proved willing to accept heavy casualties in order to remove a dictatorial regime, and b) the stated desire for regime change that underlies U.S. policy toward North Korea, exemplified by the President’s statement to Bob Woodward in *Bush At War* that he “loathes” Kim Jong Il and would like to “topple” his regime.

Given its focus on avoiding an inadvertent or deliberate war, China would like to see a clear end to a U.S. policy that is based on a hope for regime change and a desire to promote it with the help of China. What China wants, accordingly, is a denuclearization agreement linked to the normalization of U.S. and Japanese relations with Beijing.

In this connection several think tank specialists and Foreign Ministry officials in Beijing expressed dissatisfaction with a key feature of the June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004, U.S. proposal for North Korean denuclearization. In this proposal the Administration stated explicitly that even if North Korea agreed to a satisfactory denuclearization agreement with full verification, the United States would not be prepared to normalize relations. This position contrasted sharply with the South Korean proposal on June 24<sup>th</sup> that explicitly envisaged the normalization of U.S. and Japanese relations with Pyongyang in tandem with denuclearization.

Most U.S. discussion of China’s role focuses on its objective of “no nukes” in Korea and how China can be induced to apply decisive leverage, especially economic leverage, to bring about North Korean acceptance of a denuclearization agreement. However, little attention is paid to how China views

the June 24<sup>th</sup> U.S. denuclearization proposal. “China would like to see a more flexible and practical U.S. policy toward North Korea instead of a take-it-or-leave-it proposal,” observed a middle-level Chinese Foreign Ministry official, Anne Wu, in a forthcoming article (*Washington Quarterly*, Spring, 2005).

Specifically, China favors a step-by-step denuclearization process based on simultaneous concessions, in which at each step the two sides exchange “words for words” and “action for action.” By contrast, the U.S. proposal would require North Korea to reveal all of its nuclear capabilities at the outset of negotiations and to “permit the publicly disclosed and observable disablement of all nuclear weapons/weapons components and key centrifuge parts” before the U.S. indicates what incentives would be offered in return.

Publicly, Beijing does not express its criticisms of U.S. policy, in order to keep relations with Washington on an even keel. This is partly because it feels dependent on U.S. goodwill for its energy security and partly because it wants to neutralize U.S. support for Taiwan in any future crisis.

Underlying China’s attitude toward North Korea is a desire to stabilize its northeastern border and to reinforce the status quo in its relations with other Northeast Asian powers. Thus, the deployment of operational North Korean nuclear weapons would clearly be destabilizing because it would trigger the nuclear ambitions of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. But an unstable regime in Pyongyang and an uncontrollable flow of Korean refugees to Manchuria, where an ethnic Korean minority of three million is already concentrated, would also be destabilizing. For this reason, China is critical of the North Korea Human Rights Act, which, as Wu observed, is “likely to further complicate Beijing’s diplomatic effort by reinforcing Pyongyang’s perception of a ‘hostile policy’ and by encouraging further defections.”

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I will now conclude with a brief discussion of U.S. policy options. My views are outlined in detail in the report of a Task Force on U.S. Korea Policy under my chairmanship in which 28 leading academic, governmental and military specialists on North Korea participated. (Copies have been made available to the Commission)

Two key steps by the United States could lead to a resolution of the present impasse in the six-party talks and could set the stage for successful step-by-step negotiations leading to denuclearization with full verification:

1. Statements by the President and Secretary of State, to set the stage for negotiations, in which the U.S. backs away from regime change. At a minimum, the Secretary of State should reaffirm that the United States has “no hostile intent” toward North Korea. These were the key operative words in the October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000 Joint Communiqué in Washington between former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and North Korea’s No. 2 leader, Vice-Marshal Jo Myong Rok.

It is possible that the words “no hostile intent” would be sufficient to get North Korea back to the bargaining table. However, a more effective step would be for the President or Secretary Rice to state that the United States is prepared for “peaceful coexistence with North Korea despite differences in social and political systems.”

Would such a statement be a retreat from the President’s Inaugural Address? The White House has said that the President’s call to end tyrannical regimes was only a long-term declaration of U.S. values. Thus, a declaration of readiness for “peaceful co-existence” with North Korea could be rationalized by the White House. *In my view, in the absence of such a declaration or some other formula for backing away from the regime change policy in a credible fashion, it is unlikely that meaningful negotiations on North Korea nuclear disarmament will be possible.*

2. The start of negotiations is currently blocked in part by the U.S. requirement that North Korea admit to an alleged secret weapons-grade uranium enrichment program. The U.S. accused North Korea of such a program on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002. According to the U.S. North Korea admitted that it had such a program; according to North Korea, it said it was “entitled” to have one to deter the U.S.

This uranium proviso should be removed from the U.S. denuclearization proposal to permit the “plutonium first” policy that the Task Force on U.S. Korea Policy spelled out and that I have advocated in an article in the January issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

North Korea can hide uranium-enrichment facilities from aerial surveillance more easily than plutonium facilities. North Korean cooperation in intrusive, on-the-ground inspections would therefore be necessary to determine whether Pyongyang is developing a weapons-grade enrichment capability, and if so, how close it has come to producing significant amounts of weapons-grade fissile material. Such cooperation is not likely until the final stages of a denuclearization agreement in which greater trust between North Korea and the U.S. has been developed.

As the Task Force observed, “no evidence has yet been presented publicly “to justify the U.S. accusation that facilities capable of enriching uranium to weapons-grade exist in North Korea. I spell out this argument in my *Foreign Affairs* article, and the South Korean National Intelligence Service formally endorsed my assessment in its February 24<sup>th</sup> 2004 report on North Korean nuclear capabilities to the National Assembly Intelligence Committee.

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Unless conclusive evidence comes to light, the entire uranium issue should be deferred so that the parties can focus on the more immediate threat: North Korea's known plutonium-reprocessing capabilities. Since the 1994 agreement collapsed, there is clear evidence that Pyongyang has reprocessed some or all of the 8,000 plutonium fuel rods at the Yongbyon reactor that had been safeguarded by the accord. By scuttling the 1994 agreement on the basis of uncertain data that is presented with absolute certitude, and by insisting that North Korea "confess" to the existence of a uranium program before new negotiations on denuclearization can begin, the Bush administration has blocked action on the one present threat that North Korea is known to pose: the threat represented by its reprocessed plutonium, which could be used for nuclear weapons or transferred to third parties.

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