

U.S. Diplomacy with North Korea During the Bush Administration

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WWS 547: The Conduct of International Diplomacy
May 12, 2009

Introduction

One of the principal foreign policy challenges facing President Barack Obama is how to deal with a nuclear North Korea. Its nuclear program is a destabilizing regional force and a threat to the United States because North Korea could transfer nuclear weapons to terrorists or use them to coerce South Korea. Short of these dangers, North Korea has used its nuclear program as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from the international community and to position itself as a relevant player internationally. Past administrations have had a mixed record in negotiating with North Korea, and Obama faces a North Korea that has signed many agreements but also emerged as a bigger threat with a more advanced nuclear program.

An analysis of the George W. Bush administration's policies toward North Korea provides some lessons in diplomacy for the Obama administration. Its first term was plagued with strategic and diplomatic errors that gave North Korea a free hand to accelerate the development of its nuclear program. Though the multilateral engagement of its second term yielded diplomatic triumphs, the end result was that things ended up almost exactly where they had started, except that North Korea had become a declared nuclear power.

This case study begins by briefly describing the history of North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the 1994 negotiations between the Clinton administration and North Korea. This overview provides the context for the challenges Bush faced when he entered office. Next, it examines the evolution of his administration's approach to resolving the nuclear issue from the early days of policy formulation to the turning point of September 11th to the ultimate embrace of multilateral engagement through the Six-Party Talks. The case study concludes with an analysis of the negotiating approach of the Bush administration.

The North Korean Nuclear Program During the Clinton Years

Though an armistice ended the Korean War in 1953, North Korea and South Korea are still technically not at peace and have had a difficult and often acrimonious relationship. During the Cold War, North Korea was dependent on the Soviet Union for military and economic aid. It built up one of the world's largest militaries and positioned enough artillery just north of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to level Seoul. However, with the Soviet collapse, North Korea lost its primary benefactor and sought other methods to maintain its security.

In 1990, U.S. satellites discovered the building of a structure in Yongbyon that appeared capable of separating plutonium from nuclear fuel rods. Facing international pressure, North Korea signed a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, in 1993, it prevented IAEA inspectors from examining its nuclear facilities and announced its intentions to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which it had joined in 1985. The Clinton administration responded by announcing that North Korea would be crossing a red line that could trigger military action if it reprocessed fuel rods into plutonium. With the mediation of former president Jimmy Carter, the sides engaged in bilateral negotiations, reaching the Agreed Framework in October 1994. According to its terms, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear activities and allow inspectors to access secret military sites for verification purposes in

exchange for two light-water reactors, economic assistance, the provision of heavy fuel oil, and steps toward normalization.¹

Over the next few years, despite North Korean complaints about delays in U.S. funding for the light-water reactors and U.S. suspicions of other North Korean nuclear-related activities, the nuclear program remained frozen. In the Clinton administration's final months, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and believed that Kim was willing to negotiate an agreement on nuclear disarmament and his country's missile program.² However, Clinton's term came to an end, and a new president entered the White House.

Early Signs of Division within a New Administration

When George W. Bush took office in January 2001, his administration adopted a foreign policy that could be generally characterized as ABC—Anything But Clinton. Bush initiated a broad overview of U.S. foreign policy and suspended talks with North Korea while this review was occurring. However, from its very beginning, there were divergences in opinion regarding North Korea within the administration that would be a recurring theme over the next eight years.

On one side were moderate officials who advocated a pragmatic strategy of tough dialogue and engagement. This group included Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly. Opposing them were hard-liners, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton, who believed that engaging North Korea would prolong the reign of an evil, dangerous regime. They supported the use of sanctions and other coercive measures to topple the regime. Bush's personal distrust of and disdain for North Korean leader Kim Jong Il placed him in the latter camp. He publicly mentioned "loathing" Kim and referred to him as a "pygmy," "tyrant," and a "spoiled child at the dinner table."³ National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice fell somewhere between these two camps but closer to the pragmatists.⁴

Bush's Shadow Looms Over the "Sunshine Policy"

The Bush administration released an array of contradictory statements during the review period. On the eve of South Korean president Kim Dae Jung's March visit to the White House, Powell told reporters that the Bush administration would pick up where the Clinton administration had left off in trying to secure peace on the Korean Peninsula and on the negotiation of nuclear issues.⁵ However, the next day, Bush refuted Powell by expressing his skepticism about Kim Jong Il and announcing that his administration would not resume talks with North Korea until the review concluded.⁶

¹ Alan Riding. "U.S. and North Korea Sign Pact to End Nuclear Dispute." *New York Times* (October 22, 1994). May 10, 2009.

² Walter C. Clemens, Jr. "Negotiation with North Korea: Clinton v. Bush." *Global Asia*, Vol. 3, No.2. May 10, 2009 <http://globalasia.org/pdf/issue6/v3n2_clemens.pdf.

³ Helene Cooper. "A New Bush Tack on North Korea." *New York Times* (December 7, 2007).

⁴ Michael J. Mazarr. "The Long Road to Pyongyang." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (Sept.-Oct. 2007). 78.

⁵ Jane Perlez. "Divergent Voices Heard in Bush Foreign Policy." *New York Times* (March 12, 2001).

⁶ David E. Sanger. "Bush Tells Seoul Talks with North Won't Resume Now." *New York Times* (March 8, 2001).

In addition to repudiating Powell, Bush also humiliated Kim by publicly undermining his “sunshine policy.” Since taking office in February 1998, Kim had departed from past South Korean policies of North Korean isolation by instituting a policy of proactive engagement. Based on the principles of “zero tolerance for aggression, renunciation of unification through absorption, and an active drive for reconciliation and mutual exchange,” the “sunshine policy” endeavored to utilize economic, political, and cultural cooperation to restore mutual trust and to create conditions that were conducive to long-term reform and liberalization in the North.⁷ The crowning moment of the “sunshine policy” was the inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in June 2000. However, Bush’s early hard-line stance toward North Korea undercut Kim “sunshine policy.” These fundamentally different policies held by the Bush administration and by Kim—and by his successor Roh Moo Hyun—on how to deal with North Korea would undermine each other over the next few years.

On June 16, Bush announced the results of the policy review and contradicted his previous statements by affirming that the United States would initiate dialogue with North Korea on a “broad agenda,” including denuclearization and North-South reconciliation.⁸ Bush’s reversion to a Clintonian approach indicated that Powell and his supporters had gained the upper hand in formulating North Korean policy.

The Turning Point: September 11th and the “Axis of Evil”

The September 11th terrorist attacks cast the Bush administration’s foreign policy priorities in a new light, and preventing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from getting into the hands of rogue states and non-state actors jumped to the top of the agenda. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush proclaimed that North Korea, Iraq, and Iran constituted an “axis of evil” whose pursuit of WMD posed a “grave and growing danger” and that the United States would do “what is necessary to ensure our nation’s security.”⁹ The administration’s September 2002 National Security Strategy reiterated this message by labeling North Korea the “world’s principal purveyor of ballistic missiles” and asserting the United States’ right to act preemptively against such threats.¹⁰ In response, North Korea proclaimed that the “axis of evil” speech and the announcement of the Bush Doctrine of preemption to be “disturbing moves” that pushed the two nations to “the brink of war” and asserted that it should “equip itself with powerful offensive and defensive means.”¹¹

The Rise of the Hawks and the Fall of the Agreed Framework

⁷ “Sunshine Policy in a Nutshell.” GlobalSecurity.org. May 10, 2009

<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/rok/1999/reunification22.html>>.

⁸ George W. Bush. Statement on the Completion of the North Korean Policy Review. Washington: June 6, 2001. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=45819>>.

⁹ George W. Bush. 2002 State of the Union Address. Washington: January 30, 2002. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm>>.

¹⁰ The White House. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington: September 2002.

¹¹ Korean Central News Agency. “Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry Slams Bush’s Accusations.” Pyongyang: January 31, 2002. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>>.

In September 2002, the CIA learned that North Korea may have been acquiring centrifuges for enriching uranium from Pakistan since the late-1990s.¹² When Kelly confronted North Korean officials, they admitted to having a clandestine uranium enrichment program. South Korea and Japan's conciliatory approaches toward North Korea—Japan had begun to discuss normalization and South Korean presidential front-runner Roh Moo Hyun was committed to continuing the “sunshine policy”—were undermining the U.S. policy, so the Bush administration may have hoped to scare its two allies into reversing course by exposing the uranium enrichment program.¹³ The discovery of the program strengthened the position of the administration's hawks and confirmed Bush's mistrust of Kim Jong Il, which was a primary reason why he was unwilling to have his representatives talk to North Korea unless other countries were involved.¹⁴

The Bush administration responded by withdrawing from the Agreed Framework and stopping annual shipments of 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil to North Korea.¹⁵ North Korea offered to initiate talks in which “everything will be negotiable,” but the administration eschewed the urgings of its allies to pursue a diplomatic solution and was resolute in its demand that the dismantling of the nuclear program was a precondition for negotiations.¹⁶ North Korea subsequently expelled the IAEA inspectors, reopened its Yongbyon facilities, and withdrew from the NPT in January 2003.¹⁷ It stated that it was acting in self-defense because it was “most seriously threatened by the U.S. vicious hostile policy [*sic*].” However, it called for one-on-one talks with the United States and reaffirmed that it would reverse its actions if the United States resumed its obligations under the Agreed Framework and signed a non-aggression treaty.¹⁸

During this period, the Bush administration was focused on preparing for the invasion of Iraq. On March 20, 2003, the United States invaded Iraq with the primary goals of toppling Saddam Hussein's regime and eliminating Iraq's WMD.¹⁹ The Iraq War did not go unnoticed in North Korea. Its Foreign Ministry officials labeled it a “grave encroachment upon sovereignty,” equated it with war preparations being made by the United States against North Korea, and asserted that the invasion compelled North Korea “to do all it can to defend itself.”²⁰

In April 2003, North Korea stopped insisting on bilateral talks and agreed to meet with both U.S. and Chinese diplomats. During this trilateral meeting, North Korean negotiators announced that North Korea already possessed nuclear weapons and might test, export, or use them depending on U.S. actions but offered to drop its nuclear program if the United States signed a non-aggression pact. Bush labeled the North Korean proposal “blackmail” and reiterated that the

¹² Fred Kaplan. “Rolling Blunder: How the Bush Administration Let North Korea Get Nukes.” *Washington Monthly* (May 2004). May 10, 2009 <<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0405.kaplan.html>>.

¹³ Selig S. Harrison. “Did North Korea Cheat?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2005), 99-110. 101

¹⁴ Kaplan, “Rolling Blunder.”

¹⁵ David E. Sanger. “U.S. to Withdraw from Arms Accord with North Korea.” *New York Times* (October 20, 2002).

¹⁶ Philip Shenon. “White House Rejects North Korea Offer for Talks.” *New York Times* (November 4, 2002).

¹⁷ James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen. “How to Deal with North Korea.” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82. No. 2 (Mar.-Apr. 2003), 16-30. 17.

¹⁸ Korean Central News Agency. “Statement of DPRK Government on its Withdrawal from NPT.” Pyongyang: January 10, 2003. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>>.

¹⁹ “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” GlobalSecurity.org. May 10, 2009 <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraqi_freedom.htm>.

²⁰ Korean Central News Agency. “DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on U.S. Start of Iraq War.” Pyongyang: March 21, 2003. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>>.

United States would not even consider the demands until North Korea had first dismantled its nuclear program.²¹ The following month, North Korea announced that it was abandoning the 1992 Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula—the last remaining agreement on non-proliferation to which it was a party.

A New Approach: the Six-Party Talks

Despite bellicose rhetoric from both sides, North Korea agreed to attend talks in Beijing with South Korea, China, Russia, and Japan with the goal of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. Following this first round of the Six-Party Talks, North Korea declared that they were not beneficial and had reinforced its view that its only viable option was to strengthen its nuclear deterrent. It cited the U.S. insistence that North Korea first dismantle its nuclear program before discussions of normalization would be a possibility as the reason for the failure of the talks.²² Though North Korea eventually agreed to continue its participation in the Six-Party Talks, the next two rounds were uneventful.

A breakthrough occurred in September 2005 when the parties agreed on a joint statement of principles. North Korea committed to abandon its nuclear program, to rejoin the NPT, and to allow IAEA inspectors to return in exchange for energy assistance, steps toward normalization with the United States and Japan, and the eventual negotiation of a peace agreement with South Korea. The agreement also stated that North Korea and the United States would “exist peacefully together,”²³ which satisfied North Korea’s desire for a limited security guarantee. Finally, the five other parties “expressed their respect” for North Korea’s asserted right to civilian nuclear energy capabilities and agreed to discuss North Korea’s demand for a light-water reactor “at an appropriate time.” The United States had previously rejected North Korea’s insistence that it receive a light-water reactor before dismantling its nuclear program, but China and South Korea convinced both sides to accept the ambiguous language on light-water reactors.²⁴

This agreement marked a shift in the Bush administration’s attitude toward resolving the North Korean nuclear issue from an extreme, confrontational view to a moderate, pragmatic approach based on constructive engagement.²⁵ The administration stopped insisting that North Korea give up its nuclear program before negotiations could take place; the agreement emphasized reciprocal concessions by stating that it would be implemented in “a phased manner” consistent with the principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action.”²⁶ Secretary of State Rice had adopted the approach of her predecessor Powell, and her attempts to implement this approach were not blocked by the hawks, reflecting the changing balance of power within the Bush administration as Rumsfeld’s influence waned prior to his impending departure and Rice’s increased with her new position.

²¹ David E. Sanger. “North Korea Says it Now Possesses Nuclear Arsenal.” *New York Times* (April 25, 2003).

²² Korean Central News Agency. “DPRK Foreign Ministry on Six-Way Talks.” Pyongyang: August 30, 2003. May 10, 2009 <<http://kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>>.

²³ Joint Statement Released at Six-Party Talks. Pyongyang: September 19, 2005. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/dprk/2005/dprk-050920-kcna03.htm>>.

²⁴ Wade Huntley. “Waiting to Exhale: The Six-Party Talks Agreement.” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (October 25, 2005). May 10, 2009 <<http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/2903>>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Joseph Kahn. “North Korea Talks Extended to Chinese.” *New York Times* (September 18, 2005).

Despite the optimism following the September agreement, its implementation hit a roadblock in November. The U.S. Treasury Department designated the Macao-based Banco Delta Asia as a money laundering concern under the Patriot Act for laundering \$25 million in North Korea funds.²⁷ The Macao government subsequently froze North Korea's Banco Delta Asia bank accounts. Despite the U.S. insistence that this was unrelated to the denuclearization talks, North Korea said it was a deal-breaker and questioned the U.S. commitment to the September joint statement.²⁸

From Provocations to Progress?

Following the failure to implement the agreement, talks stalled, and North Korea committed more provocations. In July 2006, North Korea test-fired a Taepodong-2 missile.²⁹ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted UNSC Resolution 1695, which condemned the missile test, demanded that North Korea halt its ballistic missile activity, and required all UN members to prevent the import or export of materials to North Korea that could be used in WMD development.³⁰ China and Russia pushed for a less severe statement, including the exclusion of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which is legally binding and can authorize sanctions and military action.³¹ Despite the global outcry, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006. In response, the UNSC unanimously adopted UNSC Resolution 1718, which stated that it was acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and imposed more stringent sanctions on North Korea.³² However, reflecting Chinese and Russian concerns, this resolution did not include the threat of imminent military action and its ban on defense exports was not as strong as the United States had wanted.³³

In spite of the North Korean provocations, the Bush administration remained committed to a diplomatic solution. North Korea returned to the Six-Party Talks in December 2006. Though this round was fruitless, in a serendipitous meeting at the Beijing airport, the North Korean delegation suggested to the National Security Council's (NSC) Victor Cha that the two sides meet for bilateral negotiations outside of Beijing. Bush approved the most formal bilateral talks to date, and Kelly's successor, Chris Hill, met with his North Korean counterparts to formulate the framework of a deal.³⁴

Building on the progress made in these bilateral talks, the six parties reached an agreement in February 2007 that detailed initial steps of implementation of the September 2005 statement of

²⁷ U.S. Department of Treasury. Press release, "Treasury Designates Banco Delta Asia as Primary Money Launderer Concern Under the Patriot Act." Washington: September 15, 2005. May 10, 2009
<<http://www.ustreas.gov/press/releases/js2720.htm>>.

²⁸ "South Korea, China Call for 'Flexibility' to Continue North Talks." *Yonhap News Agency* (November 16, 2005).

²⁹ David Stout. "Bush Urges North Korea to Drop Missile Program." *New York Times* (July 5, 2006).

³⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1695. New York: July 15, 2006. May 10, 2009
<<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8778.doc.htm>>.

³¹ "UN Votes for North Korean Sanctions." *BBC News* (July 15, 2006).

³² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718. New York: October 14, 2006. May 10, 2009
<<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/572/07/PDF/N0657207.pdf?OpenElement>>.

³³ "UN Slaps Sanctions on North Korea." *BBC News* (October 14, 2006).

³⁴ Mazarr, 91.

principles. The parties agreed to “take coordinated steps...in a phased manner,” based on the “principle of ‘action for action.’”³⁵ North Korea agreed to shut down and seal its Yongbyon nuclear facilities and to allow IAEA inspectors back in within sixty days in exchange for 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil. In the next phase, North Korea would provide a comprehensive list of its nuclear activities in exchange for another 950,000 tons of heavy fuel oil. Notably, Japan declined to provide oil or aid until the issue of the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea was resolved.³⁶ In the final phase, the United States and Japan would hold bilateral talks with North Korea about normalization, and all six parties would discuss peace on the Korean Peninsula and the dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear program.³⁷

The implementation of the first phase was not completed within sixty days because the United States was unable to meet North Korea’s request for the release of its frozen Banco Delta Asia funds in an expeditious manner.³⁸ Despite this temporary setback, in July 2007, the IAEA verified that North Korea had shut down its Yongbyon nuclear plant, and North Korea received its first shipment of fuel aid.³⁹ North Korea subsequently agreed to disable its nuclear facilities and to fully declare its nuclear activities by year’s end.⁴⁰

During this period, the United States made diplomatic moves away from the table with the goal of reducing tensions. Bush sent a hand-signed letter to Kim Jong Il in which he addressed Kim as “Dear Mr. Chairman” and offered the prospect of normalization if North Korea continued to cooperate. The letter marked a reversal from Bush’s previous contempt for Kim and signaled his administration’s desire for successful negotiations.⁴¹ Then in a significant demonstration of cultural diplomacy, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra agreed to perform in Pyongyang in February 2008.⁴²

Despite these attempts to reinforce North Korean cooperation, North Korea missed the end-of-year deadline and indicated its desire to first receive compensation, such as removal from the State Department’s State Sponsors of Terrorism List, before fully disclosing its nuclear activities. The Bush administration did not publicly criticize North Korea’s recalcitrance but actively worked with its officials to expedite the process.⁴³ Indeed, when Jay Lefkowitz, Bush’s special envoy on North Korean human rights criticized North Korea’s stalling and the U.S. approach towards North Korea, Rice publicly rebuked Lefkowitz and reaffirmed the administration’s commitment to a diplomatic solution.⁴⁴

³⁵ Joint Statement: Six-Party Talks on North Korea Disarmament. Beijing: February 13, 2007. May 10, 2009 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/13/AR2007021300508.html>>.

³⁶ Jim Yardley. “North Korea to Close Reactor in Exchange for Aid.” *New York Times* (February 13, 2007).

³⁷ Joint Statement: Six-Party Talks on North Korea Disarmament.

³⁸ Heejin Koo and Allen T. Cheng. “North Korea Nuclear Talks Recess Amid Transfer Snafu.” *Bloomberg* (March 22, 2007).

³⁹ “UN Verifies Closure of North Korea Nuclear Facilities.” *CNN.com* (July 18, 2007).

⁴⁰ Helene Cooper. “North Koreans Agree to Disable Nuclear Facilities.” *New York Times* (October 4, 2007).

⁴¹ Cooper, “A New Bush Tack on North Korea.”

⁴² “NY Philharmonic in North Korea.” *BBC News* (February 25, 2008).

⁴³ “U.S., N.K. See No Problem On Declaration Format.” *Yonhap News Agency* (March 20, 2008).

⁴⁴ Helene Cooper. “Rice Rebukes Bush Envoy Who Criticized Policy on North Korea.” *New York Times* (January 23, 2008).

As the United States waited for the North Korean disclosure, changes on the South Korean domestic front threatened to derail the Six-Party Talks' progress. Lee Myung Bak was inaugurated as president of South Korea in February 2008, and he indicated that he would eschew the "sunshine policy" for more pragmatic policies. Lee advocated improved relations with the United States and favored the conditional engagement of North Korea—economic engagement of North Korea would depend on steps toward denuclearization by the North.⁴⁵ Over the next two months, relations between the two Koreas deteriorated, as North Korea criticized Lee, test-fired short-range missiles, and expelled South Koreans from a joint industrial park on the border that had been a symbol of reconciliation.

In spite of the downturn in relations between the two Koreas, in June, North Korea released a sixty-page declaration of its nuclear activities and a video of the demolition of the Yongbyon nuclear reactor. Though none of these steps was irreversible and the demolition of the reactor was largely a symbolic move, it did become more difficult for North Korea to reconstitute its plutonium program.⁴⁶ Critics stated that the declaration did not disclose details about uranium enrichment, failed to address proliferation activities, and did not detail nuclear weapons that had already been produced. Nevertheless, the Bush administration reciprocated by removing North Korea from the Trading with the Enemy Act and, in October, removed it from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list after North Korea agreed to give inspectors access to its nuclear sites for verification purposes.⁴⁷

More of the Same for a New President

The Bush administration appeared to be on the road to success with North Korea but as it entered its final months, it received some significant setbacks. First, negotiations collapsed when North Korea refused to agree to a system for verifying that it had shut down its nuclear programs and indicated that it would not return to negotiations until President-elect Obama took office.⁴⁸ Second, North Korea increased its saber-rattling against both South Korea and the United States and announced that it was scrapping all military and political deals with the South. Finally, North Korea informed the United States that it had weaponized enough plutonium for four or five nuclear bombs.⁴⁹ What had seemed to be a redemptive diplomatic success during Bush's final days had become an all too familiar challenge for an incoming president.

An Analysis of the Bush Administration's Negotiating Approach

There are competing perspectives on the success of the Bush administration's policy towards North Korea. Its supporters point to the administration's embrace of engagement and multilateralism—which resulted in the declaration of North Korea's nuclear activities and the dismantling of the Yongbyon cooling tower—as its major foreign policy success. However, the administration has also received criticism from both sides of the spectrum. Conservative hard-

⁴⁵ Norimitsu Onishi. "South Korean President Pledges Pragmatism." *New York Times* (February 26, 2008).

⁴⁶ Jon Wolfsthal. Newsletter, "Critical Questions: North Korea's Nuclear Decision." Center for Strategic and International Studies (June 26, 2008). May 10, 2009
<http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com_csis_pubs&task=view&id=4538>.

⁴⁷ "North Korea Taken Off U.S. Terror List." *BBC News* (October 11, 2008).

⁴⁸ Steven Lee Myers. "In Setback for Bush, Korea Nuclear Talks Collapse." *New York Times* (December 11, 2008).

⁴⁹ Choe Sang-Hun. "North Korea Says it Has Weaponized Plutonium." *New York Times* (January 17, 2009).

liners argue that it made too many concessions to a regime that could not be trusted. On the other hand, many Democrats assert that it wasted six years before constructively engaging North Korea. With such a panoply of views, what can we really conclude about the efficacy of the administration's approach to resolving the North Korean nuclear issue?

A failure to consider U.S. interests

One of the Bush administration's downfalls was that its initial North Korean policy was not based on a dispassionate consideration of U.S. interests. Rather, the moralistic thinking of administration members drove its first term policies. The overriding view of Bush, Cheney, and other hard-liners that Kim Jong Il was an inherently evil tyrant who could not be trusted was the primary consideration in the decision not to engage North Korea. Cheney even once said of North Korea, "We don't negotiate with evil—we defeat it,"⁵⁰ without laying out a viable strategy for doing so. This belief in the futility of engaging an "evil" regime overshadowed the U.S. interests of progress toward peace on the Korean Peninsula and greater regional stability.⁵¹ Moreover, when the administration considered its post-September 11th interest of preventing WMD from getting into the hands of rogue states and non-state actors, it identified Iraq, not North Korea, as the greater threat and essentially gave North Korea a free hand to operate until it learned about the uranium enrichment program.

The failure to adopt a pragmatic strategy based on a rigorous consideration of U.S. interests until the second term gave North Korea the time and space to accelerate its nuclear program, which enhanced its bargaining leverage. The United States already faced a challenge in seeking to coerce North Korea to abandon its nuclear program since it is more difficult to convince an opponent to undo what has already been gained—because of the time and resources that have been invested—than to stop a course of action.⁵² This challenge became even more formidable when North Korea enhanced its missile and nuclear capabilities because the United States would be seeking greater concessions from North Korea. The United States could have avoided this situation through immediate engagement, instead of waiting until the threat increased.

Strong intra-administration differences and weak inter-agency coordination

The Bush administration was also plagued by contentious differences of opinion between the hard-liners that advocated a tougher approach and the pragmatists favoring engagement. The early contradictory statements sent mixed signals and resulted in a failure to develop a coherent policy until the second term. The State Department and those favoring engagement were cut out of the process in the first term, and the NSC and the other hard-liners were excluded in the second term.⁵³ The infighting undermined the credibility of the U.S. negotiating position by casting doubt on whether the concessions that some U.S. negotiators were offering would actually be honored.

⁵⁰ Glenn Kessler. "Impact from the Shadows: Cheney Wields Impact with Few Fingerprints." *Washington Post* (October 5, 2004).

⁵¹ Bush, Statement on Completion of the North Korea Policy Review.

⁵² Paul Gordon Lauren, Gordon A. Craig, and Alexander George. *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Challenges of Our Time*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. 202.

⁵³ Mazarr, 93.

The differences of opinion between the two groups also resulted in subpar interagency coordination that hampered negotiations. Treasury's designation of Banco Delta Asia as a "money laundering concern," which led to the freezing of North Korea funds, scuttled the implementation of the September 2005 agreement and halted negotiations for a year. Even if this designation was an intentional attempt to apply pressure on North Korea, State and Treasury should have coordinated the announcement's timing to not send mixed messages to North Korea amidst the September 2005 negotiations. This undermined the trust that would be necessary to develop an implementation framework at the next round of talks.

The impact of the Iraq War

The Bush administration failed to consider the effects of its other foreign policy decisions on North Korea's calculus. Paradoxically, the invasion of Iraq could have both frightened and emboldened North Korea into accelerating its nuclear program. First, based on North Korea's inclusion in the "axis of evil," the pronouncement of the Bush Doctrine of preemption, and the invasion of Iraq, it was logical for North Korea to believe that it could be the next target of a preemptive attack—North Korea was arguably a greater WMD threat than Iraq. The invasion and defeat of Iraq demonstrated that the United States had the capability to inflict damage and the will to preemptively attack a state believed to have WMD. The heightened threat of attack could have motivated North Korea to strengthen its nuclear deterrence capabilities.

However, the Iraqi invasion also could have had the opposite effect of reducing the credibility of the use of military force against North Korea. The United States had tied up its military in Afghanistan and Iraq and would be loathe to fight a third war. Moreover, the domestic and international controversy surrounding the Iraqi invasion also would have inhibited the Bush administration's ability to muster up the domestic political capital and international support for military action against North Korea. Diminishing the likelihood of a U.S. military response, these factors could have emboldened North Korea to enhance its nuclear capabilities. Regardless of whether U.S. actions frightened, emboldened, or had both effects on North Korea, they led North Korea to accelerate its nuclear development and to become an even greater threat.

A failure to step into North Korea's shoes

During the Bush administration's first term, it failed to consider how North Korea would interpret its actions and rhetoric.⁵⁴ This is most evident in its refusal to negotiate with North Korea until it first agreed to dismantle its nuclear program. From North Korea's perspective, this repeated demand was "naïve."⁵⁵ It would be foolish for North Korea to give up its only bargaining chip as a precondition for entering into negotiations because it would have nothing left to negotiate with. According to Robert Gallucci, the chief negotiator during the nuclear crisis

⁵⁴ Roger Fisher, Elizabeth Kopelman, and Andrea Kupfer Schneider. *Beyond Machiavelli: Tools for Coping with Conflict*. New York: Penguin, 1996. 33.

⁵⁵ Joseph Kahn. "China Proposes a Deal to End North Korean Nuclear Standoff." *New York Times* (September 17, 2005).

of the early-1990s, the Clinton administration initially had the same approach, but its quick realization of its mistake was a reason for the success of the Agreed Framework negotiations.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, it took the Bush administration a few years to modify its stance by agreeing to the principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action.” A step-by-step approach to implementation was especially critical because of the history of mutual distrust—cooperation and compliance in the early stages could build confidence to encourage further compliance in the final stages.

The administration also initially did not consider North Korean interests when attempting to induce North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program—it solely threatened North Korea with sticks and did not offer carrots that provided incentives to cooperate. When North Korea signaled that its primary interest was security by asking for a non-aggression pact, the administration did not respond with anything but veiled threats and bellicose rhetoric. It only detailed the rewards that North Korea would receive for nuclear disarmament when it decided to engage North Korea in the Six-Party Talks.

Changing the other side’s choices

A key negotiating principle is that it is necessary to focus on the other side’s “currently perceived choices” and to attempt to change them to one’s liking.⁵⁷ During its first term, the Bush administration failed to alter North Korea’s choices in a manner that strengthened the U.S. leverage. If anything, its policies pushed North Korea in the other direction and weakened its negotiating position.

On the other hand, North Korea successfully altered U.S. choices on numerous occasions. For example, it changed the U.S. perception of the threat posed by North Korea with the July 2006 Taepodong-2 missile launch and the October 2006 nuclear test. These provocations demonstrated that it had the capability and the will to inflict harm upon the United States. By making the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) of the United States worse off through these actions, North Korea successfully compelled the United States to engage in the most formal set of bilateral dialogues to that point, fulfilling its objective of talking directly to the world’s preeminent power. In this and other cases, North Korea did not simply react to U.S. actions but acted purposively to worsen the U.S. BATNA and to strengthen its own negotiating position.

The value of multilateral negotiations

It is no coincidence that a breakthrough occurred when South Korea, Russia, China, and Japan were brought in to the negotiations. Moving to a multilateral format strengthened the U.S. negotiating position by bringing in more actors with a vested stake in the outcome who could contribute additional resources to incentivize North Korean cooperation and serve as additional sources of pressure on North Korea. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the Six-Party Talks was that it increased the costs of non-compliance because North Korea would not just be

⁵⁶ Fred Kaplan. “Bush Channels Bill: The New North Korean Deal is Surprisingly Clintonian.” *Slate* (February 13, 2007).

⁵⁷ Fisher, Kopelman, and Schneider, 56.

making commitments to the United States but also to the four additional parties. According to a Bush administration official, “If they renege on [a deal made at the Six-Party Talks], they are sticking their fingers into the eyes of the Chinese.”⁵⁸

Of course, the multilateral format also meant that the United States could not unilaterally shape the agenda because the four additional parties brought their own interests and strategies to the negotiating table. Japan hoped that the Six-Party Talks could also serve as a forum to resolve the issue of Japanese abductions. China, Russia, and South Korea often pushed for less stringent sanctions because of the fear that regime collapse could lead to an influx of North Korean refugees. Nevertheless, the additional parties all shared the U.S. concern about the destabilizing effects of a North Korean nuclear program and were able to play a constructive, moderating role that bridged the gaps between the U.S. and North Korean positions.

Conclusion

As President Bush prepared to leave office, he had high hopes that the progress made towards the dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear program would redeem a checkered foreign policy record dominated by the legacy of the Iraq War. In reality, what seemed to be a success because of North Korea’s declaration of its nuclear activities and the demolition of the Yongbyon tower was actually a failure. However, it was not a failure because North Korea’s subsequent saber-rattling and refusal to cooperate threatened to set back the progress that had been made. It was a failure because it took the Bush administration too long to develop a coherent strategy for dealing with North Korea that was based on a rigorous consideration of U.S. interests and that utilized the full range of tools and resources at its disposal. This does not diminish the early efforts of Powell and Kelly or the later diplomatic successes of Rice and Hill. And it certainly does not mean that the U.S. objectives in North Korea would have been accomplished if it had chosen to multilaterally engage North Korea from day one. North Korea is an unpredictable actor, and it may be reluctant to give up the one source of leverage that makes it a relevant player on the international stage. In fact, it is possible that the United States could have ended up almost exactly where it started when Clinton left office. However, this would have been a better position than where the Bush administration ended up—with North Korea having won concessions from the United States and having strengthened its leverage by becoming a declared nuclear power, and with the United States facing an even greater threat on the Korean Peninsula.

⁵⁸ Jim Yardley and David E. Sanger. “In Shift, Accord on North Korea Seems to Be Set.” *New York Times* (February 13, 2007).

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