Negotiating to Control Weapons of Mass Destruction in North Korea

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Abstract. Negotiations to control and perhaps eliminate North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) appeared to achieve positive results in the 1990s. But these positive trends reversed direction in 2001–2004 under President George W. Bush. Why? This essay weighs six possible explanations. 1. progress in the 1990s as a mirage; 2. cultural differences; 3. distrust of international agreements; 4. perceptions regarding the utility of WMD; 5. internal divisions within each government and society; and 6. ulterior motives.

The evidence suggests that the sixth explanation carries the most weight. Top leaders in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as well as in the United States had priorities other than arms control. Each side used arms control negotiations as an instrument to promote its political and economic agenda in other realms. Pyongyang demanded large and certain rewards to give up its main bargaining chips. North Korea's negotiating behavior suggested some willingness to freeze or eliminate WMD programs if the price were right. But Kim Jong Il's regime clearly saw its nuclear and missile capabilities as major assets not to be traded away except for very substantial security and economic rewards. For its part, the Bush White House probably worried that any accord with Pyongyang would impede Washington's larger political, military, and economic ambitions, including deployment of a national missile defense (NMD). There was also a subjective element: President Bush probably loathed Kim Jong II and did not relish the prospect of making any compromises with evil incarnate. For enlightened self-interest to prevail, the parties could benefit from greater empathy and a quest for mutual rather than one-sided gain.

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Negotiations to control and perhaps eliminate North Korea's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) appeared to achieve positive results in the mid- and

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late-1990s under the Clinton administration. The collapse of the U.S.-North Korean accords in the first term of President George W. Bush posed serious dangers for global security. The confrontation between the Kim Jong II regime in Pyongyang and the Bush administration constituted “the first 21st century conflict between a failed state relying on the threat of nuclear weapons and their proliferation to ensure regime survival, and a world power intent on preventing such flexing, blackmailing, and transfer of [WMD] to potential terrorists.” (Rozman 2004: 252). After four years of sparring between Washington and Pyongyang, however, signs emerged in January 2005 that both the U.S. and DPRK governments, backed by other concerned parties, might be focusing again on the potential merits of an accord on arms control and related issues. In January the KCNA news agency said that North Korea was ready to settle the nuclear issue peacefully and even to treat Washington as a “friend.” But the atmosphere soon deteriorated again when, the next month, Pyongyang claimed it had actually produced nuclear weapons and was suspending indefinitely its participation in six-party disarmament negotiations. North Korea’s explanation was that Washington was pursuing “brazen-faced, double-dealing tactics” – combining dialogue with a policy of “regime change.” What did all this mean? Some observers said the North was again bluffing, while others said it was time for the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against a country that had violated the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Autumn 2005 saw both worrisome and positive signs: When another round of six-party talks in Beijing ended on September 19, North Korea pledged in a joint statement that – in return for energy aid and U.S. promises not to invade the country – the DPRK would abandon its nuclear weapons programs and return to the nuclear nonproliferation treaty and inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Pyongyang asserted once more its right to “peaceful uses of nuclear energy,” but the joint statement affirmed only that the United States and others would supply electricity to North Korea. Though Washington would not offer Pyongyang a formal nonaggression treaty, the U.S. delegation declared that the United States had no nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula and had no intention to attack North Korea.

Ambiguity reigned. The product of last minute compromises, the joint statement left many issues unresolved. It did not specify how electricity would be provided to the North. It put off discussion of the DPRK demand for a light water reactor for an “appropriate time.” Though the Clinton administration had pledged in 1994 to build two light-water reactors for the DPRK (in the “Agreed Framework” analyzed below), the George W. Bush
team took the position that North Korea could not be trusted with any nuclear capabilities. The statement was silent on whether, as Washington charged and Pyongyang denied, the North was running a clandestine uranium enrichment program in addition to the plutonium plant at Yongbyon. The statement set no date for disarmament and specified no details for inspection.

Less than twenty-four hours after the six-party talks ended, however, Pyongyang specified that it would not give up its nuclear programs until it received a modern civilian nuclear reactor—a demand that Tokyo as well as Washington refused, even though Beijing, Seoul, and Moscow had no objections. On September 20, 2005, the North Koreans accused the United States of using the negotiations to “disarm us and crush us to death with nuclear weapons.” The DPRK Foreign Ministry underscored the problem of sequencing. It declared that the North would not make the first move. Others “are telling us to give up everything, but there will be no such thing as giving it up first.” Pyongyang warned that the United States “should not even dream” that the DPRK would give up its nuclear arsenal until Washington provided it with a light-water nuclear reactor.

Despite this turn, a few days later in New York the DPRK Deputy Foreign Minister, Choe Su Hun, told the UN General Assembly that the recent joint statement represented his country’s “principled positions.” Choe affirmed that the DPRK would not need a “single nuclear weapon” if its relations with the United States were normalized, if bilateral confidence were built, and if the North were no longer exposed to U.S. a nuclear threat. But he reiterated that Washington should give civilian nuclear reactors to the DPRK as part of “simultaneous action” on the North’s disarmament. Adding to momentary euphoria, South Korean media reported that the North intended to invite U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice or even President George W. Bush to Pyongyang so as to elevate the status of the DPRK’s “dear leader” and to accelerate normalization of bilateral ties.

Consistent with Choe’s remarks in New York, in October 2005 North Korean officials told visiting Americans and Chinese that the DPRK would return to six-party talks in November, and would negotiate seriously to keep the peninsula free of nuclear weapons, provided that the DPRK’s energy needs were met. Reversing recent pronouncements, Pyongyang also agreed that most foreign food aid programs could remain, even though the DPRK claimed to be enjoying bountiful harvests once more.

If no deal is reached on North Korea’s nuclear weapons in 2005 or a short time later, the world will probably confront a ninth nuclear weapons state—one that has often defied the usual norms of international life. Power asymmetries added to the risks of instability. Unlike the United States and Russia, or India
and Pakistan, the power relationship between North Korea and its rivals lacked any semblance of “balance.”

Even if a deal is reached, the bitter reality remains that more than four years will have been wasted – years in which the DPRK nuclear weapons capacity was enlarged, years in which many potential enhancements to the country’s economic and political situation were postponed.

Whether or not continued negotiations bear fruit in President Bush’s second term, this essay aims to analyze the main factors that have helped and hindered movement toward arms control in North Asia. There are at least six ways to view and explain the volte-face in Bush’s first term. Each lens embodies an hypothesis that can be tested against the factual record.

1. Progress in the 1990s as a mirage
2. Cultural differences
3. Distrust of international agreements
4. Perceptions regarding the utility of WMD
5. Internal divisions within each government and society
6. Ulterior motives

Each of these explanations carries weight. But the evidence suggests that each side’s instrumental approach to the negotiations – the ulterior motives behind its diplomatic facade – broke the momentum toward better relations that developed at the end of the 20th century and proved the ultimate deal-killer in 2001–2004. To reach a balanced understanding of these interactions, however, let us review each hypothesis.

**Progress in the 1990s as a Mirage**

In his memoir, *My Life* (2004), former president Bill Clinton details how military threats, economic incentives, mediation by Jimmy Carter, and negotiations by ambassador Robert Gallucci combined to move the United States and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea from confrontation to sign an Agreed Framework in 1994 limiting the DPRK nuclear program. The origins of the crisis stretched back to the post-World War II division of a homogeneous nation into two states and the Korea war waged in 1950–1953, concluded only by an often tenuous armistice. Tensions exploded again in 1993–1994 when the DPRK became the first country to announce plans to withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and from the nuclear safeguards regime administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The DPRK government indicated its intention to remove fuel rods from its nuclear
reactor and extract the weapons-grade plutonium, believed in Washington to be sufficient to make several nuclear weapons.

To deal with this challenge the Clinton team blended military threats with positive incentives. An American arms buildup in 1993–1994 threatened to wipe out the DPRK's nuclear facility. But Washington did not depend on hard power alone to influence Pyongyang. It also utilized a constructive mix of private and public diplomacy that offered both economic and political carrots. Several private American delegations visited Pyongyang in 1993–1994, including one led by ex-president Jimmy Carter. When Carter met with top leader Kim Il Sung in 1994 (just weeks before his death), Pyongyang agreed to the outline of a deal that became the "Agreed Framework" reached by Ambassador Gallucci and his DPRK counterpart in October 1994. The accord provided that the North would shut down its reactor, seal 8,000 fuel rods containing unprocessed plutonium, and freeze plutonium production under IAEA inspection. In return, the United States and its partners would provide heavy fuel oil to meet North Korea's immediate energy needs and construct two light-water nuclear plants. Despite ups and downs in U.S.-DPRK relations, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (2003) in late 2000 perceived solid reasons to believe that Kim Il Sung's de facto successor, his son Kim Jong Il, might accept negotiated curbs on North Korea's missile programs as well as its nuclear weapon ambitions.

Contrary to these rosy interpretations, many Republicans and some independent critics argue that the Clinton team gave up too much and was deceived by signs that North Korea would rein in its WMD programs in the 1990s. The critics charge that the Agreed Framework had several basic flaws. As summarized by Scott Snyder (2004), critics complained that the 1994 framework required the DPRK to "can" and store its spent nuclear fuel, but did not require the North to give up its nuclear components entirely, as Ukraine and Kazakhstan had recently done following the Soviet Union's breakup. This failure gave the North Korans easy access to spent nuclear fuel that could be reprocessed - their major lever in the tense times after 2002. Another shortfall was that the 1994 accord permitted North Korea to delay its return to the NPT by more than five years. Finally, the framework focused on a single known plant that could produce plutonium for nuclear weapons, but did not cover the rest of the country.

What about other facilities that might produce plutonium or enriched uranium? They were not directly covered by the 1994 accord, but the Agreed Framework did reaffirm a 1991 agreement between North and South Korea that banned uranium enrichment facilities as well as plutonium reprocessing facilities in the DPRK or ROK. Harrison (2005: 107) notes that the 1991
agreement did distinguish between facilities to produce highly enriched uranium (HEU), suitable for weapons manufacture, and low enriched uranium (LEU), sufficient to power light-water reactors. But a former assistant director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency argues that an enrichment facility dedicated to producing LEU can be reconfigured to produce HEU. In this light, it is wrong to speak of fundamentally different facilities (Scheinman 2005). By 2005 the Bush administration worried that any “civilian” nuclear reactor could be diverted to military purposes.

In 2002 both Pyongyang and Washington declared the Agreed Framework dead. Pyongyang complained that, eight years after the Agreed Framework was signed, work on the two light-water reactors had barely commenced. Challenged by the United States, North Korea seemed to admit that it had secretly developed a second production line to produce nuclear weapons using enriched uranium. Given the opacity and contradictions in many DPRK statements, it is possible that Pyongyang’s representatives meant only to assert their country’s right to open such a line. But Clinton’s My Life says that the second production line opened in 1998 – just four years after the Agreed Framework signing and two years before Clinton left office.

Had the 1994 accord masked a drive by one or both sides to continue a zero-sum struggle against the other? The answer defies any simple explanation. The United States supplied fuel oil to the North, as promised. Also, Washington persuaded Japan, South Korea, and the European Atomic Energy Community to take part in a Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to build the two light-water reactors. But progress was painfully slow – so slow that Pyongyang may have reasonably inferred that the United States and its partners were deliberately seeking to sabotage North Korea’s development.

It is conceivable that, even in 1994, North Korea planned to cheat on the spirit of the Agreed Framework and later surprise the world by presenting its nuclear arsenal as a fait accompli. More likely, however, Pyongyang probably planned its second production line as a fallback in case the 1994 accord came to naught. As detailed below, as late as 2000 it appeared that North Korea was willing to give up much of its missile program as well as its nuclear weapons in exchange for a breakthrough in DPRK relations with the United States.

Given the many technological shortfalls and economic problems confronting North Korea, it could still be difficult for the DPRK, even in 2005, to produce functioning weapons from either production line. Though North Korea sought to buy centrifuges, electrical frequency converters, and high strength aluminum tubes needed to enrich uranium, there was no evidence it had managed to do so. Authorities in France, Germany, Egypt, and Japan intervened in 2003 to block such deliveries to North Korea. (Alvarez 2003; Harrison 2005).
Probably the North Koreans violated not just the spirit but also the letter of the 1994 accord by secretly constructing a gas centrifuge facility that, American analysts believe, might be able to produce enough enriched uranium to manufacture one or two nuclear bombs a year. One leading authority notes, however, that the NPT permits signatories to have civilian enrichment operations under IAEA inspection. And Pyongyang may have felt no obligation to declare its LEU facilities until the United States and its partners had built the two light-water reactors, as agreed in 1994. (Harrison 2005: 106–107).

Whatever the limitations of the Agreed Framework, The Clinton team saw it as the least bad option available (Wit et al. 2004). Clinton’s memoir (2004) notes that the plutonium production halted in 1994 was a much larger program than the uranium enrichment activated in 1998. Had the earlier program kept going, it would have yielded sufficient plutonium to make several nuclear weapons a year.

On balance, it appears that progress toward containing North Korea’s WMD programs was imperfect, but that the benefits of the 1994 Agreed Framework were no mirage. The accord bought some years of peace and opened the door to further negotiations on a range of matters. The Bush administration virtually shut this door in 2001 and 2002.

The Possible Role of Cultural Differences in Negotiation

Are international negotiations, conducted by cosmopolitan, professional diplomats, now liberated from misunderstandings rooted in diverse languages and cultures? In the era of globalization, do diplomats transcend the biases and habits of their upbringing? Raymond Cohen (2002) says no. He makes a strong case that culture – basic values and way of life – is a matrix that continues to condition how negotiators perceive the world and respond to signals, what they say, and how they say it. Cohen argues that negotiations are heavily shaped by whether participants embody a “high” or a “low context” approach to negotiations. Most Asians, including Koreans, are said to place great importance on the overall setting of negotiations. For Asians, a negotiated deal is impossible without personal bonds between the negotiators. Low context Americans, by contrast, are said to focus on the bottom line and on abstract rules and laws, with little regard for cultural sensitivities and diplomatic niceties. The graduated reciprocity strategy suggested by psychologist Charles Osgood, however, presumes that all humans – whatever their culture, whatever their acculturation and language – will respond positively to demonstrated efforts at conciliation, provided they wish to reverse a conflict spiral and push toward détente (Osgood 1962; Clemens 1973a and 2003).
An American with vast experience in Korea, Stephen W. Linton, identified the North Korean approach to negotiations in these terms: “From the North Korean perspective, human relations should never be made conditional on something else. Problems should be portrayed as annoying obstacles to what is most important: friendship between the highest levels of leadership. . . . [Attempts] to meet leadership, resolve sensitive issues, and conclude agreements, all on a three-day trip to Pyongyang, sends the wrong message.” Unlike many Westerners, Koreans do not see impersonal law as the framework for action but rather the personality behind the law. “Proof of interest at the highest level is paramount for giving the negotiating process legitimacy.” (Linton 1995).¹

Is Linton naïve? As we shall see below, Linton’s picture of Korean negotiating style resembles what American diplomats recalled of Communist China’s negotiating culture in the 1970s. Linton’s characterization also dovetails with subsequent observations of North Korean behavior by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Still, North Korean and Chinese Communists have not always been renowned for their tact. At the Panmunjom negotiating table and other venues their behavior resembled the Soviet model established by “Mr. Nyet” diplomats such as Andrei Vyshinsky and V. M. Molotov. The Communists at Panmunjom demanded a great deal and gave as little as possible. They tried to wear down their opponents by bidding high, persevering, backtracking, repeating, and making only token concessions (Wilhelm 1994). At Panmunjom and elsewhere, North Korean diplomats have often practiced brinksmanship (Eberstadt 2002: 147).

Indeed, North Korean diplomats have often said nyet, albeit in their own ways. At times they have seemed to play roles in what Karen Elliott House termed “a theater of the absurd: Pyongyang promises, then procrastinates, then provokes, then pauses. After a long pause come new promises, and the cycle starts anew.” (House 1997)

Digging deeper, however, Scott Snyder depicted U.S.-DPRK negotiations in another light. He agreed that North Korea’s crisis-oriented negotiation style has often shown a pattern of drama and catastrophe – quite different from anything suggested by Linton. Rather than a linear process with a discrete beginning, middle, and end, Snyder suggested that that these relations should be seen as a cycle in which issues are revisited, points reexamined, and interpretations redefined. Expanded, the process may include new issues and deeper mutual understanding (Snyder 1999: 43–44).

Indeed, expanding Linton’s thesis, Snyder’s 1999 book devotes an entire chapter to elucidating the high context approach taken by North Koreans in dealing with U.S. diplomats. The North Koreans value punuigi [atmosphere]
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and kibun [good feeling]. If these are absent, they practice kojip [intransi-
gence] – expressed in brinksmanship, cries of wolf, demands for unilateral
concessions, bluffs and threats, manufactured deadlines, and threats to walk
away from the negotiations. All this aims to create leverage out of weakness.
Also, before a deal is possible, the lead DPRK negotiator may need to show
kosaeng [suffering] – proof for his bosses that he has done everything possi-
bile to extract the most possible concessions. Underlying the entire enterprise
is “face.” An American visitor to Pyongyang was told: “For us, saving face is
as important as life itself.” (Snyder 1999: 65–96).

While Linton emphasizes face and feeling, and Snyder drama and cata-
trophe, each behavior may be part of a larger and quite distinctive “Korean”
way of negotiating. Thus, one reviewer of this essay observed: “One has only
to spend time working with a South Korean company to see how similar are
these strands, and how they have their own internal logic. It is inordinately
frustrating to outsiders to encounter Koreans, because the mixture of bombast,
face, stubbornness, and emphasis on context and good relations seems quite
illogical. But ... it’s all part of a whole that has an internal logic.” This logic
arises from the fact that “Korean culture is the most hierarchic in East Asia.
As a result, when discussions between two ‘equals’ breaks down, it is a huge
break, and also virtually impossible for them to back down or compromise
from a stance, no matter how illogical that stance is – to do so is to lose all face
and submit to the other side. In this context, a third party, usually of higher
‘rank’ is necessary to intervene and find a solution. Once relations are restored,
great warmth and flexibility is possible by all sides, but approached in the
wrong manner, this is impossible.” Even watching South Korean television,
the reviewer wrote, these patterns of conflict and resolution are manifest
everywhere.

Another reader, based in Seoul, noted that in Korean history, legalists – what
we now call realists – argued that power prevailed over Confucian ideals, and
that North Koreans today assume that all power is concentrated in Kim Jong
Il. Experience in world affairs could teach North Korans that life is not a zero-
sum game, but today’s DPRK elites have had very little experience in market
economics or give-and-take diplomacy.

The first reviewer also observed that negotiations in 2005 progressed some-
what better than in previous years because “a number of those actually doing
the negotiating in Beijing ... are deeply experienced with Korea itself (not just
East Asia or negotiating in general), and the expectations of what to expect
from the North Koreans in terms of style has been much clearer than before.”

Experience shows that when Koreans negotiate, whether from the South or
the North, they are often tough with each other and practice all the varieties
of kojip [stubborn intransigence]. Thus, in apparent contrast to Linton, one
experienced U.S. diplomat pictured Koreans as “very direct and tough people.” When South Koreans tried to open negotiations with PRC representatives in Hong Kong in the early 1980s, “they made quite a hash of this. They tended to demand things up front, and to use very blunt and insulting bargaining techniques, and to misunderstand the difference between things that needed to be done with a wink and a shrug and things that could be done explicitly. And so they were getting nowhere.” (Charles W. Freeman interviewed in Tucker 2001: 429–430).

In this same vein, the Financial Times correspondent in Korea opined that “militaristic language seems to be a cultural preference.” Even in South Korea, company statements are full of the words for “stronghold” and “military base.” One firm calls its new mobile phone factory in Spain a “bridgehead to attack the European markets.” (Fiifield 2005).

Granted that Korean negotiating style is distinct from that of other East Asians, one may nonetheless ask whether North Koreans or Chinese Communists have inherited some behaviors from their erstwhile Soviet patrons. Thus, both PRC and DPRK negotiating styles seemed to replicate leading motifs of the Vyshinsky (Mr. Nyet) model during the tensest times of the Cold War. In the 1970s, however, Beijing’s representatives often conveyed more modulated tones as they negotiated to normalize relations with the United States. Richard Solomon concluded that Chinese diplomats often utilized ostensible personal bonds in pursuit of their goals. (Solomon 1999). “Friendship,” for them, could be real or feigned. Either way, it would be exploited.

Solomon’s picture of high context negotiations resembles Linton’s. So too does Henry Kissinger’s sketch of negotiations with Zhou Enlai and other PRC representatives in the early 1970s. As Kissinger saw it, the Chinese used “friendship as a halter in advance of negotiation, by admitting the interlocutor to at least the appearance of personal intimacy, a subtle restraint is placed on the claims he can put forward.”

Unlike most depictions of DPRK negotiators, however, Kissinger saw Chinese diplomats as “meticulously reliable.” Also, “they never stooped to petty maneuvers; they did not haggle; they reached their bottom line quickly, explained it reasonably, and defended it tenaciously. They stuck to the meaning as well as the spirit of their undertakings.” Across ten visits to China, Kissinger felt he was engaged “in one endless conversation with an organism that recalled everything, seemingly motivated by a single intelligence” (Kissinger 1979: 1056). Kissinger enjoyed immensely his talks with Zhou Enlai. Far from being a hard bargainer, Zhou asked only that Kissinger explain what he needed and why. China’s number two leader practiced the openness valued, for example, by many – probably most – participants in the Harvard
Negotiating Project (Raiffa 1982). To be sure, Zhou got much of what he wanted, but his style could not be classified in any formulaic way. It combined personal rapport with openness in what could be read as a sincere quest for mutual gain.

Whatever cynics may say about high context opportunism, the diplomatic breakthroughs in U.S.-DPRK relations in the 1990s were initiated thanks to personal contacts between Reverend Billy Graham (accompanied by Dr. Linton) and DPRK leader Kim Il Sung; a June 1994 meeting between scholar Selig Harrison from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace with Kim Il Sung, and a tête-à-tête later that month between former U.S. president Jimmy Carter and Kim. These unofficial contacts of “Track II diplomacy” laid the groundwork for subsequent “Track I” negotiations by government officials.

But the atmosphere in 1994 was extraordinarily complex. Not only was the United States beefing up its military forces in Korea with Patriot missiles and Bradley fighting vehicles, but also U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright was trying to mobilize the Security Council to demand sanctions against the DPRK. Less visibly but no less important, PRC foreign minister Qian Qichen was telling his Japanese counterpart, Koji Kakizawa, that China was urging restraint on North Korea. Despite these pressures, just a few weeks before Carter’s visit, Kim Il Sung refused to meet with two emissaries chosen by President Clinton, Senators Richard Lugar and Sam Nunn, who were expected to carry a blunter message than Carter. Some of what Carter did and promised exceeded any mandate he carried from Washington. Outflanking hardliners in Washington and offering some international exposure to Kim Il Sung, Carter brought with him a CNN television crew (Gills 1995: 17–18).

The official U.S. negotiators, led by a career Foreign Service officer, Robert L. Gallucci, sought an agreed framework but did so mindful of the cultural and political differences between the sides. It sought to avoid forcing the DPRK regime to choose between its own collapse and military adventure (Gallucci 1997).

The memoirs of Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State in the late 1990s, basically support Linton’s theses about the importance for Koreans of high-level personal contacts (Albright 2003: 459–472). Still, she was struck by the “smooth” professionalism of the DPRK Foreign Minister Paek Nam-Sun, whom she met for the first time in Bangkok in July 2000. Their talk, expected to last 15 minutes, continued for an hour.

The Americans believed that sending former Defense Secretary William Perry to Pyongyang in 1998 amounted to the dispatch of a “high-level” emissary. When Albright met her opposite number in July 2000, she asked whether
Pyongyang would reciprocate. Though it took a few months to get a reply, in October 2000 Pyongyang sent to Washington a near equivalent to Perry in rank. This was the number two man in the DPRK military establishment, Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok. Visiting the State Department, he wore a gray suit; half an hour later, he appeared at the White House in a full military uniform adorned with medals. Was his costume change a sign of professionalism or Korean culture or both?

"With a flourish," according to Albright, the Vice Marshal presented Clinton a letter from Kim Jong II inviting the U.S. president to Pyongyang. When Clinton hedged, Jo pressed for a definitive reply. When Clinton suggested that Albright go first to prepare the ground, Jo did not give up. He said that if the president and secretary came together, "We will be able to find a solution to all problems." As Albright observed, "North Korea's top-down decision-making style didn't fit well with our practice of trying to 'pre-cook' arrangements . . . before committing the President." Still, Jo invited Albright to Pyongyang.

Before Jo left Washington, each side pledged "no hostile intent" toward the other. While Albright does not comment on this point, the joint pledge amounted to a constructive compromise between the North's demand for a nonaggression pact and the traditional U.S. position that the UN Charter already bans aggression. The importance of the pledge was underlined in 2002 when the Bush administration refused to reaffirm it.

Not long after Jo departed, Albright found herself in Pyongyang in late October 2000. She had been told that to get diplomatic results with North Korea one had to take time and build a relationship. But she had only two days—not even the three derided by Linton! When she met Kim Jong II, the dear leader promptly expressed admiration for her energy (after a marathon flight) and expressed gratitude for two symbolic acts—Albright's visit to his father's mausoleum and a condolence letter from Clinton after Kim Il Sung's death—as well as for humanitarian assistance in recent years. Again expressing the hope that Clinton would visit, the DPRK leader averred that "if both sides are genuine and serious, there is nothing we will not be able to do."

During her short stay Albright found Kim Jong II to be isolated but intelligent, well informed, and able to discuss a wide range of technical problems without consulting his advisers. He seemed amenable to a missiles-for-cash deal and did not object to the continued presence of U.S. troops in Korea, which he now saw as a stabilizing influence. The main event underscoring cultural differences was a demonstration for Albright by more than a hundred thousand people—what she saw as "an Olympic opening ceremony on steroids"—singing and moving to songs such as "Let Us Hold High the Red Flag."
Clinton wanted to visit Kim Jong II in late 2000 and try to bring to fruition the negotiations conducted by Albright and others. Incoming president George W. Bush did not object. But Clinton felt he must choose in the final weeks of his presidency between Korea and another mediation effort for the Middle East. He chose the latter. The Americans then invited Kim Jong II to visit what was still the Clinton White House, but he declined – perhaps because the invitation came so late and could be seen as an affront to “face.” But the biggest obstacle to a diplomatic breakthrough was not poor communication or cultural differences but time. Clinton had too many items on his platter and too little time to deal with them.

Prospects for an accommodation with Pyongyang gained from the near absence of brinksmanship in DPRK policy toward South Korea from June 1999 to June 2002. During those three years, spanning the last 18 months of the Clinton administration and the first 18 months of the Bush era, the North provoked no major clashes at sea or along its border with the ROK (Eberstadt 2002: 148). So anxious was the ROK government to avoid provoking Pyongyang that in August 2003 it prevented an NGO effort to waft transistor radios by balloon across the demilitarized zone (DMZ) so that North Koreans could listen to radio broadcasts not controlled by the Kim Jong II regime. Pyongyang abandoned radio broadcasts to the South earlier that month and called on Seoul to stop its broadcasts, but the South Koreans refused (Brooke 2003). Apparently each side was making delicate judgments about what was permitted in the context of the ROK Sunshine strategy to engage the North. Indeed, both Seoul and Pyongyang agreed in June 2004 to halt broadcasts across the DMZ.

A leitmotif of Bush policy was “anything but Clinton” (ABC). The Bush White House steered sharply away from any kind of deal nurtured by its predecessors. This ABC complex was not immediately grasped by Bush’s choice for Secretary of State. Colin Powell assured Albright in late 2000 that the Bush team would pick up with North Korea roughly where the Clinton team left off. (Albright 2003: 470). Indeed, Powell repeated this formulation for reporters on March 6, 2001, as ROK President Kim Dae Jung – architect of South Korea’s “sunshine” engagement policy with the North – arrived in Washington. Powell stated that “some promising elements were left on the table, and we’ll be examining those elements.” But this did not happen. The very next day, as Bush met with Kim Dae Jung, Powell stepped out of the Oval Office to inform the press that North Korea was “a threat . . . we have to not be naive about the threat.” If “there are suggestions that there are imminent negotiations [between the United States and DPRK], this is not the case.” Powell underscored that Bush “understands the nature of the regime in Pyongyang and will not be fooled by it.” A day later, Powell told the Senate
that the DPRK is a "despotic regime" and that the United States might want to revisit the KEDO deal with North Korea. Powell was catching on to the ABC line.

This was the first of many signs in the next four years that Powell's diplomatic instincts could be overruled by a hard-line president and his closest advisers, and that Powell would sacrifice his own views and even his integrity to remain part of the team. Apparently Bush could dictate, as Khrushchev did, that his foreign minister squat and dance the kazachok.

Compelled to mouth the administration's hard line approach, Powell was (or should have felt) humiliated. The White House also gave a shock treatment to Seoul and Tokyo, whose governments pursued an appeasement strategy toward the DPRK. But the deepest blow went to Pyongyang. Assuming that North Korean leaders placed much weight on personal ties and a semblance of friendship between countries, they probably saw some prospect of better ties with the United States after visits in the 1990s by Rev. Billy Graham, ex-president Carter, and Secretary of State Albright. They probably knew that the elder George Bush had cultivated better ties between the United States and Communist China. They probably heard reports that he urged his own son, the 43rd U.S. president, to continue negotiations with the DPRK. What a shock, then, for Pyongyang when George W. Bush cut off those talks and expressed his disgust toward a regime that let its own people starve.

For his part, the 43rd president probably saw the North Korean regime as the embodiment of evil. Viewing the world in terms of good and evil, Bush in 2002 formally assigned North Korea to the axis of evil. For passionate conservatives, America stands with the sheep; North Korea with the goats. Negotiating with evil regimes is useless, dangerous, and perhaps even immoral.

Far from trying to establish personal bonds or helping North Koreans to save face in difficult times, the Bush team repeatedly insulted the DPRK regime and its "Dear Leader." Any government concerned with "face" would balk at demands that it "confess" to wrong-doing and make unilateral concessions. Not surprisingly, when Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton, the top State Department official responsible for arms control, called Kim Jong Il a "tyrannical rogue" in August 2003, Pyongyang replied by branding him "human scum." The North demanded and got Bolton's exclusion from talks held later that month in Beijing. (Slevin 2003: A12).

In a sign of the premium that North Koreans placed on personal ties, on January 10, 2003, the very day that Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the NPT, two DPRK diplomats stationed at the United Nations flew to New Mexico to consult with Governor Bill Richardson, whom they had got to know when he was Clinton's ambassador to the United Nations. Their devotion to
the human factor, however, was misplaced – at least in this case: Whatever they worked out with Democrat Richardson would not sit well with a Republican White House in 2003, though his subsequent visit to Pyongyang in October 2005 seemed in tune with the more conciliatory inflection in U.S. policy at that time.

As noted earlier, North Korea took part in six-party negotiations in 2004 but refused “indefinitely” in February 2005 to return to this format. What sparked this posture? President Bush had made only one, rather innocuous reference to North Korea in his January 2005 State of the Union speech. But Condoleezza Rice in the hearings about her suitability to be Secretary of State had listed North Korea with five other “outposts of tyranny” – not a phrase calculated to convince Pyongyang that Bush 2 would make a fresh start. Indeed, Dr. Rice specifically mentioned twice that same week that “all options are available” in dealing with North Korea. I would add that the reports of processed fuel to Libya circulated by the US administration, later proven to be wrong, only furthered the impression that the US was trying to pressure the North, as were the administration’s public fears – again wrong – about a potential test in May of 2005.

Official Washington seemed unconcerned about “face” or the “high context” atmosphere on which East Asian diplomats often place great weight. One wonders if America’s leading diplomat publicly lambasted recalcitrant deans and department heads when she ran Stanford University. Did her experience suggest that dialogue was improved by publicly insulting or ignoring the other side?

When Pyongyang again demanded two-party talks in February 2005, Washington replied categorically that it would take part only in six-party negotiations – where, experience showed, Pyongyang would stand alone against five opponents. To be sure, some of the other four parties differed with Washington on important details. South Korea and China publicly and privately told the Americans that they were being too inflexible with the North; Japan, although siding somewhat more with the United States, in June 2005 ruled out any possibility of UN sanctions against the DPRK; and neither South Korea nor China joined the Proliferation Security Initiative (discussed below). When, later in 2005, the United States became more flexible and showed a stronger willingness to deal with Pyongyang, a more united front emerged among the five.

The atmosphere was not helped by new U.S. allegations, later proved untrue, that North Korea may have sold partly processed nuclear fuel to Libya and perhaps to other buyers on the black market, and that DPRK workers in May were preparing a site for an underground nuclear test. The credibility gap opened by the Bush team’s disinformation campaign regarding Saddam
Hussein's WMD programs left the world dubious about anything the White House might say about anything. Here was another instance where Washington had dissipated its soft power capacity to persuade others to trust and follow U.S. lead. An impression of moral equivalence resulted – an impression that the words of Washington were no more reliable than those of its adversaries.

DPRK intentions were the more difficult to interpret because, while the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) often underscored Pyongyang’s desire for peaceful coexistence and friendship with the United States, audiences within the hermit kingdom learned that the North’s “attack diplomacy” was forcing U.S. and other foreign adversaries to their knees. School textbooks, wall posters, and literary works showed stammering American and international officials trying to placate the relentless “warriors” of the DPRK Foreign Ministry. The novel *Barrel of a Gun* ends with recognition by a U.S. negotiator that North Korea is “a mighty superpower.” The North agrees to let Americans inspect a cave for nuclear facilities provided they agree to provide 700,000 tons of food as atonement for their “strangulatory” blockade of the North. Posters assure North Koreans that DPRK bombs can reach not only Seoul but even Washington (Myers 2005).

The diverse tacks taken by the KCNA and domestic media in the North resemble the apparent contradiction between the Soviet Foreign Commissariat’s campaign for disarmament and the revolutionary line taken by the Comintern in the 1920s and early 1930s. On occasion somebody in Moscow would explain how Soviet disarmament diplomacy revealed the impossibility of negotiated disarmament by capitalist regimes and thus the need for revolution. But if Western governments had agreed to cut their arms (then far superior to Soviet), the Kremlin would probably have been willing to go along.

By May 2005 even the Korean Central News Agency denounced the U.S. president and his entourage in terms that made “axis of evil” sound like a complement. The KCNA said the U.S. president was “the world’s worst fascist dictator, a top-notch war maniac and Hitler junior waving hands stained with blood shed by innocent people.” It declared that the whole “brutish Bush bellicose group” is a “bunch of hardened thugs losing their grip on the ability to think normally and not the kind of people we should deal with in the first place.” When the KCNA talked this way, Pyongyang seemed to be putting more nails in the coffin of six-party talks.

“There’s a siege mentality” in Pyongyang, said Michael Harrold, author of the book *Comrades and Strangers* about his seven years editing speeches for Kim Il-sung. “They’re still on a war footing and one the great unifiers in the
constant threat from America.” DPRK commentaries are filled with “burning hatred” for “imperialist aggressors.” Because the term “U.S. imperialists” was used so often, the DPRK coined a special word – “mi-je,” a contraction of “miguk [American]” and “jegukjuja [imperialist].” If DPRK propaganda did not find new ways to denounce foreign foes, said Harrold, “the outside world might think they’re softening their positions.” (Fifeld 2005).

The balance sheet is complicated. Yes, Americans can be rightly pictured as comparatively low context and Koreans as high context in their approach to negotiations. But Koreans (both South and North) as well as Americans can be polite and friendly if they wish – or the opposite. Whereas bad vibes can kill a prospective accord, good vibes can help to reach and maintain one. Nevertheless a cordial atmosphere is surely not sufficient for a deal. On balance, cultural differences probably played only a supporting role in the U.S.-DPRK conflicts that erupted after Bush entered the White House.

Distrust of International Agreements and Institutions

Kim Il Sung’s main addition to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism was juche – self-reliance. Other Communist leaders – Lenin, Stalin, Tito, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro – espoused self-reliance, but none (except perhaps Albania’s Enver Hoxha) made it the distinguishing characteristic of state ideology. Paradoxically, none was so dependent on outside help as North Korea. North Koreans – leaders and followers – have been taught to view the outside world with deep suspicion – not only the capitalist world led by the United States but also the United Nations and even putative socialist allies in Beijing and Moscow. For Pyongyang, the United States and UN were one – North Korea’s foe in 1950–1953 and at Panmunjom. While China and the USSR furnished much aid to the DPRK over the years, they were also demanding, insolent, and condescending. The Korean Energy and Development Organization (KEDO) appeared to be another Trojan horse calculated to deceive and injure North Korea. The six-party talks arranged by Beijing brought together five parties, each intent on disarming North Korea.

Pyongyang did not like to face five potential opponents. It sought instead direct, high-level contacts with the world superpower, the United States. Anything else “international” or “multilateral” amounted to smoke and mirrors. Given the Bush administration’s refusal to pursue bilateral relations, however, North Korea wanted its own WMD, seen as an integral part of juche. A signed editorial in the authoritative newspaper Rodong Sinmun on September 1, 2003, broadcast also in English the same day, underscored that the DPRK
nuclear deterrent “embodies the principle of self-reliant defense based on the juche idea” and is “a means of defending sovereignty” and coping with the threat of a U.S. pre-emptive nuclear attack (KCNA 2003).

Given the Bush-Rice doctrine of pre-emption and the U.S. assault on Iraq, the DPRK quest for a deterrent could not be seen as irrational. If Britain and France were unwilling to rely on their long-time partner, the United States, and insisted on having their own nuclear deterrent during and after the Cold War, with what greater cause would a country still at war with the United States insist on some tangible assets to keep its long-time foe at bay?

To deal with most foreign problems the Bush administration favored a militant unilateralism – an American version of juche. To be sure, the Bush team usually kept the door open to assistance from NATO allies, from China, and other UN members so long as they accepted the fundamentals of U.S. policy. With North Korea, however, the Bush administration demanded a multilateral approach. Washington insisted on multiparty talks rather than bilateral with Pyongyang to deal with WMD.

Whether the Bush team wanted the six-party talks to succeed or believed that they could, however, remains unclear. It is conceivable that Washington wanted them to fail and knew that they would. The U.S. vice president and president focused on Iraq, and showed little interest in Korean issues. As of early 2000 the U.S. Defense Department could not say whether North Korea’s military might had increased or diminished in recent years. It did not know if North Korea had nuclear weapons and, if so, how many. Its contingency plans for dealing with North Korea had not been updated for years. As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld saw it, the United States had no options except “rhetoric” and “75 sledgehammers to beat that gnat into the ground (Woodward 2004: 31–32).” But the White House seemed not to care and directed its attention to Iraq.

President Bush and his entourage were cool and sometimes hostile to laws that might constrain their actions. They renounced the Kyoto protocol and then purported to “un-sign” the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In late 2001 the president purported to abrogate the ABM treaty. This action probably violated the U.S. Constitution, because the president altered the law of the land without participation by the legislature (needed to make a treaty or any other law). More than thirty members of the House of Representatives sued the Administration on this issue (Weiss 2002; Clemens 2001).

Distrust of international institutions and law paralleled a proclivity in Pyongyang and Bush’s Washington for secrecy. Each side played its cards close its vest. Neither communicated fully with its subjects or its potential partners abroad. The United States, of course, remained a far more open society than North Korea. But revelations in 2004 about the buildup to the Iraq war
showed how those in power could withhold and manipulate information to deceive not only the public but Congress and foreign governments.

**Attitudes toward the Importance of WMD**

Both Kim Jong Il and the Bush administration seemed to think that WMD can be a useful instrument of policy. Not sure what would result from the 1994 Agreed Framework, by 1998 North Korea was utilizing a clandestine facility to produce enriched uranium for nuclear weapons. When an American envoy in 2002 accused Pyongyang of cheating, the DPRK regime responded by seeking to convince outsiders that it did indeed possess a small but growing nuclear arsenal. Pyongyang claimed it needed nuclear weapons to deter foes who might try to bully or even attack the DPRK. The fact that the Bush administration had felt free to attack Iraq probably strengthened Pyongyang’s juche determination to obtain a nuclear or other WMD deterrent. Despite the Bush team’s public assertions about Saddam Hussein’s WMD, Washington expected to oust his regime without major incidents and did so within a short time (Woodward 2004).

The U.S. Defense Department, led by Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, explained some of its approach to nuclear weapons in the *Nuclear Posture Review (2001)* submitted to Congress on December 31, 2001. This report proclaimed a new strategic triad composed of: offensive strike systems (the old triad plus non-nuclear forces), active and passive defense, and a revitalized research and development base to “surge” produce and update U.S. forces as needed. The new triad, bound together by enhanced command and control and intelligence, would reduce U.S. dependence on nuclear arms to deter enemy attack.

Against which targets might nuclear weapons be used? North Korea headed the NPR list. “North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya are among the countries that could be involved in immediate, potential, or unexpected contingencies. All have longstanding hostility toward the United States and its security partners; North Korea and Iraq in particular have been chronic military concerns. All sponsor or harbor terrorists, and all have active WMD and missile programs.” Given the “ongoing modernization of its nuclear and non nuclear forces, China is [also] a country that could be involved in an immediate or potential contingency.”

What would be the role of anti-missile systems? “Missile defenses could defeat small-scale missile attacks intended to coerce the United States into abandoning an embattled ally or friend. Defenses that provided protection for strike capabilities of the New Triad and for other power projection forces
would improve the ability of the United States and its allies and friends to counterattack an enemy. They may also provide the President with an option to manage a crisis involving one or more missile and WMD-armed opponents.”

The NPR had to be interpreted in the context of a new doctrine of pre-emption, enunciated by National Security Assistant Condoleezza Rice and by the president himself. The doctrine averred that, in an age of WMD and terrorist actions, the United States could no longer afford to wait while enemy forces prepared to attack. Instead, Americans should and would pre-empt a gathering storm. Soon, this logic helped rationalize the U.S. attack on Iraq. Since there was never any sign that Baghdad readied an attack on the United States, however, the U.S. invasion should rather have been defined as a “preventive” war, meant to immobilize a distant, future threat – not an imminent attack.

Despite official rhetoric about WMD, the evidence suggested that the Bush White House wanted more and better nukes for the United States and did not worry much if other actors obtained nuclear weapons. While Washington called on others to abjure nuclear weapons, the Pentagon improved “infrastructure” would develop “bunker busters” and what used to be called “battlefield” nuclear weapons, regardless the poor prospects that collateral damage could be minimized if such weapons were used (Nelson 2002). The NPR advised that U.S. weapons laboratories might have to resume nuclear tests, curtailed since 1992.

Thus, the Bush administration pursued its own version of juche – the self-reliance so esteemed by Kim Jong Il and his late father. If the United States enjoyed a decisive military superiority, it could take a more cavalier approach to arms control – deemed to be either useless or unnecessary or both. Accordingly, the Bush team nearly ignored Iran’s nuclear weapons capacity as well as North Korea’s, while focusing its energies on Iraq. It did so even though the National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002 identified only a desire in Baghdad to obtain WMD without much evidence of a restored WMD capability (Congressional Record 2003). It appears that the Bush team decided to invade Iraq for reasons other than arms control, while doing very little to thwart WMD production in Iran or North Korea.

Strategic self-reliance, filliped by an allergy to treaty law, led Washington to undermine efforts to strengthen the NPT and existing conventions on chemical and biological weapons. Though it shied away from tightening most arms control treaty obligations, the United States did seek agreement from other actors to stop ships on the high seas and confiscate illicit cargo.

The Bush administration’s indifference to other countries’ WMD and its disdain for arms control accords were manifest in U.S. policies to the Russian Federation, still a WMD superpower but also a potential source of “loose
This disdain was evident even in the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty signed by Presidents Bush and V. V. Putin in May 2002. Bush had resisted any formal commitment, but finally agreed to a treaty that, unlike its bulky predecessors, was just a few pages long. SORT (even the acronym suggests disdain) called for reductions in U.S. and Russian operationally deployed strategic warheads to no more than 2,200 by the end of 2012, but left each side with enormous flexibility as regards its future deployments.

A double standard emerged in 2004–2005 as the White House objected even to civilian nuclear power programs in North Korea and Iran, while dropping U.S. opposition to India’s and Pakistan’s nuclear weapons programs. As Congressman Ed Markey told an audience at MIT on October 22, 2005, “hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue.” The Bush team prepared to sell military equipment to Islamabad as well as to New Delhi, even though Pakistan refused to put its prime proliferator, Abdul Quadeer Khan, on trial. As to India, the Bush team agreed in June and July 2005 (subject to Congressional approval) to permit U.S. support for India’s civilian nuclear program and allow India to purchase uranium on the international market. In this the White House followed a precedent set by the Carter administration, which sold nineteen tons of enriched uranium to India after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Washington worried about the USSR in 1980, while U.S. concerns about China and Iran drove policy to India in 2005. Myopia over foresight.

Internal Divisions

The potential importance of internal resistance to détente was underscored by the ability of one high U.S. official to scuttle talks between North and South Korea in the mid-1983–1984. PRC officials at that time tried to arrange talks between North and South Koreans, with the United States in attendance, hosted by the Chinese in Beijing. Senior PRC leader Deng Xiaopeng made this proposal to Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense under President Ronald Reagan, when “Cap” visited Beijing in 1983. Astonished by this démarche, before sending a cable back to Washington, U.S. diplomat Charles Freeman double-checked with the PRC Foreign Ministry to make sure Deng had made this proposal. Yes, he was told, China was undertaking a major policy initiative. Later, however, Freeman learned that Paul Wolfowitz, then the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, had edited this comment out of the conversation, alleging that he had not heard any such thing. Indeed, Wolfowitz adamantly denied Freeman’s version, and accused him of putting words in Deng’s mouth. (Freeman in Tucker 2001: 429–430).
But when Secretary of State George Shultz traveled with President Reagan to China in 1984, the Chinese repeated Deng’s 1983 proposal. Having discussed the idea with U.S. Ambassador Art Hummel, Shultz endorsed it. Between the secretary’s stay in Beijing and his subsequent arrival in Seoul, however, Wolfowitz managed to reverse the U.S. position, thereby killing the idea. Soon, Freeman observed, there was a “very nasty leak in the Periscope section of Newsweek, accusing Ambassador Hummel of having manipulated George Shultz on the Korean issue.” Later, Freeman found a notation in his personnel file to the effect that he had put words in the Chinese mouths on Korea (Freeman in Tucker 2001: 429–430).

One might write off these incidents as ancient history, but Wolfowitz did not go away. In 1999 he took part in a commission chaired by Richard Armitage that criticized Clinton’s policy to North Korea as too fragmented (Armitage 1999). While Wolfowitz in 2003–2004 gained most notoriety for his role (as Deputy Secretary of Defense) in shaping U.S. policies toward Iraq, the hard line taken by the Bush team toward North Korea was consistent with his lupine attacks on four-power talks in 1983–1984.5

Unilateralist hardliners seemed to control U.S. policy toward North Korea and most other foreign issues from 2001 to 2004. Colin Powell and others in the State Department favored a larger effort at dialogue with the DPRK, but even Powell’s deputy on arms control, John Bolton, was an outspoken hawk – very skeptical about arms control in general and about dealing with the DPRK leadership in particular. Elsewhere in Washington and the country, many supporters of dialogue with North Korea continued to write and speak their minds. They were not muzzled – just ignored.

Probably there are conflicting views, factions, and tendencies on WMD and related issues in Pyongyang as well as in Washington. As one U.S. expert observed, North Korea is “not a primitive tribe with a single leader who can keep tabs on everything.” To see North Korea as a monolith is to deny the possibility of politics (Merrill 1996).

Kim Jong II may be a nearly absolute dictator, but he probably weighs the views and influence of his entourage as well as attitudes among his subjects (many of whom seek refuge in China and beyond). He told Albright in 2000 that there was a fifty-fifty split within the DPRK military on whether or not to improve relations with the United States and that there were people in the foreign ministry who had opposed even his decision to talk with Americans. Some wanted U.S. troops to leave Korea, even though he now saw a useful role for them. But Kim Jong II added a nuance: He acknowledged that those who opposed his moves did not amount to the same level of opposition as occurs in the United States. Kim told Albright that there were a hundred thousand computers in North Korea, three of which he used (Albright 2003: 465).
So some news and views from outside the hermit kingdom get in. And the Dear Leader had long been fond of watching South Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and U.S. television programs (Maas 2003).

Given the persistent weaknesses of the North Korean economy and the relative success of China's model, it would be amazing if DPRK leaders did not question their own economic system. As for relations with the West, some North Korean generals probably set the bar very high for surrendering WMD; some diplomats and industrialists, much lower. A ranking DPRK general told a visitor in April 2004 that Pyongyang wanted to keep the world guessing about North Korea's HEU capabilities since it "strengthens our deterrent posture." (Harrison 2005: 109).

**Instrumental Approach to Arms Control**

Whether or not negotiations yield an agreement, they can be utilized to shape the climate of world politics and garner political support at home and abroad. Negotiations can foster mutual understanding but can also mask hostile endeavors. If diplomacy fosters a country's peaceful image, it may strengthen pacifist sentiments among foes. Reaching into the enemy camp, it may weaken support for war and arms buildups. It can buy time in which to buttress one's own defenses.

Tsar Nicholas II in 1899-1907 and then Lenin demonstrated how to use arms control negotiations for ulterior motives. As Soviet Russia tried to become an active participant in international relations in 1922, Lenin developed an arms control diplomacy that helped to buttress pacifist sentiments in Great Britain, deepen cleavages between London and Paris, aggravate "contradictions" between the Versailles victors and Weimar Germany; increase distrust between Poland and its Baltic neighbors; while supporting Turkey and containing the influence of Britain and France at the Dardanelles. More generally, Soviet diplomacy tried to expose the futility of disarmament negotiations so long as capitalist regimes remained in power and pursued their vested interests. If arms control negotiations reached no accords, they could still continue the revolution by other means (Clemens 1964, Clemens 1973b).

In this spirit, Pyongyang may have used arms negotiations to buy time in which to cultivate its nuclear arsenal. So long as North Korea appears somewhat amenable to dialogue, it undermines the willingness and political capacity of foreign foes to attack its nuclear facilities. We do not know when – or even whether – this logic guided DPRK behavior. It could have been instrumental as early as 1993–1994. More likely, it amounted to a form of contingency planning – a calculation that:
if arms control does not lead to a broader breakthrough, our negotiating efforts will have shielded our nuclear buildup from attack. Sooner or later we can present the world an accomplished fact – as did China, India, Pakistan – which cannot be easily removed. Iran, we observe, may be pursuing a similar logic.

A review of Marshal Tito’s nuclear ambitions underscores how a dictatorship can guard its secrets and, feeling threatened, may devote huge resources to building its own nuclear bomb. (“We must build it even if it costs us half of our income for years,” said Tito’s collaborator Edward Kardelj in 1950.) The record of Yugoslavia under Tito – like Iran and North Korea today – shows that: “The more isolated the regime and the more hostile the international environment, the less relevant are global norms regarding weapons of mass destruction. Isolated regimes also are inclined to discount the political costs of violating international taboos.” (Potter et al., 2000: 69) National egotism can also play a role. North Korea, like the USSR and India, may feel a need to show that it can shine in the military sphere if not in others. 

Despite the risk that North Korea would be isolated, it took part in several rounds of six-party talks in 2003–2004. During the third round, held in Beijing in June 2004, the United States proposed a conditional security guarantee and resumption of heavy fuel oil shipments from China and South Korea in exchange for DPRK disclosure and disarmament after a three-month preparatory period. Pyongyang rejected this proposal and concluded the talks with a threat to test a nuclear weapon. Earlier that month, there were reports that the DPRK had conducted an engine test for the Taepo-dong 2 missile, estimated to have a maximum range of 6,000 km.

The U.S.-DPRK impasse resembled that between France and the USSR in the 1920s. France then demanded “security first” and “moral disarmament” while the Soviet regime called for “material disarmament.” In the early 21st century it was North Korea that wanted security first, while the United States demanded DPRK disarmament first. To be specific, Washington required that Pyongyang disarm unilaterally, even as U.S. weapons labs worked on bunker busters and tactical nuclears. Yes, the United States promised trade and aid if North Korea disarmed, but said it would withhold full normalization so long as Pyongyang continued its human rights abuses. Pyongyang would also note that, rounding out its “disarmament first” program, Washington sought to expand its September 2003 Proliferation Security Initiative (SPI) to prevent the transfer of WMD-related materials and contraband that originate from, or are destined for, countries or non-state actors of “proliferation concern.” By June 2004 the number of participating countries reached seventeen, while dozens more signaled their interest in supporting SPI activities. As of late
2004, however, North Korea had no missiles deployed except surface-to-air defenses and short-range attack missiles. On the other hand, it deployed large fleets of transport planes and helicopters capable of infiltrating at least two air force sniper brigades and assault forces deep into ROK rear areas. Flying hours for DPRK air forces amounted to just 20 hours or less, compared to 150 for Japan and over 200 for the United States. (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2004: 19, 28, 163, 177, 178, 179).

It appeared that top leaders in the DPRK as well as in the United States had priorities other than arms control. Each side used arms control negotiations as an instrument to promote its political and economic agenda in other realms. Pyongyang demanded large and certain rewards to give up its main bargaining chips. North Korea's negotiating behavior suggested some willingness to freeze or eliminate WMD programs if the price were right. But Kim Jong Il's regime clearly saw its nuclear and missile capabilities as major assets not to be traded away except for very substantial security and economic rewards. For its part, the Bush White House probably worried that any accord with Pyongyang would impede Washington's larger political, military, and economic ambitions, including deployment of a national missile defense (NMD). President Bush probably loathed Kim Jong Il and did not relish the prospect of making any compromises with evil incarnate.

All this suggests that the Bush administration for years attached a low priority to reaching an accord with Pyongyang on WMD. The White House may even have opposed such an accord because it could undermine his other objectives. If this proposition is correct, then it was wrong to trust that the Bush White House actually wanted a "Libyan solution" by which Pyongyang would renounce its nuclear ambitions and open the country to IAEA inspectors. Indeed, the Bush team pressed North Korea to go even further than Tripoli and give up its other illicit activities, transform its economy, end restrictions on food assistance, and become a "normal" state (Snyder 2004: 147) — all desirable from the U.S. standpoint but probably unacceptable jokers for Pyongyang.

But could this skeptical interpretation really be true, given President Bush's oft-stated concerns about WMD? Yes. As suggested earlier, the White House seemed not to worry much about nuclear spread so long as the United States could improve its own arsenal. Indeed, the incipient nuclear-missile capability of North Korea provided the best justification for the United States to deploy a national anti-missile defense (NMD) — a holy grail for many conservatives ever since President Reagan unveiled his Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983. Indeed, in late 2000, the Secretary of State saw that "many in Congress and within the punditocracy opposed a [Clinton-Kim Jong Il] summit because they feared a deal with North Korea would weaken the case for national missile defense." (Albright 2003: 469).
If enough resources go to the NMD, there is an outside chance it could take shape in ways so it became useful against a PRC or even a Russian missile attack. Meanwhile, the combined impact of Bush’s foreign and military policies gathered dollars and political support from passionate conservative donors and voters who also value a tough stance toward the outer world, who distrust and disdain international institutions, and/or who want no truck with Communists.

Even if the NMD never becomes very effective, its deployment rewards and pleases many elements in the military-industrial complex. Business analysts warned that defense spending might plateau in 2005, but the price of shares in Boeing and Raytheon, each a major NMD contractor, soared in the first days after Bush’s reelection.

As part of this pattern, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld seemed almost pleased to declare in June 2004: “Needless to say, time favors North Korea.” Having done almost nothing constructive for four years to contain the DPRK, the Bush team could hardly have been surprised that time worked for Pyongyang.

In 2004 the United States withdrew 12,000 troops – one-third of the existing force – from Korea for duty in Iraq, and planned in the next few years to pull back most of the remaining U.S. troops from positions close to the DMZ to bases south of Seoul. Both these moves were opposed by the ROK, but Washington shifted its forces across the global chessboard with its usual insensitivity to the opinions of old allies, whether in Asia or Europe (Goodby 2004: 13; also, “American forces in South Korea” 2003). Some strategists in Pyongyang worried, however, that the withdrawal of many U.S. troops from the DMZ meant only that the United States wished to spare its own soldiers and intended to depend more heavily on long-ranger weapons to harm North Korea.

The Upshot

Neither the Bush nor the Kim Jong II governments handled their relationship in a way that improved the security and well being of their own citizens. The Bush team should have picked up where Clinton left off in 2000, but did not – with tragic consequences that could probably have been avoided. Whatever its shortcomings, the 1994 Agreed Framework could have been saved. It was like a glass half full and half empty. Had KEDO accelerated its work, had the Bush team not insulted but rather talked with Pyongyang, the glass might have been filled. More communication might have reduced antagonisms. Internal foes could have been constrained.
North Korea registered some gains during Bush’s first term. Limited “jaw-jaw” without “fight-fight” allowed the regime to continue development if not production of a nuclear-missile force that could threaten not only South Korea but also Japan and the United States. Also, the DPRK seemed to improve its ability to sell weapons abroad. But Pyongyang’s limited resources could have been more usefully channeled in other directions. The DPRK arms buildup was probably unnecessary and unwise, because Kim Jong Il’s regime probably did not need a nuclear deterrent. It already had a conventional force capable of intimidating Washington as well as Seoul. Even if some American decision makers wanted to attack North Korea, their hand would have been stayed by concern for South Korea.

The standoff with Washington probably bolstered Kim Jong Il’s rule. If any North Korean hardliners opposed better relations with the United States, they would have welcomed the impasse. But the atmosphere of confrontation was not needed. Had there been détente with America, Kim’s totalitarian dictatorship could probably have survived. The Dear Leader’s media could have presented virtually anything as a victory for juche.

North Korea’s economic ties with Japan, China, and South Korea helped to cushion and smooth political-military tensions. Far from maintaining a cordon sanitaire around the DPRK, Japan in 2004 moved toward investing in North Korea. Meanwhile, South Korean investors as well as tourists continued to expand their activities across the DMZ.

The DPRK stepped up its efforts to woo public opinion on Korean reunification and to strengthen animosity in the South toward the United States. North and South Korea agreed in June 2004 to stop propaganda broadcasts along their border and to take steps to avoid clashes along the DMZ and in disputed areas of the high seas, but they made no moves to reduce arms or troops (1,105,000 in the North, 687,700 in the South, with some 4.5 million reserves on each side). They did not sign a peace treaty or take any action on the North’s WMD. The tank traps, gun emplacements and minefields remained in place, with no sign of an imminent political solution to their conflict. Indeed, only a few hours after the June 2004 accord, the ROK Defense Ministry reported that two North Korean navy patrol boats crossed into waters controlled by South Korea off the west coast, while chasing Chinese fishing boats poaching in the area, and retreated when South Korean warships approached. A different version came from North Korea’s state-run news agency, which claimed that three South Korean warships had infiltrated its waters and two South Korean jet fighters threatened its fishing boats as part of the South’s alleged efforts to exercise jurisdiction in the area. Similar incidents continued to occur, for example, in early November 2004.
But a few marginal economic gains did little to improve living standards in the North. Thousands of North Korean refugees crossed into China and hundreds managed to reach South Korea in 2003–2004. The DPRK remained rather isolated and impoverished, with no immediate avenues to enter the global community of modernizing and prosperous nations. South Korea's economic assistance to the North remained quite limited in 2005 and would not be expanded so long as the DPRK retained its nuclear weapon programs.7

In 2004 China openly challenged the United States to provide evidence that the North had in fact opened a second production line for nuclear weapons. When Pyongyang boldly claimed in February 2005 that it had produced nuclear weapons, doubts were expressed – in Seoul and elsewhere – that North Korea had actually crossed the nuclear weapon threshold. So far, experts noted, the North had not detonated a bomb.

Whether or not the DPRK had joined the nuclear club, however, outsiders...
Communist North. But ROK political and business elites continued to do what they could to foster family exchange, promote tourism, and build new industries just over the North-South divide. Seoul claimed that its offer in July 2005 to double the North’s electric supply is what brought the DPRK back to more rounds of six-party talks in Beijing. Americans thought their consistent firmness did the trick; South Koreans claimed it was their flexibility. Perhaps both played a part, like a tough and soft cop; but it was equally possible that Pyongyang was just milking the differences between two of its potential antagonists.

As six-party talks continued in late 2005, the issue of sequencing remained. Which side(s) should take the first step? Former ROK Prime Minister Goh Kun (2005) called for a U.S. security guarantee to the North “concurrent” with DPRK denuclearization. But the guarantee could be offered in an instant, while denuclearization could take months if not years to complete, and probably require periodic if not permanent verification by international inspectors. A reasonable system of sequencing had been worked out in the earlier Agreed Framework, but each side appeared to drag its feet in ways that defeated the logic of sequencing. And while Washington preferred to contemplate a six-party guarantee to the North, Pyongyang focused on getting assurances from the United States.

Washington labored in 2005 to bring Japan and others into its efforts to stop DPRK exports of missiles and nuclear materials and also to halt its trafficking in narcotics and counterfeit dollars (Sanger 2005). Tokyo took the big step in March 2005 of closing its waters to foreign ships lacking liability insurance against spills and other accidents. Since almost no North Korean vessels carried such insurance, the new requirement could halt most shipping traffic between the two countries. Seoul and Beijing, however, were loath to take part in any actions that would further isolate the North.

By its fifth year in office, the Bush team could claim it had been firm as well as flexible in dealing with a rogue state. It had eschewed what it depicted as the arms control mirage created by the 1994 Agreed Framework. Even as the Bush team exposed what it said was the evil duplicity of the DPRK government, the White House also managed to display a sober caution. Instead of rattling its missiles, the Bush administration had insisted on multilateral talks to deal with a problem that concerned all of North and East Asia. So long as no deal was reached with Pyongyang, however, Washington could stick to its rationale for going ahead with a NMD. An added boon was that, since North Korea looked ominous, Japan would chip in and take part in missile defense.

But the track record since 2000 offered cold comfort for anyone worried about U.S., Northeast Asia, or global security. Failure to derail North Korea’s nuclear ambitions promised not only continued high tension between
Pyongyang and Washington, but also mounting pressures on Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan to go nuclear. This chain reaction, sooner or later, would alarm and energize China and then Russia, galvanizing India and then Pakistan to greater nuclear efforts.

There was still a chance that, having wasted more than four years, the United States and North Korea could move toward a mutual gain solution in Bush's second term. Signs emerged in summer and autumn 2005 that the top decision makers in Washington were taking a new look at North Korea and may have wanted to reach an accord with Pyongyang, even if this meant departing from earlier principles or preferences. The administration seemed to give lead U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill some leeway to conduct give-and-take negotiations, unlike the hapless Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly, usually under strict orders about what he could or could not say. Kelly's demeanor suggested that serious negotiations were not on the agenda – leading to an incident in late 2003 when DPRK diplomats stopped him in a hallway in an effort to launch a dialogue.

Would the up-and-down cycle of hope and hostility ever cease? If so, when and how? Washington and Pyongyang could revive their earlier pledges of no hostile intent, but go further by buttressing them with security guarantees from Japan, China, and Russia. Like Libya and South Africa, North Korea could freeze and then terminate its nuclear and other WMD programs, subject to IAEA inspection – in return for immediate and long-term energy assistance. Instead of leading a hostile encirclement of this hermit kingdom, the United States could reduce barriers to trade with and technology transfer to North Korea. Americans, if they wished, could pocket $100 or $200 billion on a missile defense that, despite its cost, would probably prove a chimera. Both Koreas could benefit from a neutralization accord something like the 1955 deal that facilitated the withdrawal of foreign troops from Austria (Harrison 2002; Clemens 2003).

To reach a deal, however, each side would have to forgo its demand that the other side act first. Zero-sum sequencing would have to stop. Instead, security and disarmament would have to advance in tandem or nearly in tandem as one side reciprocated the other's initiatives. Progress along these lines would be complicated but would not require rocket-science diplomacy. Dependence between the DPRK and USA is asymmetric but each party is vulnerable in many ways to the other. Common recognition of each side's needs could guide negotiations toward an accord oriented to mutual gain. Half a century earlier, a strategy that created values for each side helped America convert erstwhile foes Germany and Japan into dependable partners. A similar strategy, premised on reciprocity and appropriate safeguards, could work in Northeast Asia.
Indeed, the Korean case is just one of many in the web of today’s mutual vulnerabilities in which “actors are more likely to enhance their objectives if they can frame and implement value-creating strategies aimed at mutual gain than if they pursue value-claiming policies aimed at one sided gain.” An instrumental approach geared to “exploitation may yield short-term benefits for one side but tends to boomerang in the long run, so that costs outweigh benefits (Clemens 2004: 41).”

Notes

1. Linton grew up in a Presbyterian missionary family in South Korea. He first visited North Korea in 1979 as an observer to an international table tennis meet. Later, while studying and teaching Korean religion at Columbia University, he met twice with DPRK leader Kim Il Song – once as an interpreter for Billy Graham and another time alone. When the DPRK asked for assistance in 1995, Linton left Columbia and founded the Eugene Bell Foundation to coordinate shipments of donated food. In 1997 the DPRK Ministry of Public Health asked Linton to focus the organization’s work on tuberculosis. By 2003 Linton had visited North Korea more than 60 times, traveling into every district. See Linton 2003.

2. For her part, Dr. Albright also liked symbols: She was famous for wearing a decorative pins suited to the occasion and her own frame of mind. When she saw Jo again in Pyongyang, he wore a pin bearing the image of Kim Il Sung; she, her largest stars and stripes pin.

3. The Bush team did not initially regard Vladimir Putin’s Russia as a serious military threat or even as a major player on the world scene. Only after the 9/11 attack did Bush seek better relations with Russia – mainly to win Moscow’s support for or acquiescence in America’s war on terror, a quest later reinforced by hopes of importing Russian oil. The NPR issued at the end of 2001 declared that a nuclear “contingency involving Russia, while plausible, is not expected.” In 2001–2002 the White House seemed unconcerned by Russian warnings that if Washington abrogated the 1972 antiballistic missile treaty, the Duma would not ratify the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty “2” (signed by George the Elder in 1993). The treaty constrained Russia far more than the United States, because it forbade multiple warheads on ICBMs. Without such weapons, Russia might need to build a new generation of ICBMs. One day after Washington abrogated the ABM treaty in June 2002, Moscow denounced the START 2 treaty and was again free to deploy MIRVed missiles.

4. The treaty permitted each side to keep – not destroy – the nuclear warheads withdrawn from its deployed arsenal. The U.S. Senate approved ratification of the treaty in March 2003 as did the Russian Duma three months later. Reporting on the Duma’s action, the newspaper Moskovskii Komsomolets (May 15, 2003) ran the headline: “A Nuclear Bomb in Stars and Stripes.” The first paragraph declared that while the treaty “does not actually bind Russia to anything, the obligations of the United States under it are even less binding than Russia’s.” The U.S. Department of Energy announced in June 2004 that the U.S. would retain thousands of additional warheads in storage and hedge toward building more warheads in the future. The Energy Department said the stockpile would be supported by a “responsive infrastructure,” including plans for a new facility to make key nuclear bomb components, research into new nuclear weapon designs, and a heightened readiness to resume nuclear testing. Stockpiled weapons, of course, could be redeployed. Daryl G. Kimball, executive
director of the Arms Control Association, observed on June 3, 2004 that the Bush adminis-
tration’s plan would not significantly alter the number of existing nuclear warheads and
delivery systems and could only marginally affect the residual nuclear potential of the
United States and Russia.

5. Wolfowitz became probably the most articulate hawk on invading Iraq, often justifying his
views by intelligence reports by Ahmad Chalabi, the Iraqi exile who claimed to be leading
an underground resistance to Saddam Hussein. In May 2004, however, even the Pentagon
cut off financial subsidies to Chalabi, amid reports he had funneled U.S. secrets to Iran.
Wolfowitz was said to be leader of the “neo-cons” shaping U.S. policy and a Straussian – a
follower of philosopher Leo Strauss who, his critics alleged, urged policy makers to use eso-
teric language in the pursuit of their objectives. To defeat totalitarians, the argument ran, any
means are justified. Some “Straussians,” however, said their teacher’s teaching had no rel-
evance to Bush policies in Iraq or elsewhere.

6. For India the decision to proceed with nuclear weapons derived as much from Hindu nation-
alist concern for India’s self-image as from worries about foreign threats or pressures
(Perkovich 1999).

7. Direct aid consisted mainly of food and medical supplies. The industrial zone in North Korea
where fifteen ROK companies had begun operations occupied just 23 acres. They paid their
DPRK workers $57 about month – a wage so low that it helped them compete with indus-
tries in China (Goh Kun 2005).

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