



A Pushover for Pyongyang

(Published in *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2008)

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Colaboraciones n° 2297

May 19, 2008

The Bush administration is on the verge of signing an agreement with North Korea that, it argues, will result in the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In practice, however, the likely outcome will be the continuation of North Korea's nuclear weapons program and the proliferation of North Korean nuclear technology around the world.

The evolution of the administration's approach to North Korea has been an object lesson in muddled diplomacy, a "how-not-to" handle rogue states. Six years ago, the Bush administration cancelled the Clinton administration's Agreed Framework Between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, holding back a generous package of aid and light water nuclear reactors that had been

promised to Pyongyang in exchange for giving up its plutonium-based nuclear weapons program. At the time, the Bush administration accused North Korea of cheating on the agreement by establishing a covert uranium enrichment program. Intelligence and the North Koreans themselves affirmed those charges.

Since the signing of the original Agreed Framework in 1994, North Korea has detonated a nuclear weapon, exported a nuclear reactor to Syria, aided Libya's incipient (and since dismantled) nuclear program by providing uranium hexafluoride (a precursor to the enrichment of uranium), aided the terrorist group Hezbollah with the construction of reinforced tunnels that emboldened the group and enhanced its capacity

to wage war with Israel, provided sophisticated long range missiles to Iran, Syria, Yemen, Egypt and Libya, masterminded the counterfeiting of U.S. one hundred dollar bills, money laundered development aid from the United Nations, and likely starved to death hundreds of thousands of its own people.

This is an impressive record of international and domestic mayhem. Over the years, the American response has been to impose, either under law or executive order, a web of interlocking sanctions the collective impact of which is to preclude foreign assistance, exports, imports, trading preferences and all the other accoutrements of relations with normal countries.

In the case of most of the penalties imposed over the last decades, the president enjoys the right to waive sanctions under particular circumstances. However, in the case of at least one law, the so-called Glenn amendment to the Arms Export Control Act (which is triggered by a nuclear detonation), Congress must act to remove the sanctions imposed. The State Department is now pressing the House and Senate to do just that.

Indeed, far from seeking a narrow carve out of sanctions in order to facilitate verification of North Korean disarmament, the Bush administration appears intent on the rehabilitation of North Korea and a broad lifting of sanctions. American officials have committed to remove North Korea from the list of state

sponsors of terrorism, remove restrictions tied to the Trading with the Enemy Act and waive other sanctions where the president is empowered to do so.

In other words, the Bush administration, having begun its term repudiating the concept of the Agreed Framework because, as Secretary Rice then said, Pyongyang cheated by "pursuing another path to a nuclear weapon, the so-called 'highly enriched uranium' path", and having then initiated the Six-Party talks with the intention, as President Bush suggested, of "North Korea completely, verifiably, and irreversibly dismantl[ing] its nuclear programs," will end its term by agreeing to an accord that essentially rewards Pyongyang for its misbehavior and falls short of the president's own demands.

Sequentially, we have demanded North Korea "dismantle" its nuclear program but have settled for "disabling." We have demanded a "complete declaration of all nuclear programs," but have accepted a deal that allows North Korea to avoid disclosing details of its program to enrich uranium and its assistance to Syria, Iran, Libya, Egypt or various subnational terror groups.

Three important questions remain: How did this happen? Will the United States Congress acquiesce in the administration's plan? And what impact can be expected?

Regarding the first question, it appears that certain officials have developed the North Korean equiva-

lent of Stockholm syndrome. So eager are they to ink a deal, they are not only willing to jettison meaningful requirements, but have stooped to making arguments on behalf of the North Korean dictatorship to the U.S. Congress and the American public. Why so eager? We can only speculate that the unpopular Iraq war, the failure of efforts to contain Iran, and the sputtering Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts have produced a drive within the hallways at Foggy Bottom to accomplish something for the history books.

Will Congress go along? Notwithstanding expressions of concern from experts and opinion leaders on both left and right, some in Congress appear poised to sign up to the new North Korea deal. The Senate Armed Services Committee recently sent a Defense Authorization measure to the full Senate that includes a provision waiving the Glenn amendment -- nominally for the purpose of providing aid to dismantle the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon. Practically, however, it is broad enough to permit vast amounts of assistance to the Kim Il Sung regime. The House Foreign Affairs Committee has also sent leg-

islation to the full House. That provision, however, has significant restrictions on the easing of sanctions tied to North Korea's support to terrorist-supporting states and the accord's verification requirements.

Here we get to the heart of the matter: Is an accord with Pyongyang that manages to make some undetermined progress on disarming North Korea and allows a marginal engagement with the regime worth the price? Doubtless among would-be nuclear weapons states such as Iran and Syria, the deal will be seen as a model. Rewards without concessions and disarmament without verification are standards that even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad can live up to. The likely outcome? Iran, Syria, and with them Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and others will line up to become nuclear states. Meanwhile, even a partial lifting of sanctions by the U.S. will unlock the door for other countries and United Nations agencies to open their coffers to North Korea. The result will sustain the world's most ruthless regime, prolonging the danger it poses not only to its population but to the entire civilized world.

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