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"The North Korean Problem", Japan and the US: The Politics of Hypocrisy

By Gavan McCormack

1. Nuclear Politics and Hypocrisy

For 60 years the world has faced no greater threat than nuclear weapons. Yet nuclear politics, in principle the most urgent for human survival, has been in practice the most ridden with hypocrisy.

Mohammed ElBaradei, Director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has described as "unworkable" the way of thinking that it is "morally reprehensible for some counties to pursue weapons of mass destruction yet morally acceptable for others to rely on them for security and indeed to continue to refine their capacities and postulate plans for their use." [1] While he did not spell out particular countries, the nuclear superpowers plainly fill the category of countries that "rely on.., refine..., postulate plans for" use of nuclear weapons, while they undoubtedly see as "morally reprehensible" the attempt of other countries, notably North Korea and Iran, to do likewise. While plainly hypocritical, the former is the position of the United States (and its allies, such as Japan).

Mohamed ElBaradei delivering his Nobel Lecture in the Oslo City Hall, December 10, 2005. Photo: Arne Knudsen

In May 2005, the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference collapsed in failure. It was a disaster and an outrage, but scarcely a surprise. Responsibility was equally shared by the established nuclear powers whose hypocrisy discredited the system and those outside the club seeking to justify themselves according to the super-power principle: without nuclear weapons there is no security. Jimmy Carter summed it up: "The United States is the major culprit in the erosion of the NPT. While claiming to be protecting the world from proliferation threats in Iraq, Libya, Iran and North Korea ... they also have abandoned past pledges and now threaten first use of nuclear weapons against nonnuclear states." [2]

Despite the evidence, especially since 9/11, that nuclear weapons are no guarantee of security, the nuclear club powers (US, Britain, Russia, France, China) ignore the obligation they entered 30 years ago under Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and reaffirmed in 2000 as an "unequivocal undertaking" for "the elimination of their nuclear arsenals." The dominant Western powers among them also turn a blind eye to the secret accumulation of a huge nuclear arsenal on the part of a favored state (Israel) that refuses to join the NPT and thumbs its nose at the idea of non-proliferation. The United States has also just lifted a thirty-year ban on sales of civilian nuclear technology to India, describing it as "a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology" even though civil nuclear energy cooperation with a non-signatory contravenes the very essence of the NPT.

The United States itself in March 2003 launched a devastating war on Iraq based on a groundless charge that that country was engaged in nuclear weapons production. Yet it maintains its own arsenal of around 10,000 warheads, deploys shells tipped with depleted uranium that spread deadly pollution likely to persist for centuries, has withdrawn from the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty

(ABM) and declared its intent not to ratify the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), has adopted (in 2006) a production schedule of 250 nuclear warheads per year, is making great efforts to develop a new generation of "low yield" mini-nukes, and promises to extend its nuclear hegemony over the earth to space. Robert McNamara, who used to run the American system, in March 2005 described it as "illegal and immoral." [3]

Japan is well known as a nuclear victim country which maintains "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" (non-production, non-possession, and non-introduction into Japan) and has a "peace constitution." Yet the core of Japan's defense policy is nuclear weapons. [4] True, the weapons in questions are not Japanese but American. Japan clings to the assurance that any enemy attacking or threatening it with nuclear weapons would be devastated by American nuclear counter-attack. Its non-nuclear "principles" therefore amount to no more than the pretence, while its actual policy is unswerving commitment to (American) nuclear weapons. So supportive has Japan been of American nuclear militarism that in 1969 it entered secret clauses into its agreement with the United States so that the "principles" could be bypassed and a Japanese "blind eye" turned towards American vessels carrying nuclear weapons docking in or transiting Japan, an arrangement that lasted until 1992. [5]

The Japan of "non-nuclear principles" is also in process of becoming itself a nuclear superpower, the sole "non-nuclear" state that is committed to possessing both enrichment and reprocessing facilities, as well as to developing a fast-breeder reactor. Its stocks of plutonium amount to over 40 tons, the equivalent of 5,000 Nagasaki-type weapons. Its determined pursuit of a nuclear cycle, giving it the wherewithal to be able to go quickly nuclear itself should that Rubicon ever be reached, is in defiance of the February 2005 appeal from the Director-General of the IAEA for a five-year freeze on all enrichment and reprocessing works. [6] Japan's forty tons of plutonium may be compared with the 10 to 15 kilograms of fissile material that North Korea was accused of illicit diversion in the 1994 crisis, or the 0.7 grams that South Korea produced in the early 1980s and for which it was severely rebuked by the IAEA. [7] When Japan's Rokkasho facility – probably the world's most expensive facility in modern history, expected to cost around 19 trillion yen over the term of its use - commences operation in July 2007 it will be capable of reprocessing eight hundred tons of spent fuel per annum, yielding each year about eight more tons (or 1,000 warheads-worth) of plutonium. The best estimates are that a one-percentage loss of materials in such a vast system would be impossible to detect. Japan also regularly ships highly toxic wastes across vast stretches of rough and dangerous ocean, each shipment equivalent to about 17 atomic bombs-worth, in defiance of countries en route and despite risks of piracy or terrorist hijacking.

In the United Nations, Japan declines to associate itself with the "New Agenda Coalition" (NAC) that came into existence following the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998 to try to exert more urgent pressure for disarmament and non-proliferation. For Japan, the NAC was too "confrontational," in other words, too directly challenging the nuclear privilege of the US and the other nuclear privileged powers. For Japan to join NAC, against US wishes, might also have been to weaken the US-provided "umbrella." While Japan therefore stresses non-proliferation, insisting on North Korean obligation, it is passive on disarmament, i.e., specifically downplaying the obligations of the US and other superpowers. Its defense policy rests on the *attachment to*, perhaps even the implicit *longing for,* nuclear weapons. It is therefore cool to the idea of a Northeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

Northeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone

2. The Problem of Perspective

While it is common in the Western (US-centered) world to think of the "North Korea Problem" in terms of a threatening, nuclear-obsessed, tiny and irrational country with a political system based on "great" and "dear" leaders that refuses to follow common sense, from North Korea the world looks very different. The "problem" is the United States, and the half century of hostile, violent and always intimidating confrontation from the intervention that divided the country in 1945 and the devastating war of 1950 to 1953 to the hostility that continues to this day.

Washington is outraged over the program it believes North Korea has been following over the past decade and a half to produce nuclear weapons. Pyongyang, on the other hand, looks back over more than half century of nuclear intimidation by the US. During the Korean War, military commanders MacArthur and Ridgway, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all at one time or other favoured nuclear attack on North Korea and were restrained only by the fear of possible Soviet retaliation. Then, for almost the entire period of the Cold War, American nuclear weapons were stored in South Korea - in violation of the Armistice Agreement of 1953 - ready for instant deployment and use, and even after their withdrawal, at South Korean insistence, much of North Korea continues to be targeted by US sea and air-based nuclear war-fighting systems.

Set in its historical context, the North Korean decision to "go nuclear," however reprehensible, is neither illogical nor incomprehensible. After experiencing explicit nuclear intimidation for decades, it seems to have decided that its security, like that of the super-powers, could only be accomplished by either turning itself into a nuclear power and achieving the impregnability that is assumed to go with that status, or by using a supposed or real nuclear weapons program as a negotiating ploy to achieve security from nuclear and non-nuclear threat. Whether or not it actually possesses any such weapons, the lesson it (and indeed any other country feeling insecure) would reasonably draw from the invasion of Iraq, and the acceptance into the nuclear club of India and Pakistan, would be the need to persuade its enemies that it did. In the twisted logic of nuclear politics, that which renders all humanity insecure becomes that without which no country can consider itself secure.

In 1994, the confrontation between the US and North Korea degenerated to the brink of war, staved off only at the last minute by an accommodation known as the Geneva "Agreed Framework." Under it, North Korea froze its graphite reactors and accepted international inspection of its plutonium wastes, while the US promised to construct two alternative, light water reactors , supply heavy oil for energy generation till the reactors came on stream, and to move towards political and economic normalization. During the eight years that the Framework functioned, relations between the two countries were stabilized and late in the Clinton administration there were dramatic portents of reconciliation. In the end, however, all that North Korea actually got was the supply of heavy oil, which was then cut off in the middle of the winter of 2002-3. The reactors, supposed to be generating power from 2003, never progressed much beyond some large holes in the ground. Rather than steps towards normalization, the George W. Bush administration came to power in 2001 denouncing North Korea, referring to it in January 2002 as part of the "Axis of Evil."

The Framework broke down in particular over the US insistence that Pyongyang had been pursuing a two-track nuclear weapons program: the one that was subject of the 1994 Agreement, using the wastes from the Yongbyon reactors to process plutonium for "Nagasaki-type" nuclear devices, and the other, a covert program using uranium enrichment to produce "Hiroshima-type" devices. According to Under-Secretary of State James Kelly, officials in Pyongyang confessed such a program to him during his October 2002 Pyongyang visit . This confession (denied by North Korea, which insisted that Kelly had misunderstood its statement of the *right* to such a program as a statement of its possession) led the US to suspend its commitments under the Framework. This in turn prompted North Korea in the following January to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and resume its weapons program.

For the United States, elimination of any North Korean nuclear weapons and related programs (plutonium and uranium-based) is the overriding, but far from exclusive, goal. It also demands demilitarization, especially the scrapping of North Korea's missile program, and major political changes (in respect of human rights). Some within the Bush administration are also committed to regime change. North Korea, for its part, seeks resolution of the problems that have plagued it for so long: isolation, intimidation and sanctions, through the conversion of the ceasefire of 1953 into a permanent peace treaty and the "normalization " of relations of all kinds – security, political, diplomatic, economic - with the United States and Japan.

At the heart of the booming Northeast Asian region, it is anomalous and destabilizing for such confrontation to persist. Increasingly, neighbor countries now play an active role in seeking to resolve it.

3. The Beijing Initiative

From 2003, China began to play a crucial role in attempting to broker a solution, hosting from August 2003 what beca me known as the "Six-Sided Talks, " bringing together the key protagonists, the United States and North Korea, together with the neighbor states – South Korea, China, Russia and Japan .

For two years, the talks produced little. The US representative was under instructions not to speak to his North Korean opposite number save to state and restate US demands, calling on North Korea to undertake what he called "CVID" (complete, verifiable, irreversible, dismantling) of all nuclear programs, to scrap its missiles and reduce its conventional forces, and to address terrorism and human rights concerns , while he dismissed North Korea's demand for a guarantee it would not be attacked, and its pleas for comprehensive normalization, as unnecessary, irrelevant, premature, and occasionally as "blackmail." After the August 2003 session, asked what the biggest obstacle in the negotiations had been, the Chinese chair, Wang Yi, replied, "The American policy towards DPRK – this is the main problem we are facing." [8]

Despite regular statements from Washington about the unity of the five countries that sat with North Korea around the table, disunity was in fact characteristic. Even on the US claim of a North Korean confession to a covert uranium enrichment program, central to the case of North Korean bad faith, the US was unable to persuade its Beijing conference partners. Late in 2004, even after a concentrated diplomatic effort by the Second Bush administration, both the Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing and the Director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service explicitly rejected the US claims. [9] By then, the manipulation of intelligence to justify war on Iraq was well known, and the intelligence on North Korea could not escape similar suspicion. The US journal *Foreign Affairs* published an analysis by the highly placed Washington observer, Selig Harrison, who pronounced the evidence inconclusive, based on a deliberate favoring of "worst case scenarios." [10] Evidence of North Korean purchases of aluminum from Russia (and of failed attempts to import it from Germany), and of the Pakistan-based A.Q. Khan network, point to attempts by North Korea to procure the materials for an enrichment program, but its denial of actually having an active and ongoing one is plausible. In any case, the US failed to convince its partners of a crucial aspect of its case.

What had begun in the Beijing conference forum as a US attempt to mobilize a united front of pressure on North Korea began to turn, under South Korean, Chinese, and Russian "reverse pressure," into a true, multilateral, negotiating forum. Two years into the negotiations, the US softened its rhetoric and ceased its abuse, showing a readiness to talk with the North Koreans and shifting from talk about the need for "regime change" in North Korea to "regime transformation." In itself, it was a minor shift in terminology. In September 2005, f earful of becoming what Jack Pritchard, formerly the State Department's top North Korea expert, described as "a minority of one … isolated from the mainstream of its four other allies and friends in the Six-Party Talks," [11] and facing an ultimatum from the Chinese chair of the conference to sign or else bear the blame for their breakdown, [12] the US yielded. The parties to the Beijing "Six-Sided" conference reached a historic agreement on principles and objectives.

Under the September 2005 agreement, North Korea would scrap "all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs," return to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and allow international inspections. In return, it would be granted diplomatic recognition, normalization, and economic benefits, including, at "an appropriate time," a light-water reactor. [13]

Several major points were left unclear: whether "existing programs" that North Korea would scrap included the enriched uranium weapons program on which Washington insisted but whose existence Pyongyang denied , and when and under what conditions would North Korea become entitled to a civilian nuclear energy program. The right to a civilian nuclear program is described in Article 4 of the Non Proliferation Treaty as "inalienable. " South Korea , Russia and China took the view that North Korea should enjoy its right to a civil, energy program once it returned to the Treaty, but the US head of delegation, Christopher Hill, had ruled it out for North Korea.

It was also notable that long-range missile programs and " human rights concerns " were not addressed in the September agreement, although they remained major concerns in Washington and had been vigorously argued by Japan and the United States." The reluctance to include any reference to "human rights" on the part of China in particular, which views American "human rights" campaigns as a cloak for attempts to achieve regime change and extend US influence, is well known. As for South Korea, it is deeply concerned over human rights questions in North Korea, but takes the view that policies of "Sunshine"and non-interference are the best ways to achieve long-term improvement.

However vague and incomplete, the Beijing consensus of September 2005 declared principles that conformed to international law, recognized the interests of regional countries for a denuclearized peninsula, and responded to North Korea's complaints. Yet the Agreement held for little more than a day. In both Pyongyang and Washington, hardliners seized the initiative to block possible

reconciliation. North Korea made its commitment to end its weapons program and return to NPT Safeguards dependent on getting a light water reactor first. [14] The US responded by insisting that no light water reactor could even be *considered* until all other steps necessary to bring North Korea back into the NPT were complete . It then summarily terminated the KEDO Agreement (the Light Water Reactor project at the heart of the 1994 agreement, which had remained frozen, but not cancelled, till then). [15] Pyongyang's view of "appropriate time" for a North Korean LWR was "now," Washington's the distant future.

One may well wonder why North Korea should have insisted on a civilian energy program and in particular its claim to a light water reactor. There is a certain logic to it. North Korea has a chronic energy problem, is rich in uranium, and for long has dreamed of using its resource to solve its problem. In the 1980s, when North Korean president Kim Il Sung succeeded in persuading the Russians to provide him with a reactor, he insisted on the newest, light water (Russian VVER) type, rather than a graphite one, i.e. the most advanced technology rather than the technology most compatible with a weapons program, and was apparently extremely angry when he learned that they had sent him the graphite model instead. [16] In the 1990s, Kim Il Sung was persuaded to sign on to the Agreed Framework because of the American promise to supply him a LWR. Yet the American government was reluctant from the start, dragged its heels, and from 2001 the George W. Bush administration sought the first opportunity – which came in 2002 - to scrap it. In Beijing from 2003, North Korea again pressed the case for a LWR and the Bush team opposed it till the very last minute and, when it agreed to it under pressure, probably had little intention of ever honoring its commitment.

The wisdom, economics, and safety of nuclear power may be open to serious question, and the provisions of Article 4 of the NPT may deserve revision, but it was scarcely credible for the US (and Japan) to demand that North Korea alone should be deprived of a right that was generally recognized and is even entrenched in the very treaty that it is being told it must return to, especially when both Japan and South Korea currently produce around 40 per cent of their electricity from nuclear power stations and China is planning massive expansion in the sector.

Whether a LWR is the appropriate way to address North Korea's acute energy crisis is another matter. Such reactors are fabulously expensive, take years to construct, and would require many billions of dollars upgrading the national grid before any electricity from it could be circulated. However desirable as a symbol of prestige it might be, it seems hardly appropriate to the needs of the economy. On both sides, the light water reactor becomes the irrational symbol of the deeper issues of confrontation, lack of trust (on both sides), and insecurity (on North Korea's side).

4. Non-Nuclear Considerations – Crime and Human Rights

The Beijing Agreement was only possible because in Washington, for a time, pragmatic forces that gave priority to nuclear and missile concerns over "regime change"and "human rights"were briefly in the ascendancy. That ascendancy did not last long. Following what the head of the Bush administration's North Korea working group, David Asher, referred to as a "strategic decision" at the highest level, policy direction shifted late in 2005 from realists in the State Department to a more highly charged and highly-placed group directed by Vice-President Dick Cheney and coordinated by Under-Secretary for Arms Control Bob Joseph, who were determined to squeeze North Korea on every front, especially in regard to its alleged illegal activities and its human rights record. [17] The purport of the "strategic decision" seems to have been to widen the scope of negotiations from nuclear matters, on which some progress had been made, to the nature of the regime itself, thus neutralizing the Beijing process, with the ultimate objective not of normalizing relations but of toppling the regime.

Allegations of North Korean involvement in narcotics are far from new. The Pong Su, a North Korean ship, was seized in Australian waters in 2002 after unloading 150 kilograms of heroin. Two men from the ship were convicted and sentenced to long prison terms, although the captain and several crewmembers were eventually acquitted. [18] However, the allegations of narcotics dealing were stepped up in 2005 and extended into a comprehensive campaign of denunciation of North Korea as a criminal organization. In September, the US government ordered suspension of transactions with a Macau-based bank that was alleged to have helped North Korea launder drug and counterfeit money and froze the assets of eight companies accused of involvement in weapons sales, publicized defector allegations of regime engagement in large-scale opium production, and accused North Korea of the manufacture and distribution of counterfeit hundred dollar bills, "supernotes." [19] The picture that emerged was of "an extensive criminal network involving North Korean diplomats and officials, Chinese gangsters and other organized crime syndicates, prominent Asian banks, Irish guerillas and a former KGB agent." [20] The coordinator of the Bush administration's North Korea working group described North Korea as

"the only government in the world today that can be identified as being actively involved in directing crime as a central part of its national economic strategy and foreign policy. … In essence, North Korea has become a ' soprano state ' - a government guided by a Worker's Party leadership whose actions, attitudes, and affiliations increasingly resemble those of an organized crime family more than a normal nation. " [21]

The newly appointed US ambassador to South Korea, Alexander Vershbow, spoke in similar terms, denouncing North Korea as a "criminal regime" responsible for "weapons exports to rogue states, narcotics trafficking as a state activity and counterfeiting of our money on a large scale. [22] "Normalization" with such a regime, Washington implied, was no more likely than normalization of relations between the US government and the Mafia.

US ambassador Alexander Vershbow

North Korea 's Foreign Ministry spokesman on 11 December retaliated by referring to ambassador Vershbow's statement as a "declaration of war," saying the talks were "suspended for an indefinite period," and a few days later demanding Vershbow's recall.

The campaign on criminal charges, as that on uranium enrichment, rested heavily on US intelligence sources. Given the profound distaste for North Korea expressed by the President and the record on Iraq, US intelligence was inevitably suspect. South Korea's National Intelligence Service, which had good reason to be well informed on its northern neighbor, advanced the contrary view, stating that North Korea had engaged in counterfeiting in the 1990s, but not since 1998. [23]

The US denunciation of North Korea on grounds of counterfeiting was dubious for another reason. At Secretary Rumsfeld's instructions, the Pentagon in 2003 drew up something called "Operations Plan 5030," a revision of its earlier plan for war against North Korea that featured destabilization, including "disrupting financial networks and sowing disinformation." [24] In other words, if North Korea today were indeed engaged in counterfeiting hundred dollar bills, it was taking a leaf out of the US's own book. Unlike criminal counterfeiting, the roots of counterfeiting as a political stratagem are themselves political and resolution is only likely to be accomplished by political processes, especially the ending of hostilities.

Since nobody would defend North Korea on its human rights record and few would deny the likelihood of its involvement in crime, however, these were issues on which Washington could expect to be able to mobilize support easily and on which diplomatic resolution was highly unlikely. Congress in 2004 adopted (following a unanimous vote in both Houses) a "North Korean Human Rights Act" and a special U.S. envoy for North Korean human rights took up office in August 2005. In December, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution jointly sponsored by Japan, the US and the European Union, condemning North Korea for multiple human rights abuses. Resolution 10437 of 16 December 2005 listed "torture, public executions, arbitrary detention, the lack of due process, extensive use of forced labour, high rates of infant malnutrition and restrictions on humanitarian organizations … severe restrictions on freedom of religion, assembly and on free movement within the country and abroad, as well as trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, forced marriage and forced abortions."

As the focus shifted to "human rights," the Bush administration became steadily more active in interventions along North Korea's borders and via the airwaves, supporting an "East European" model of undermining and destabilizing the regime by non-military means. The right-wing Hudson Institute's Michael Horowitz, one of the authors of the Human Rights Law, on 23 December 2004 stated his belief that North Korea would implode within the year. He also spoke of the possibility of finding generals within the North Korean military prepared to work with the U.S. and using them to bring about a coup. "Defense Committee Chairman Kim Jong Il," he added, "won't be able to enjoy the next Christmas."" [25]

In a similar vein, Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute, another prominent neo-conservative intellectual, wrote a November 2004 article entitled "Tear down this Tyranny."[26] Like Horowitz, he directed his venom at both Korean governments, referring to "the pro-appeasement crowd in the South Korean government" who had turned that country into a place "increasingly governed in accordance with graduate-school 'peace studies' desiderata." From this perspective, "negotiation" with North Korea was out of the question. North Korea had only to submit. To encourage it, the appropriate diplomatic tool was a "coalition for punishment," according to Victor Cha, who in December 2004 took up the position of Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council. [27]

Like American nuclear double standards, Japanese human rights rhetoric had a strong flavour of hypocrisy because of its lack of a universal moral frame. Outrage at being the victim of North Korean abduction of some dozen or so of its citizens two and a half decades ago outweighed any consideration of its own responsibility for the mass abductions and violations of Korean human rights by Japan a few decades earlier and inclined it to support the US cry for punishment. At the Beijing table, and in addressing the North Korean problem in general, Japan's position was therefore closest to the American. In some respects – as its late 2002 suspension of humanitarian food aid to put pressure on North Korea over the abductions – it went further than the US, and within the Japanese Diet the call for explicit sanctions moved towards the top of the political agenda.

The focus thus shifted in 2005 from nuclear questions to questions of criminality and human rights, and from Beijing, where the US had found it increasingly difficult to call the shots, to the global arena. The efforts of the regional powers, South Korea, China and Russia, to achieve a negotiated solution were thereby undercut. They may find it harder to resist a campaign on crime and human rights issues than to continue putting pressure on both North Korea and the United States to resolve their nuclear differences.

5. Prospects

However reprehensible North Korea may be, its grievances are also serious. Its demand for relief from nuclear intimidation should have been heeded long ago, and its plea for "normalization" as the price of abandonment of its nuclear program, often referred to

as "blackmail," is not unreasonable. For around forty years, the world was indifferent to the nuclear threat that North Korea faced from the United States, and only when North Korea began to develop what in Great Power parlance is described as a "deterrent" was world attention aroused.

North Korea 's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the unfreezing of its plutonium stocks and restarting of its graphite reactors in 2003 was destabilizing, and it must be persuaded to return to the treaty and its accompanying obligations. However, the 1994 Agreement broke down because of serious breaches on both sides. If North Korea has produced the weapons it proclaimed in March 2005 , that would certainly be in defiance of the international will as expressed in the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 and the Korean South-North "Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" Agreement of January 1992. *If* any country has the right to develop nuclear weapons as a deterrent it has to be North Korea, because it has faced explicit nuclear threat longer than any country on earth . Even the International Court of Justice (in a 1996 Advisory Opinion) refused to rule that the attempted construction of nuclear defenses by a state under threat of nuclear attack is illegal. [28] Today North Korea uses the only negotiating instrument it possesses to press its case for removal of intimidation, including nuclear intimidation, the lifting of sanctions, and economic and political normalization. Resolution of these problems is the key to peace, cooperation, and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

The steady pressure designed to force collapse and regime change in North Korea is risky. The Pyongyang regime is unlikely to surrender and if pushed to the wall is likely to resist. Given the fact that, according to veteran journalist Seymour Hersh (in the *New Yorker*, April 17, 2006), the US in 2006 was actively considering use of nuclear weapons against Iran, it could hardly be doubted that similar plans were in store for North Korea. Occasional glimpses of the US nuclear strategy for Korea are scarcely reassuring. In the late 1970s, eager to reassure South Koreans that it would stop at nothing in their defense, the Carter administration drew up plans to respond to any move by North Korean forces into South Korea by dropping nuclear bombs to within *9 miles of Seoul's Post Office*. [29] The government in Seoul also recently released details of a more recent (2005) study. [30] The use of US nuclear weapons in a "surgical" strike on North Korea's nuclear facilities would, in a worst case scenario, make the whole of Korea uninhabitable for a decade, and if things worked out somewhat better, kill 80 per cent of those living within a ten to fifteen kilometer radius in the first two months and spread radiation over an area stretching as far as 1,400 kilometers, including Seoul. The Pentagon's "Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations," posted on the web in March 2005, made clear that nuclear weapons were fully integrated with "conventional" war fighting capacity.

In the confrontation between the US and North Korea, the observer is hard-put to think which is the more defiant of international law and principle. Unlike the US, North Korea has not committed aggressive war (at least in the past half century), threatened any neighbor with nuclear weapons, or attempted to justify the practice of torture and assassination. The suffering and denial of human rights suffered by citizens of North Korea can scarcely be greater than, say, those of prisoners at Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo. Plainly, the North Korean state is far from international norms of behaviour but, seen in its historical context, it is not so much "evil" as the fossilized encapsulation of the contradictions and failures of the 20th century. By a paradoxical feed-back process, no factor so helps sustain its dictatorship as US hostility, on which the Pyongyang regime feeds, justifying and reinforcing itself. Likewise, it may be said that no factor so helps the US maintain its military dominance over East Asia, its bases in Japan and South Korea, as the ability to point to possible North Korean aggression.

If one rules out pressure designed to achieve regime change by precipitating collapse, or by coup or invasion, because of the chaos that would be likely to bring to the entire region, what options are there? The South Korean, and to a lesser extent Russian and Chinese, approach to North Korea constitutes an alternative. Instead of squeezing North Korea, cutting trade and restricting the flow of funds to it and working covertly to achieve "regime change," South Korea, and the regional powers China and Russia, were all doing or planning deals, maximizing their cooperation and engagement in the two-way flow of funds and trade, and steadily incorporating North Korea into the networks of regional cooperation: i.e. precisely the reverse of US and Japanese practice.

Setting aside fundamentalist hostility to North Korea, South Korea began in the late 1990s to articulate an approach which it summed up in the word: "Sunshine." Though despised by the US government as wimpish, this approach has served to prise open doors through which different winds now blow in North Korea. The contest around the Beijing table, and the ongoing contest over North Korea, represents essentially a contest between the American attempt to achieve regime change by the mobilization of a "coalition for punishment" and the Seoul approach to seek windows through which "sunshine" can penetrate in to North Korea.

The people of South Korea won their own democracy though decades of struggle against oppressive and criminal regimes that were supported by the US and its close allies who now claim to stand for freedom and democracy. If the people of North Korea are to achieve the same victory, it is likely to be in their own way, in association with their southern compatriots, and by peaceful means. The campaign to "free" them is as likely to be disastrous in its consequences as the campaign to "free" Iraq. The Beijing agreement of September 2005 is the best agreement thus far and renewed pressure on both Washington and Pyongyang to honor and extend it is the only way forward.

Notes

[1] Mohammed ElBaradei, "Saving ourselves from self-destruction," *New York Times*, 12 February 2004.

[2] Jimmy Carter, "Saving nonproliferation," *The Washington Post*, 28 March 2005.

[3] "McNamara derides illegal nuke policies," AP, 10 March 2005.

[4] "The GOJ (Government of Japan) … cannot help but rely upon security policies which include nuclear deterrence." See discussion between Japanese NGO organizations and the arms control and disarmament specialists of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The real thinking of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)," http://www.peacedepot.org/e-news/nd/japanup.html .

[5] Morton Halperin, "The nuclear dimension of the U.S.-Japan alliance," Nautilus Institute, 1999. http://www.nautilus.org/archives/library/security/papers/US-Japan-4.html

[6] Mohammed ElBaradei, "Seven steps to raise world security," *The Financial Times*, 2 February 2005.

[7] http://www/iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2004/gov2004-84.pdf

[8] " South Korea, Russia wants diplomatic push, China blames US policy," Agence France-Presse, 1 September 2003.

[9] Selig Harrison, "Crafting Intelligence," March 2005. Japan Focus No 229. http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=229

[10] Selig Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?" *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2005, and at Japan Focus, No 186, http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=186

[11] Charles L. (Jack) Pritchard, "Six Party Talks Update: False Start or a Case for Optimism," Conference on "The Changing Korean

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[12] Joseph Kahn and David E. Sanger, "U.S.-Korean deal on arms leaves key points open," *New York Times*, 20 September 2005.

[13] For relevant documents, *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. xxix, 3, Fall 2005, pp. 45-464.

[14] North Korean Foreign Ministry Statement of 20 September 2005, ibid., p. 458.

[15] " U.S., Partners end N. Korean nuclear project," Associated Press, 22 November 2005.

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