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By Georgy Bulychev

North Korea's nuclear blast last October signaled the end of a cycle that started in October 2002 when the United States accused Pyongyang of running a clandestine uranium program. (The preceding cycle - 1994-2002 - was a period of a more-or-less stable "crisis freeze"). The 2006 nuclear test - regardless of the measure of its success - ended the long-standing argument about whether the North Korean nuclear program was the real McCoy or a bluff aimed at extorting benefits from the West. Assuming the latter, it was concluded that the answer to the bluff should be toughness and the refusal of concessions. Only by such toughness could North Korea be forced to drop its brinkmanship and stop its nuclear program (This was the application of negative motivation - *"the stick"*).

Those who believed that North Korean efforts were really caused by the regime's fear about its security and aimed at creating a cheap "strategic equalizer" to deter possible intrusion or interference aimed at regime change, on the other hand, argued that dialogue was needed to address North Korean concerns, satisfy its aid requests and arrive at a compromise that would require North Korea give up its WMD without any promises about the country's future. (This was the notion of *positive* motivation -*"carrots.")*

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill speaks to journalists at a hotel in Beijing, Feb. 2007.

In February 2007, as the resumption of the 6-party process shows, US policy changed from mostly sticks to more carrots. Why? Is it that North Korea had become more dangerous by acquiring nuclear potential? Although nobody can be sure whether the nuclear device is functional, there is a suspicion that it might be almost worthless from a military point of view. For one thing, it is doubtful that North Koreans have the technology to enable them to make a combat-ready nuclear weapon, although nasty surprises are not impossible. For another, they do not have – and will not have in the immediate future – any means of delivery. But North Koreans actually do not need a nuclear bomb to deter an all-out conflict - their conventional forces and subversive capacities are enough to contain any such attempt - and the Pentagon agreed a decade ago it was not worth it. Nor was there any obvious sense of increased threat on the part of its adversaries after Pyongyang went nuclear.

This means that it is the political fallout from the explosion that mattered. The ideology (even if not openly articulated) of the neoconservatives in 2002-2006 was that regime change was the solution to the WMD threat, and that no concessions were to be made to the North Korean regime, which was about to collapse anyway and should be assisted in that by sanctions, isolation and subversive activities, Such an approach also fitted nicely with US geopolitical aims - containing China (and Russia) and strengthening its alliance with Japan. To achieve these far-reaching goals, the North Korean nuclear program was a nuisance to be temporarily tolerated (or even something to be used to justify policies taken in response), and therefore the interests of non-proliferation fell prey to them. Hence the muted response to North Korea's escalation of the stakes, first by walking out of the NPT, then reprocessing fuel rods, then declaring its desire to acquire nuclear weapons, and then launching missiles. Even the unprecedented public statement that the nuclear test was imminent (which could have been interpreted as a last North Korean offer of dialogue) was ignored.

Only the actual test did the trick. It proved to be a shrewd step on Kim Jong Il's part, although it taught him a really bad lesson about how to get what he wants from the US. Faced with a real threat to non-proliferation and the danger of a domino effect (spurring Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan to develop nuclear weapons…), the US recognized the need to do something practical to eliminate the North Korean nuclear program. Of course, Democrat dominance in the Congress after the November 2006 elections, and the need to show some diplomatic success against the background of US problems in Iraq, also helped, but these were not, in our view, decisive.

North Korean poster: "With the people's united power, let's crush U.S. maneuvers to provoke nuclear war."

Will a new proportion of "more carrots, less sticks" help? In North Korea's case, sticks have had, and almost certainly will have, little or no effect. The reason is the peculiarity of its "besieged fortress" mentality on which the regime's legitimacy is based, and the regime's emphasis on WMD as the ultimate guarantor of its existence. It took several years for policy-makers to come to terms with that reality.

And what about the carrots? There should be no great illusions about them either. For one thing, there is no guarantee that North Korea would not be tempted to try to deceive its opponents and get the benefits without giving up much. More importantly, the carrots *per se* - if we see them as small "handouts" (even one million tons of oil) to lure the regime into the trap of self-destruction – would not work either, unless the purpose of regime change is taken off the agenda. North Korea has never declined gifts, e.g. food aid, energy assistance, etc, but it has never let them be used as Trojan horse.

What could work then? The whole 20-year period during which the world community tried in vain to stop Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons shows that only real *engagement* worked - especially during the Kim Jong Il era when the influence of ideological factors almost

vanished. Only engagement helped at least to slow down, if not totally stop, WMD development. It is high time it was understood that North Koreans want not only economic aid or promises of security, as is usually implied, but also respect, trust and recognition of their national security interests. This is necessary if there is to be any possibility of coexistence with their former enemies. This is what they refer to as "elimination of hostile policies." Therefore the basic question North Koreans ask is whether the new American conciliatory mood is just a tactical trick to give the Republicans an election boost, or a sincere attempt to move toward resolution. Will the US advance *beyond* the term of the current administration in implementing the "package deal" – basically proposed four years ago, of trading "peace for nukes" (details of the "initial phase" of which are contained in the Joint Statement from the Third Session of the Fifth Round of the Six-Party Talks just completed)? Demonstration of such resolve may be seen by North Koreans as a litmus test of American intentions. Any American insistence on finalizing everything in a matter of months would doom the deal.

It is also a safe guess that nobody in Pyongyang is currently thinking about discarding their hard-earned nuclear weapon(s) any time soon. However, there is a clear prospect now of the demolition of the existing nuclear facilities and of securing guarantees that there will prevent return to a military nuclear program.

Of course that is not enough, but without a good deal of patience we won't get even that. However, to succeed further it should be made absolutely clear to the North Koreans that this is not the end in itself, and that the process must continue. The outcome should be well-defined from the start: a non-nuclear, peaceful, modernizing, sovereign (*chajujok*) North Korea, increasingly involved in regional economic cooperation and not threatened by anyone.

There should be some stages in this lengthy process. We are now at the "initial stage" – actually "phase Zero," or getting back to where we were 13 years ago – but substituting "disabling" for "freezing" of the reactor. Pyongyang can afford this as it now has the bomb and might not need additional plutonium.

Already there is uneasiness about even the next phase – which includes "provision by the DPRK of a complete declaration of all nuclear programs and disablement of all existing nuclear facilities, including graphite-moderated reactors and reprocessing plant." Energy assistance alone might not be enough to make North Koreans deliver, unless substantial - and more or less irreversible - progress is made on the tracks of security provision and diplomatic normalization.

Members of the 4th round of six party talks, from September 2005.

Should trust be restored and North Koreans become confident that the US will not backtrack after North Korea has declared and "disabled" its facilities, phase 1 could follow (about two years after a formal agreement, endorsed in the framework of legal systems of the 6 countries). Probably the DPRK would want at this stage to get not only the lifting of sanctions and energy aid, but an international system of security guarantees. In addition to the above-mentioned steps it should also be expected that North Korea would fully return to IAEA control mechanisms (maybe even sign the Supplementary Protocol of 1997), declare a ban on nuclear tests, formally declare that it will not acquire uranium enrichment technologies (later verified by IAEA), and put all existing materials under IAEA control.

During Phase 2 (Years 2 to 5) the new security system should be put in place, including bilateral and multilateral arrangements, and approved, or at least acknowledged, by the UN. At the same time an alternative power base in the DPRK will have to be created. I cannot see North Koreans being satisfied just with continuation of receiving fuel/power aid, as this will not solve the basic issue of energy security. I would not be surprised if the issue of LWR (which is after all mentioned in the September 19th, 2005 Statement) will again appear on the agenda. As a compromise, and as I have written elsewhere, the LWR could be constructed as DPRK property and under its management, but in Russian territory. (See Georgy Bulychev, "A Russian Role in Resolving the North Korea Problem?")

And what about the existing fissile materials? According to a rather vague formula of the Joint Statement such materials, including "plutonium extracted from used fuel rods, … would be abandoned." I expect extensive debate over this issue - for example, what about plutonium that has already been turned into "nuclear devices"? One suggestion of a way to "abandon" these materials is to hand them over at some stage for safe keeping to one of the nuclear states with a legal guarantee of their immediate return in case of serious threat to implementation of the agreements by the 'other side'. Eventually, these materials could be purchased (bought back) by the 6-party member countries.

Only as a result of Phase 3 (up to 10 years from now) will it be possible to expect full liquidation of the DPRK nuclear arsenal. However, that won't happen unless the situation around the DPRK becomes normal, its trust in the intentions of its partners becomes firm, and economically it is integrated into the region. Only then could a "South African option" (voluntarily giving up nukes) take place. And only then would the DPRK be able to return to compliance with the Non Proliferation Treaty (in what capacity could it do so before then?) and the international non-proliferation regime could be fully restored.

To achieve this long-term result, it would be logical to broaden the mandate of the 6-party talks to enable it, first, to develop a reliable system of peace and security in Korea, and second, to help in the modernization and development of the DPRK. The Working Groups' creation is a good start. Russia sees the creation of a reliable security mechanism in North East Asia as crucial to the success of the quest to eliminate North Korean nuclear capacity, hence Russia is to chair the relevant working group. At the same time economic assistance to this end should be associated with attaining certain modernization goals, not with 'patching the holes' of a ruined North Korean household ('robbing the belly

to cover the back').

The 6-party talks in their current phase should therefore produce at some stage a thoroughly prepared document, corresponding to international law norms, containing a long-term vision of things to come. The preparation of such a document, that might be called, "Statement of Basic Security, Cooperation and Development Principles," could be started by the mandate of the "ministerial meeting to confirm implementation of the Joint Statement and explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia," as stipulated in the Joint Statement. A corresponding Declaration to this effect could later be adopted at the summit level (for example, on the sidelines of the APEC forum).

A 10 to 15 year plan of DPRK modernization, coordinated with the DPRK, could become an addendum to such a document. What we see now in the economic sphere is uncritical acceptance of North Korean demands for assistance, which are not – and cannot be because of the lack of any concept – aimed at system transformation. This can only conserve the existing outdated North Korean economic structure.

Such a task cannot be accomplished in a short time. However, it is appropriate to consider a grand future perspective in which the initial 6-party negotiation mechanism will eventually transform itself into a regional organization for cooperation and security.

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