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# *Wrong War, Wrong Place, Wrong Time*

## *Why Military Action Should Not Be Used to Resolve the North Korean Nuclear Crisis*

**by Doug Bandow**

## Executive Summary

Ever since North Korea's dramatic revelation that it was producing materials that could be used to make nuclear weapons, the Bush administration has considered a range of policy options—including a military strike on North Korean nuclear facilities. Although the administration officially dismisses such talk, President Bush has left the military option on the table, and influential advisers outside of the administration have openly called for military action along the lines of the Israeli attack on Iraqi nuclear facilities at Osirak in 1981.

But a military strike is the least desirable of a range of unpalatable policy choices. An attack on North Korea is likely to result in a full retaliatory response by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which would threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of South Koreans, as well as the nearly 37,000 Americans stationed on the peninsula. Even a successful attack could spread nuclear fallout throughout East Asia. Finally, a unilateral U.S. attack that destabilized the peninsula could upset relations with China and South Korea.

Rather than adopting the most dangerous course of action as a first resort, the United States should instead take the opportunity to reduce its threat profile in the region by focusing on multilateral diplomatic efforts that place primary responsibility for resolving the crisis on those regional actors most threatened by the North Korean nuclear program.

*Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and the author and editor of several books, including* Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World. *He is a former special assistant to President Reagan and visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation.*

**An attack on North Korean nuclear facilities is likely to lead to a full-scale military conflict in East Asia.**

## Introduction

During a visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) in October 2002, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James A. Kelly informed officials in Kim Jong-il's government that the United States knew about the secret uranium enrichment program underway in the DPRK. This program, Kelly explained, violated at least the spirit, if not the letter, of the Agreed Framework, negotiated between the United States and the DPRK in 1994.

Once confronted, North Korea admitted that it was processing nuclear material. It then followed this unexpected admission by announcing the reopening of a mothballed nuclear plant to make plutonium, removing seals and surveillance cameras installed by the International Atomic Energy Agency, expelling IAEA monitors, and announcing its withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.[1] At the beginning of February, U.S. satellites revealed North Korean technicians moving fuel rods at the Yongbyon complex, potentially a prelude to reprocessing the 8,000 spent fuel rods to produce plutonium.

The DPRK appears determined to become a member of the world's nuclear club. Halting the North's program is an important goal, but exactly how important depends a bit on Pyongyang's plans. Does it intend to maintain only a modest arsenal for the defensive purpose of preserving the regime? Will it marry this new nuclear capability with existing missile technology and threaten a first strike on one of its neighbors, South Korea or Japan? Will it continue its efforts to build an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), thereby threatening the United States? Or, will North Korea's nuclear development program shift into high gear, enabling the impoverished nation to sell plutonium or highly enriched uranium on the international market?

It is this last hypothetical in particular—the prospect of North Korean nuclear technology falling into the hands of al Qaeda, or other terrorist organizations willing to use them against the United States—that has prompted anxious discussion. Some analysts have gone so far as to argue for a military strike against nuclear installations in the DPRK, in the hope of dismantling these facilities before the program becomes a threat to the United States. But while a military attack might appeal to those frustrated by a lack of good options for dealing with the problem of North Korean nuclear weapons, the U.S. should resist the urge to use military force on the Korean peninsula. An attack on North Korean nuclear facilities is unlikely to achieve the desired result (the complete destruction of the North's program) and is likely to lead to a full-scale military conflict in East Asia that would threaten the lives of millions of people.

## American Troops as Nuclear Hostages

The developing nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula has played out in the midst of an ongoing debate over the role and utility of American troops in East Asia. Today, the nearly 37,000 U.S. forces in the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea) and an additional 50,000 in Japan will be nuclear hostages if the North marries an effective nuclear device to a means of delivery, which some fear it has already done. Nowhere else on earth would so many Americans be at such risk.

Although the American troops in Korea serve no useful military purpose and contribute to a growing anti-American sentiment in South Korea, the troop tripwire makes North Korea's nuclear weapons America's problem.[2] The United States is needlessly entangled in the inter-Korean conflict and is seen by Pyongyang as its primary adversary.

Washington's force deployment has interfered with a solution to the nuclear issue in another way. Fear of having to discuss U.S. troop deployments apparently is one reason the Bush administration has rejected North Korea's demands for bilateral negotiations and a nonaggression pledge.[3]

The situation is serious. It is widely assumed that the North possesses, or has at

least reprocessed, enough plutonium to make one or two nuclear weapons.[4] It is now clear that North Korea has been enriching uranium suitable for use in nuclear weapons despite the 1994 Agreed Framework, which was supposed to halt Pyongyang's program. U.S. officials fear that Pyongyang intends to build up its stockpile and perhaps test a weapon.[5] The game of brinkmanship grows more serious almost daily.

Before the meetings in late April between the United States, North Korea, and China, the DPRK issued conflicting reports about the progress of its weapons program that briefly threatened to scuttle talks. Earlier, however, Pyongyang claimed to have no plans to make nuclear weapons and said that negotiations with the U.S. could resolve the issue. Bush administration officials chose to move forward with negotiations.[6] When the North first announced that it was restarting the Yongbyon reactor, it alleged that this was only for the purposes of producing electricity. (This claim lacks credibility, however, because the five-megawatt reactor is not connected to any power grid, which means its value in generating electricity is rather small.)[7] Meanwhile, both Koreas have continued with cabinet level talks, providing further evidence of the North's willingness to negotiate. The North and South also issued a joint declaration, in which they "agreed to actively cooperate to resolve this issue peacefully," for whatever that is worth.[8] Indeed, North Korea's ambassador to China made everything sound simple: "If the U.S. legally assures us of security by concluding a nonaggression treaty, the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula will be easily settled."[9]

Alas, the best strategy for handling the DPRK is neither obvious nor easy. The North probably chose to openly affirm its nuclear plans for a variety of reasons. One may be that it had decided to cheat all along, and it was only recently caught red-handed.[10] The North may have concluded that the United States was serious about inspections being carried out by the IAEA as demanded by the agreement.[11] Others suggest that the North perceived that the Agreed Framework was unraveling, since the United States had failed to move forward with diplomatic and economic relations.[12]

Another explanation for the North's behavior may be that Pyongyang believed the Bush administration had targeted Kim's regime for a preventive war. One need not be a communist apologist to note that if military threats may deter, they may also provoke. In fact, a number of U.S. analysts, including some intelligence officers, believe that the North Korean regime feared attack.[13] In this context, the North Korean nuclear program may be intended primarily as a defensive measure, designed to deter a U.S. attack.

## Threatening War

Regardless of who is to blame, what is to be done? Many Americans, including, it would seem, the president, are willing to contemplate the use of force. A decade ago many American policymakers, politicians, and columnists blithely talked about military options, most obviously the destruction of the nuclear reactor in Yongbyon and any other known atomic facilities.[14] Today similar demands are being made. Retired Gen. John Singlaub and Adm. Thomas Moorer are avidly pushing a military option.[15] Robert Carstens of the Council of Emerging National Security Affairs asked "what if, while everyone was looking towards Iraq, we turned on a dime and crushed North Korea's nuclear and military capability?"[16] Editors at the *Weekly Standard* innocuously talk about the need for "regime change" in the North.[17] Some analysts, such as Dennis Ross of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, put the threat of military action in the context of negotiation: "The purpose is not to make the military option inevitable but to build the pressure to produce a diplomatic alternative."[18]

Others believe that coercion is inevitable because the North cannot be bought off.[19] Some seem to merely be biding their time. Explained

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columnist Charles Krauthammer: "It is obvious that, at least until Iraq is settled, nonbelligerence is warranted. We simply cannot handle two military crises at once."[20] He later called for only "temporary appeasement."[21]

This may be the administration's private strategy. The administration's procrastination in reporting North Korea's transgressions, known in June 2002 but not revealed until four months later, after passage of the congressional resolution authorizing action in Iraq, appeared intended to avoid complicating the administration's planned campaign against Baghdad.[22] Now that the war against Saddam Hussein is largely completed, pressure may grow for an encore in East Asia. After all, John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, warned in March 2003: "As we near the endgame in Iraq, it is important to remember that Kim Jong-il and other budding violators will watch the world's response to Saddam with rapt attention." Bolton predicted that the willingness of these "budding violators" to "risk obtaining weapons of mass destruction will be based on a careful calculation of the international community's likely reaction."[23]

Of course, Bush officials have made much of even refusing to call the North Korean situation a "crisis."[24] This is a curious stance coming from people who viewed Iraq as posing a crisis that required a military resolution. Washington's rhetoric may shift once military operations in Iraq wind down.

**Evidence of plans for military action abounds.**

Indicative of the seriousness with which the Bush administration is taking the North Korean threat, the president himself has indicated that "all options are on the table," including military action.[25] He has gone so far to say that if the administration's efforts "don't work diplomatically, they'll have to work militarily."[26] War is, after all, the logical outgrowth of the administration's doctrine of preemption, articulated in the National Security Strategy and being used against Iraq. Indeed, defense adviser Richard Perle, who was suggesting military preemption back in 1991, declared as recently as December 2002: "The Bush administration will consider all the alternatives, because the dangers involved are so substantial."[27]

Evidence of plans for military action abounds. Moving the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk out of Yokosuka, Japan in January 2003 could be seen as a step to deter Pyongyang from military aggression, but since an attack from the North is extremely unlikely, it could also be seen as applying general pressure or preparing for war. Placing long-range bombers on alert, moving B-1 and B-52 bombers to Guam, planning to relocate fighters and reconnaissance aircraft, and adding soldiers to forces stationed in Korea, seem equally threatening. The Pentagon's unsubtle comments have exacerbated the crisis. For example, the Pentagon explained that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was "immersed" in the issue of the North Korean crisis even as he made plans for war in Iraq.[28] Rumsfeld also called North Korea a "terrorist regime," perhaps the most obvious justification for attack, given the Bush administration's overarching "war against terrorism."[29] In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary of State Powell stressed that "no options have been taken off the table." These options included military action, even though Powell added that "we have no intention of attacking North Korea as a nation."[30]

Indeed, it is hard to find anyone who speaks with administration officials off the record who believes their publicly expressed pacific intentions. A "prominent Asian academic" told the *Far Eastern Economic Review* that "not one of the senior administration officials he met with recently would rule out military action to remove North Korea's nuclear threat."[31] *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof interviewed numerous administration officials about war plans for Korea and concluded: "The upshot is a growing possibility that President Bush could reluctantly order such a strike this summer, risking another Korean war."[32]

Seymour Hersh reported that the Bush administration's "public talk of compromise is being matched by much private talk of high-

level vindication." According to an unnamed intelligence official who had attended White House meetings: "Bush and Cheney want [Kim Jong-il's] head on a platter." The official went on to explain that talk about negotiations was merely a ruse. "There will be negotiations," he was quoted as saying, "but they have a plan, and they are going to get this guy after Iraq. He's their version of Hitler."[33]

## East Asian Anxieties

It is not surprising that policymakers in Seoul, within easy reach of North Korean artillery and Scud missiles, have a different perspective on the use of force. Those in Beijing, Moscow, and Tokyo also worry about radioactive fallout, missile attacks, refugee flows, economic turmoil, and regional chaos. There is no constituency anywhere in the region, even among the countries most vulnerable to a North Korea with nuclear weapons, in favor of war.

South Korea is particularly adamant. In early 2002, South Korean presidential aide Lim Dong Won said he planned to visit Pyongyang to stave off a "rumored crisis on the Korean peninsula in 2003." Seoul anticipated that this crisis would be exacerbated by delays in the construction of the reactors that were permitted under the Agreed Framework, the Bush administration's characterization of the DPRK as a member of the axis of evil, and a report that North Korea was one of seven countries identified as possible targets by the U.S. military.[34] When president-elect Roh Moo-hyun denounced "blindly following U.S. policy," an unnamed U.S. official returned the favor by denouncing Roh as "an appeaser."[35]

Seoul's assertiveness on the issue is likely only to increase. Beating the war drums in the United States now sparks immediate South Korean criticism. After President Bush indicated that military action was an option, Chang Chun-hyong, deputy spokesman for the ROK's ruling Millennium Democratic Party, wondered aloud "whether emotions have interfered with U.S. efforts to resolve the North's nuclear problem."[36] Howard French of the *New York Times* describes South Korean officials as being "shocked" by Secretary Rumsfeld's rhetoric.[37]

Seoul continues to publicly contend that Washington would not act without the ROK's agreement. Unification minister Jeong Se-hyun characterized fears of unilateral action by Washington as "groundless" and wondered aloud how Washington could "ignore or go against South Korea in its North Korean policy."[38] But that is exactly what happened in 1994. President Clinton admitted that his administration had prepared military options for use against the North a decade earlier, without a nod to the South Koreans.[39] South Korean President Roh understandably complained, "We almost went to the brink of war in 1993 with North Korea, and at the time we didn't even know it."[40]

The avoidance of war is of primary importance to Seoul. President-elect Roh declared that he could not support U.S. policy if that entailed "attacking North Korea."[41] During a campaign debate, candidate Roh admitted, "our nation failed to play our rightful part in the conflict between the North and the United States" in 1994, but he affirmed "it is still our nation that should take the main role to make the difference." "For Washington," Roh explained, "their prime interest lies in getting rid of weapons of mass destruction to restore the world order, but for us it's a matter of survival."[42]

Some advocates of military action say that the ROK should not worry, dismissing the argument that Pyongyang would choose to retaliate. Referring to the Israeli destruction of an Iraqi nuclear facility in 1981, intended to eliminate the Iraqi nuclear program, former State Department official Jed Babbin argued: "If the nuclear weapons program continues, we should consider an Osirak-like strike at the Yongbyon plant which is the center of North Korea's program. It's quite possible to do that without beginning a general war."[43] Some Clinton administration officials similarly

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believed that military action in 1994 would not precipitate a full-scale war.[44] Ralph Cossa, head of the Pacific Forum Center for Strategic and International Studies, contends that Kim Jong-il would not risk the destruction of his regime by retaliating.[45] That appears to be the view of the hawks in the Bush administration, according to Nicholas Kristof.[46]

To attack on the assumption that the North would not respond would be a wild gamble. Some advocates of military action have proposed that an attack on Yongbyon be coupled with a nuclear ultimatum and even tactical nuclear strikes on North Korean artillery and troop emplacements.[47] But a military strike might not get all of Pyongyang's nuclear assets; the North Koreans favor underground facilities, which might prove difficult to destroy, even with newer, more destructive bombs. Warns Joshua Muravchik: "the North Koreans have also built underground nuclear reactors, plutonium reprocessing plants, and uranium-enrichment facilities—and who knows what else?"[48] Moreover, hitting the reprocessing plant and spent fuel rods might also create radioactive fallout that could drift over China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. That would be a high price to pay for an unsuccessful strike. Most important, warns Stanley Kurtz of the Hudson Institute, "The true disaster for the United States would be a strike against North Korea that does anything less than successfully intimidate its military capacity. Short of rapid and total success, we face the deaths of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of South Koreans."[49]

Yet U.S. military action would virtually force Pyongyang to respond militarily. The North's response could come in two forms: full scale war, or limited retaliatory attacks. Given the formal U.S. policy of preemption, and the designation of the North as a member of the "axis of evil," Pyongyang might decide that a military strike on its nuclear facilities was evidence of America's determination to destroy the Kim Jong-il government, the opening phase of a war for regime change. Indeed, it is obvious that Pyongyang fears, and has considered the possibility of, an American attack.[50] The North explicitly threatened in early February 2003 that "a surprise attack on our peaceful nuclear facilities" would "spark a total war."[51]

That is precisely what most analysts predicted would happen during the previous crisis in 1994. Gen. Gary Luck, U.S. commander in Korea, observed: "If we pull an Osirak, they will be coming South."[52] Bill Taylor, formerly of West Point and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and who met with Kim Il-sung and other senior leaders in the early 1990s, believes: "faced with a major military strike on its territory, the North Korean leadership will respond with everything it has against Americans and our allies."[53] South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jun says simply: "If America attacks North Korea, war on the Korean peninsula will be unavoidable."[54]

An account by a high-ranking North Korean defector, Cho Myung-chul, is particularly sobering. In analyzing Iraq's defeat in the (first) Gulf War, North Korean military officials concluded that Baghdad was too defensive. Cho characterized the North's approach, growing out of the lessons learned from Iraq: "If we're in a war, we'll use everything. And if there's a war, we should attack first, to take the initiative." Cho estimates the chances of general war at 80 percent in response to even a limited strike on Yongbyon.[55] Unfortunately, "everything" is a daunting force: in addition to an army of more than a million soldiers, the North possesses long-range artillery and rocket launchers, deploys up to 600 Scud missiles and additional longer-range No Dong missiles, and has developed a significant number and range of chemical and perhaps biological weapons.[56] Estimates of the number of likely casualties from a full-scale North Korean attack exceed one million.[57]

An alternative strategy for the North short of full-scale war would be a limited retaliatory strike, perhaps focused on the Yongsan facility in Seoul, the primary American base on the peninsula. Such an attack, although ostensibly directed at military forces, would be accompanied by heavy civilian casualties.

The Seoul-Inchon metropolis hosts roughly half of South Korea's population, some 24 million people. The region is also the ROK's industrial heartland, and is being developed into a regional economic hub for East Asia. Pyongyang is thought to be able to fire up to an incredible 500,000 shells an hour into Seoul.[58] North Korea also might choose to hit Japan.[59] Retaliation could easily lead to a tit-for-tat escalation that would be difficult to halt short of general war.[60] It is this sobering reality that should give serious pause to anyone contemplating a precipitous military strike against a still nascent nuclear threat.

## The Future of North Korea

None of the DPRK's neighbors are eager to destabilize the North. South Korea is most strongly opposed. It worries about undercutting the trend toward improved ROK-North Korean relations and is mindful of the potential for lost business opportunities.[61] Moreover, any measure encouraging the collapse of the DPRK could spark internal armed conflict that would spill into the ROK. Even absent a violent civil war, refugees would undoubtedly flood south from a destabilized North. A delegation of South Koreans sent by President-elect Roh reportedly shocked their Washington hosts when they stated that it would be better for Pyongyang to acquire an atomic bomb than to collapse.[62] Although South Korean officials later denied these comments, which were attributed to South Korean foreign minister Yoon Young Kwan, other evidence suggests that the ROK is seeking accommodation with the North.[63]

Given the sober assessments of East Asian nations, the United States should not overstate the nature of the North Korean threat. There is no artificial timeline beyond which negotiations will be automatically ineffective. Though the DPRK is flirting with brinkmanship, it is merely threatening to build nuclear weapons, not to use them. And the world has survived far worse international crises: the Cuban missile crisis, China's intervention in the Korean War, Douglas MacArthur's proposal to strike the Chinese mainland, and the confrontation over Quemoy and Matsu.[64] Through all of its bluster and vitriol, the North at least claims a willingness to resolve issues peacefully.[65]

Although Pyongyang has behaved in a reckless manner in recent months, over the last decade the regime's behavior has actually *improved*. The DPRK has been more engaged with the outside world than it was before, and it appears to want to increase that engagement. Thus it has quite a bit to lose from confrontation.

The DPRK's emphasis so far on negotiations with the United States is another indication of its willingness to bargain. An overture through former United Nations ambassador and current New Mexico governor Bill Richardson was another sign.[66] If the North simply wanted to build a bomb, it did not have to flaunt before Washington its nuclear activities. Its emphasis on the United States suggests an attempt by Pyongyang to win what only Washington can give—the security guarantees and status conferred on nuclear powers.

That is what Governor Richardson believes: "They use those cards to get what they want. They also have a mind-set that they demand international respect. They want to deal directly with the United States, not with South Korea. They want to be considered big, major powers."[67] Seoul's Ministry of Unification argues that the North Koreans' "true aim is not to continue the nuclear development program, but to seek a breakthrough in relations with the United States."[68] That is the clear implication of Pyongyang's rejection of an ROK offer of increased aid in exchange for an end to the North's nuclear program.[69]

The North's ongoing provocations—buzzing an American reconnaissance plane in March 2003 for instance—occurred at a time when Washington's attention was focused on the Middle East. Although the Bush administration has largely ignored Pyongyang's escalations, it has also fed a

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sense of panic, discussing the possibility that the North's Taepo Dong 2 rocket could hit the western United States. But the North is far from developing the capability to attack America. There is no evidence that the North Koreans have ever successfully tested a Taepo Dong 2. The missile's range and accuracy are uncertain, and it is unclear whether the missile has the capability of carrying a nuclear payload. It is also not clear whether the North has, or will soon have, nuclear weapons suitable for delivery via ICBM. Finally, the uncertain and nascent threat posed by a North Korean nuclear-tipped ICBM could be effectively countered by the United States' prodigious deterrent (Pyongyang must know that an attack on American soil would result in the complete destruction of the regime) and by an effective missile defense in the highly unlikely event that deterrence failed.[70]

Nevertheless, there remains a substantial possibility that North Korea is committed to becoming a nuclear state or that it at least wants to see what the United States and its allies are willing to offer in return for abandoning the North's one claim to international attention and regional power status.[71] In that event, the United States should distinguish between two different dangers. The most serious but also most potentially manageable would be if the DPRK matched missile sales with plutonium sales, including, conceivably, to terrorist groups such as al Qaeda. In 2001, Pyongyang earned $560 million in missile exports.[72] Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage rightly argues that "the arms race in North Korea pales next to the possibility . . . that she would pass on fissile material and other nuclear technology to either transnational actors or to rogue states."[73]

But the United States has a number of options for dealing with that threat. Evidence of weapons proliferation would warrant consideration of interception of any air or naval shipments abroad—a possibility that Pyongyang should be made aware of long before such a course appeared likely.[74] Other options include further economic sanctions or a more aggressive blockade, policies that would be made more effective through regional cooperation. Finally, Pyongyang should be warned that evidence of even a contemplated transfer of nuclear or missile technology could trigger a military response directed at the regime as well as its nuclear facilities. A nuclear-armed North Korea serving as "Plutonium-R-Us" to America's enemies would be unacceptable. But military action would be the last, not the first, resort. And a North Korean regime dedicated to self-preservation could easily distinguish between building an arsenal to guarantee its own existence and putting out an international "for sale" sign that would draw Washington's wrath.

Short of that worst-case scenario, however, the possibility of the North modestly expanding its presumed arsenal of one or two atomic bombs poses a far different security threat. Such a development would be worrisome, to be sure, but the DPRK could be deterred. With regime survival being Kim Jong-il's highest priority, he need only know that use of such weapons would lead to the destruction of his regime. That could be accomplished through a U.S. threat to retaliate, but maintaining a permanent nuclear umbrella over South Korea and Japan would keep the U.S. needlessly entangled in a dangerous situation potentially forever. Over the longer term, the United States should promote alternatives, including a greater involvement on the part of regional powers to provide for their own defense. Such an approach would involve missile defense for not only for the United States but also its East Asian friends, who should develop their own systems. Moreover, South Korea and Japan should be left free to develop their own nuclear arsenals, a prospect that should be communicated to the North. (An ancillary benefit of this approach would be to encourage China to pressure Pyongyang to bargain away its nuclear program.)[75] Further proliferation in East Asia would be a bad solution—but far better than the alternative of risking Los Angeles to protect Seoul and Tokyo.

## Conclusion

In October 1950, during the first Korean War, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the commander of U.S. forces on the peninsula, advocated a military strategy of carrying the fight well into North Korea, a sharp departure from the original mission of simply expelling DPRK forces from the South. Critics warned that such a strategy risked drawing the People's Republic of China into the war. It would, in the words of Gen. Omar Bradley, involve the United States "in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy."[76] A similar case could be made today.

The timing of the Bush administration's exposure of North Korea's nuclear program is curious. It might be merely coincidental that it has emerged when the U.S. administration is promoting the doctrine of preventive war, which it employed in Iraq. Or it might be a matter of design by the DPRK, tied to a dispute with the United States over the Agreed Framework and a change of administration in Seoul—circumstances that, given the potential for further strains in the U.S.-ROK relationship, increase opportunities for mischief. Regardless of the origins of the crisis, however, the risks of a war arising from a preemptive U.S. attack far outweigh the likely benefits of halting the North's nuclear program, or even the more ambitious goal of toppling Kim Jong-il's regime.

In short, the dangers posed by a nuclear North Korea are significant, but even limited military action would likely spiral into a devastating war. Thus, the United States must find an alternative—the least bad option available. That would almost certainly involve a messy mix of negotiations, deterrence, and cooperation with neighboring states and would yield uncertain results. Ultimately, however, instead of searching for ways to become more involved in a potentially catastrophic military conflict, Washington should withdraw from its dominating position in the region, which makes the United States the focus of Pyongyang's attention and discourages other nations from fulfilling their normal international responsibilities.

## Notes

1. There is some disagreement about whether the North Koreans initially admitted to possessing nuclear weapons or simply claimed the right to possess them, but the difference is of little significance, given Pyongyang's undisputed actions afterwards. See, for example, Ralph A. Cossa, "Trials, Tribulations, Threats, and Tirades," *Comparative Connections—An E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations,* 4th quarter 2002, www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0204Qus_skorea.html.

2. For more on removing U.S. troops from Korea and restructuring the U.S.-ROK relationship, see Doug Bandow, "Bring the Troops Home: Ending the Obsolete Korean Commitment," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 474, May 7, 2003.

3. Peter M. Beck, "The United States and North Korea: Collision Course?" *Korea Insight* 4, no. 12 (December 2002): 1.

4. It is at least possible that Pyongyang's atomic capabilities are more bluff than real. See Jim Hoagland, "One Proliferator at a Time," *Washington Post,* December 11, 2002, p. A33; Seymour M. Hersh, "The Cold Test," *New Yorker,* January 27, 2003, pp. 42–47; and Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "Where Are the Hawks on North Korea?" *American Prospect,* February 2003, pp. 27–28. The outgoing South Korean Prime Minister Kim Dae-jung said that he did not believe that the North had nuclear weapons. Jae-suk Yoo, "South Korean President Asks EU for Help in Defusing North Korean Nuclear Crisis," Associated Press, February 11, 2003.

5. Glenn Kessler, "U.S. Believes N. Korea Rapidly Seeking Stockpile," *Washington Post,* February 1, 2003, pp. A1, A20.

6. Glenn Kessler and Doug Struck, "N. Korean Statements Jeopardize New Talks," *Washington Post,* April 19, 2003, p. A1; Howard W. French, "North Korea Informs South Korea That It Doesn't Plan to Produce Nuclear Weapons," *New York Times,* January 23, 2003, p. A12; and Paul Shin, "Seoul Official: North Korea Says It Has No Intention of Making Nuclear Weapons," Associated Press, January 22, 2003.

7. Paul Shin, "U.S. Envoy Hopes North Korea Nuclear Dispute Will Go Before U.N. Security Council This Week," Associated Press, January 22, 2003.

8. Soo-Jeong Lee, "Koreas Agree to Peaceful Nuke Resolution," Associated Press, January 23, 2003. See also Howard W. French, "The Two Koreas Open Cabinet-Level Talks," *New York Times*, January 22, 2003, p. A10.

9. Quoted in Peter S. Goodman, "S. Korean Seeks Mediation Role to End Standoff," *Washington Post*, January 4, 2003, p. A10.

10. Some intelligence officials believe that the North began to test high-explosive implosion devices as early as 1997. Henry Sokolski, "Fool Us Once . . . ," *Weekly Standard*, November 11, 2002, pp. 13–14. The Bush administration worked hard to blame the Clinton administration for negotiating a flawed Agreed Framework. Karen DeYoung and T. R. Reid, "Bush Administration Shifts Blame for N. Korea Crisis," *Washington Post*, January 12, 2003, p. A22.

11. See Henry Sokolski and Victor Gilinsky, "A Nuclear Dilemma," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 2003, p. 1. The authors argue that the reactor project under the Agreed Framework was flawed from the onset.

12. Jay Solomon, et al., "Troubled Power Project Plays Role in North Korea Showdown," *Wall Street Journal*, January 30, 2003, pp. A1, A6.

13. See, for example, Homer T. Hodge, "North Korea's Military Strategy," *Parameters*, Spring 2003, p. 70–71. See also Philip H. Gordon, "Deal with North Korea," *Washington Times*, January 15, 2003, p. A17; and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Forcing Foes into a Nuclear Corner," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2003.

14. See Doug Bandow, "Defusing the Korean Bomb," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 14, December 16, 1991, pp. 5–6; and Doug Bandow, "North Korea and the Risks of Coercive Nonproliferation," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 24, May 4, 1993, pp. 4–6.

15. Gen. John Singlaub and Adm.Thomas Moorer, "Korean Monster," *NewsMax* magazine edition, March 2003, pp. 1, 14–17.

16. Roger D. Carstens, "Attack North Korea Now," *Washington Times*, December 30, 2002, p. A21.

17. William Kristol and Gary Schmitt, "Lessons of a Nuclear North Korea," *Weekly Standard*, October 28, 2002, p. 8. See also James Hackett, "Not One Cent for Tribute," *Washington Times*, February 12, 2003, p. A16.

18. Dennis Ross, "Don't Rule Out Force," *Washington Post*, January 10, 2003, p. A21.

19. See John McCain, "Rogue State Rollback," *Weekly Standard*, January 20, 2003, pp. 12–13; Mona Charen, "Ticking Time Bomb," *Washington Times*, January 16, 2003, p. A16; and Stanley Kurtz, "It's All about North Korea," *National Review Online*, March 5, 2003, www. nationalreview.com/kurtz/kurtz030503.asp. Most foresee early military action, but Kurtz, of the Hudson Institute, believes "the greater likelihood is war within the next six years."

20. Charles Krauthammer, "Korea Follies," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2003, p. A23. See also Paul Greenberg, "One War at a Time," *Townhall.com*, October 25, 2002, www.townhall.com/columnists/paulgreenberg/pg20021025.shtml. Greenberg says we must deal with Iraq first: "There will be time to neuter Kim Jong il's ambitions, diplomatically or more abruptly." See also "Pyongyang's Nuclear Blackmail," *Wall Street Journal*, editorial, October 18, 2002, p. A10. Richard Perle, former chairman of the Pentagon Defense Policy Board, emphasizes that military action remains an option. Ju Yong-jung, "US Hawk Warns Not to Rule Out Military Option," *Digital Chosun Ilbo*, December 18, 2002, http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200212/200212180031.html. See also Joshua Muravchik, "Facing Up to North Korea," *Commentary*, March 2003, p. 38. Muravchik, of the American Enterprise Institute, contends that military action today "may be less costly than a few years from now," when the DPRK may be better armed.

21. Charles Krauthammer, "A Place for Temporary Appeasement," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2003, p. A33.

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31. John Larkin and Murray Hiebert, "Talks Needed to Avert Attack," *Far Eastern Economic Review,* December 26, 2002–January 2, 2003, p. 17.

32. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Secret, Scary Plans," *New York Times,* February 28, 2003, p. A29.

33. Hersh, p. 47. Some foreign observers assume as much. Roland Watson, "Bush Is Keeping Kim Jong Il in His Sights," *The Times Online* (London), December 13, 2002, www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.asp?ID=5074. There has been one contrary report, denied by the Bush administration, that it has accepted the likelihood of a nuclear North Korea. Sonni Efron, "U.S. Said to Be Resigned to a Nuclear Korea," *Los Angeles Times,* March 5, 2003, p. A1.

34. Paul Richter, "U.S. Works Up Plan for Using Nuclear Arms," *Los Angeles Times,* March 9, 2002, p. A1.

35. John Larkin, "New Leader, New Crisis," *Far Eastern Economic Review,* January 9, 2003, p. 13; and Joel Mowbray, "Doing Nothing," *National Review Online,* February 12, 2003, www.nationalreview.com/mowbray/mowbray021203.asp.

36. Quoted in Sang-Hun Choe, "S. Korea Appeals for Calm in Nuke Crisis," Associated Press, February 8, 2003.

37. French, "Reversals in U.S. South Korean Links, and Some Jagged Fault Lines."

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49. Kurtz, "It's All about North Korea."

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54. Quoted in Andrew Ward, "S Korea Says It Is Ready for War If Talks Fail," *Financial Times*, January 17, 2003, p. 9.

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56. See, for example, Jong-Heon Lee, "N. Korea Amasses Chemical Weapons," *Washington Times*, September 17, 2002, pp. A1, A12.

57. See Vernon Loeb and Peter Slevin, "Overcoming North Korea's 'Tyranny of Proximity,'" *Washington Post*, January 20, 2003, p. A16; and Hersh, pp. 45–46. The original Korean War resulted in three million casualties. Paul Wiseman, "Steep Price Tag Expected for Victory in N. Korea," *USA Today*, February 28, 2003, p. 13A. One million casualties in a second Korean war is actually a conservative estimate. The most pessimistic predictions estimate that one million North and South Koreas would be *killed* in the first day of fighting alone. See, for example, Doug Struck and Glenn Kessler, "Clashing Agendas Threaten Start of North Korean Talks," *Washington Post*, April 20, 2003, p. A13.

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71. See Ted Galen Carpenter, "Options for Dealing with North Korea," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 73, January 6, 2003; and Doug Bandow, "A Regional Solution to the East Asian Nuclear Crisis," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing, forthcoming. A number of analysts have advocated an attractive "more plus more" negotiation, in which the North would give up its nuclear program, dismantle its nuclear reactors, and reduce its conventional capabilities, in exchange for recognition, acceptance, trade, and aid. See, for example, James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen, "How to Deal with

North Korea," *Foreign Affairs,* March–April 2003, pp. 16–30. Although those benefits might seem attractive to the United States and its allies, they still might not seem attractive enough to the North Koreans to convince them to drop their nuclear option.

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73. Quoted in James Dao, "U.S. Official Says North Korea Could Sell Bomb Material," *New York Times,* February 5, 2003, p. A12.

74. See, for example, Bennett Ramberg, "Accept Nuclear Reality on the Korean Peninsula," *Los Angeles Times,* January 16, 2003, p. A11. The United States demonstrated the feasibility of an aggressive anti-smuggling policy when it cooperated with Spain to seize (and eventually release) a ship full of Scud missiles from North Korea bound for Yemen. However, it might be difficult to seal the DPRK in the face of a concerted smuggling campaign. See, for example, Muravchik, p. 37; and Joshua Kurlantzick, "Traffic Pattern," *New Republic,* March 24, 2003, pp. 12–13.

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