

Discussion of NAPSNet Forum #19 — Potential Crisis in the Agreed Framework



The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.

Recommended Citation

"Discussion of NAPSNet Forum #19 — Potential Crisis in the Agreed Framework", NAPSNet Policy Forum, August 20, 1998, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/discussion-of-napsnet-forum-19-potential-crisis-in-the-agreed-framework/>

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Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network

DISCUSSION OF "POTENTIAL CRISIS IN THE AGREED FRAMEWORK"

#19B -- AUGUST 20, 1998

The is intended to provide expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia, and an opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis. The Forum is open to all participants of the [Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network \(NAPSNet\)](#) . As always, NAPSNet invites your responses to this report. Please see "[NAPSNet Invites Your Responses,](#)" below, and send your responses to the NAPSNet Coordinator at: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org .

DISCUSSION OF "POLITICAL/ECONOMIC TRANSITION ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA"

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I. Comments by Robert G. Rich, Jr.

Response to Policy Forum Online #19, by Robert G. Rich, Jr., US Ambassador, retired.

Gordon's analysis is excellent. Hope it gets the attention it deserves. There are at least three additional factors, however, one good, two bad.

The biggest additional problem, it seems to me, is that in looking around the world Kim Jong-il may really feel he can successfully bluff or even defy the United States at this time if he does not get what he wants. One only has to look at Saddam Hussein in Iraq, where our previous dire warnings have virtually dissipated, and Kosovo, where our strong language has not been backed up with action. Given the further perception that the President, and thus the American Government, are now seriously weakened insofar as taking new, forthright actions or initiatives, the situation really does become dangerous. The East Africa bombings may also make it appear that the US is on the run. I believe we would indeed react forcefully to a clear challenge from North Korea, but Kim Jong-il is looking at current international precedents which may well make him doubt this.

Secondly, there is the news of major new underground construction near Yongbyon for undisclosed purposes, news which probably broke after Gordon wrote his article.

Thirdly, there is ROK President Kim's 50th anniversary speech, which clearly reached out to the North in a conciliatory tone. That is the good news.

Now much more seems to hang on Friday's meeting in New York between Ambassador Kartman and the DPRK officials. With the recent intelligence news, it will be more difficult now for the USG to offer any relaxation of economic sanctions. If I had the option, I would tell the DPRK that we are prepared this autumn to take some further economic relaxation steps, but that first they must allow IAEA inspectors access to the new construction site--not once, but on a regular basis--to assure the world that it is not to become a nuclear facility.

Without such a deal, the US-DPRK dialogue will continue to degenerate, with the dangerous implications Gordon Flake has so well analyzed. Without the proposed inspection, the USG is unlikely to win Congressional support for positive steps from our side.

Will President Kim's speech elicit a positive response? I wonder. It will be difficult for the ROK to continue far on that course if the US-DPRK part of the equation is deteriorating, but Pyongyang may adroitly perceive that some thawing of relations with the South can significantly defuse or delay any strong USG reaction on other fronts.

Gordon Flake's article has very sharply outlined the dangers. We are clearly not out of the woods on

North Korea, and it will take more concentrated high-level commitment to make hard choices and to avoid calamity.

II. Comments by John H. Kim, Esq.

Mr. Flake's concise, sharp analysis of the current problems with the Agreed Framework is quite convincing and to the point. In fact, the recent news report on the alleged discovery of underground complex being built for nuclear reactors in North Korea may be the beginning of the crisis he foresaw.

It seems some officials in the Clinton Administration may have leaked the news to reporters at this time to prevent any Administration offers of lifting sanctions against N.Korea. Otherwise, how can we explain the timing of the news release , just a few days before the planned meeting of the officials of the U.S. and North Korea? Mr. Flake was quite right in noting that "there is now considerable resistance to sanctions easing within the Administration as well."

If anyone reads the news carefully, they can see that there was not much substance to it, rather mostly just the speculations of intelligence officials. The site could have been merely another underground factory. I wonder whether the news, perhaps known to officials for some time, was blown out of proportion deliberately to sabotage the Friday talks.

On the other hand, it is also quite possible that the North may have started the digging just to send a strong message to the US that it is ready to walk away from the '94 Agreement if the US doesn't offer any concrete measures on Friday to remedy what they perceive to be breach of US obligations under the Framework.

The Agreed Framework is indeed more than just an agreement on nuclear freeze. It provided a broad road map for normalizing relations between the US and North Korea, specifying four areas for further actions. It is likely that the North may have put more hopes on the US promises of offering "formal assurances to the DPRK, against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the US" and lifting "barriers to trade and investment, including restrictions on telecommunications services and financial transactions."

Unfortunately, except for the telephone service, there have been no significant movements on these fronts from the Clinton Administration in the last three years. No wonder the North Korean officials are angry and suspicious at this time! Although the North Korean officials are also partly responsible for the lack of progress because of their blunders such as the submarine incidents, the Administration officials cannot escape some blames for the unnecessary foot-dragging in carrying out the commitments we made under the Agreement. For instance, at a time when the Administration is providing food aid to the famine victims in the North, it is still not lifting the economic sanctions on the export of our agricultural and medical goods. Furthermore, a Korean American family still can not send any money to a family member who may be dying of starvation there. Is this a rational, humanitarian policy? It doesn't make any sense at all. Besides, it was reported that the Administration even refused to heed the wishes of ROK President Kim Dae-jung on lifting sanctions. Are we trying to block the "Sunshine" policy of President Kim? What a friendly support we give!

In any case, the U.S. should go ahead now with lifting the freeze on the assets of N.Korea and open up trade and investments without further delay, if the North is willing to give some assurances and permit some respected figures such as President Carter to examine the new site right away. To delay the lifting until the fall, as Ambassador Rich suggested, may only create new doubts and anger on

the part of the North Korean officials. I just hope both sides will be more than generous and do the right things on Friday to save and keep the Agreed Framework alive.

NAPSNet Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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