

Policy Forum 02-14A: Agreed Framework Is Brain Dead; Shotgun Wedding Is the Only Option to Defuse Crisis



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.

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by Kim Myong Chol

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I. Introduction

This essay was contributed by Kim Myong Chol, Executive Director of the Center for Korean-American Peace, Tokyo, and the former editor of People's Korea. Kim is also author of "Kim Jong Il's Reunification Strategy," a book published in both Seoul and Pyongyang. Kim asserts that the Geneva Agreed Framework is "brain dead" by Western standards. North Korea is not to blame, but rather it is the United States that is responsible for the virtual collapse of the nuclear deal. A package settlement, which addresses North Korean security concerns, will go a long way to defuse the crisis.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on contentious topics in order to identify common ground.

Editorial Note: Tomorrow, the Nautilus Institute will begin running commentaries in response to our recent reports on the developing situation in North Korea. Nautilus invites you to respond to this forum, including any responses to this essay. Please send all commentary to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org

II. Essay by Kim Myong Chol

"Agreed Framework Is Brain Dead Shotgun Wedding Is the Only Option to Defuse Crisis"

By Kim Myong Chol

Executive Director, Tokyo-Based Center for Korean-American Peace

All indications are that the Geneva Agreed Framework is brain dead or by Western standards "virtually dead." I have no objection. However, alternative Korean medicine may suggest a different prescription for bringing it back to life, despite Western medicines general skepticism of alternative medicine.

The present furor over the reported North Korean centrifuge for uranium enrichment may be likened to the scene being made by a jealous possessive wealthy American Uncle Sam, who has gone out of his way to tell his friends and acquaintances about the alleged illicit affair of his poor but strongly assertive North Korean fiancée in a bid to whitewash his acts of sowing his wild oats. While unwearily running after other women, he has resisted not only taking any steps to make an honest woman of her by the promised wedding date of 2003, but also fails to pay proper attention to her for the past two years, say, by sending fancy gifts to her or taking her out for a date.

Nor is this all. The American gentleman has repeatedly insulted his fiancée in public by calling her all names. The North Korean woman, faithful to her Confucian tradition, has continued to grin and bear it all the time, until the American fiancé made a sudden visit and insisted on her remaining his second-class mistress, submitting the evidence of her alleged infidelity.

No shred of compelling evidence has been produced that the North Korean fiancée has had relations with any other man (although the lonely woman confessed that she has gone out with another man.) A high-tech gadget maniac, Uncle Sam has no compelling satellite imaging to document his

accusations. Procurement documentation is too weak to charge the North Koreans with actually running the centrifuge for enrichment of uranium. There are clear limits to what high-tech American intelligence gathering can do.

An engagement does not stop a woman from going out with any other man than her fiancée. The engagement has virtually been nullified for lack of attention and refusal to take steps to marriage. The only option left for Uncle Sam is either to terminate the engagement and give her total freedom to do whatever she pleases or to apologize for his poor attention to her and to have a wedding ceremony before 2003, albeit at the point of a Taepodong ICBM fitted with a hydrogen warhead. A shotgun marriage is the most reasonable way out for the Bush Administration, because the Geneva agreement mandates the U.S. to.

Uranium Enrichment Far From Material Breach of N-Accord

The American allegation of the clandestine North Korean nuclear weapons program seems to be founded on fact. However, a closer look at the reports from the American capital shows that the allegation is apparently ungrounded and accordingly unwarranted. It is too obvious that the Bush Administration has arbitrarily distorted the meaning of the language of the Geneva Agreed Framework.

As a matter of fact, a knowledgeable expert readily and categorically denies that the presence in North Korea of an enriched uranium program is in violation of any terms and conditions of the Geneva nuclear agreement. The reported admission by a North Korean official of the possession of a centrifuge for uranium enrichment does not necessarily constitute an act of producing a nuclear bomb. Nor is it clear at all whether the enriched uranium centrifuge is in operation or whether the North Koreans have ever fabricated an atomic or hydrogen bomb with enriched uranium in such a way.

The Americans have been under an illusion that given the primitive nuclear technology of the North Koreans, the freezing of the graphite-moderated nuclear reactor and its related facilities would totally deny them any access to nuclear technology using plutonium. Little have the Americans imagined that the North Koreans would ever attempt to resume a legal nuclear activity involving uranium. This explains why the idea of enriched uranium failed to occur to the Americans when they hammered out the landmark Geneva nuclear deal.

The Americans should have known better. They are totally unaware that as a matter of common knowledge a state with nuclear ambitions undertakes simultaneous development of the weaponization of uranium and plutonium as is the case with the United States, China and other countries. The Americans should recall that they successfully developed nuclear devices much before they set on development of missiles as vehicles to deliver them onto targets. From the North Korean point of view, nuclear weaponization is much easier than developing ballistic missiles.

As CIA Director, George Tenet, acknowledged, the North Koreans have been in compliance with the Geneva accord, keeping frozen the graphite-moderated reactor and its related facilities. In striking contrast with the North Korean compliance, the Americans have done little to fulfill their part of obligations under the Geneva agreement. To be more blunt, the Americans have left no stone unturned to humiliate and isolate the North Koreans in a constant bid to choke it into submission.

North Korean accounts suggest that Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly must have been arrogant and high-handed enough to demand that the North Koreans disarm themselves by abandoning their missile force and reducing their frontline forces. He must have assumed that the Geneva agreement has effectively nullified the nuclear card, the trump card in the hands of the North Koreans.

Missiles and conventional forces are outside the scope of the Agreed Framework. The Americans must be oblivious that the American policy of hostility has driven the North Korean missile and nuclear program. As frontline deployment is a common international practice, it is highly logical for North Korea to deploy a massive military force along the frontline as it is pitted against the nuclear-armed U.S. in the absence of a peace treaty that formally ends the state of war, replacing the armistice agreement.

Some critics of North Korea may argue that the 1994 accord refers to the 1991 declaration on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In fact, the declaration has been effectively nullified by a series of South Korean violations, including the continuing American nuclear presence in South Korea and repeated American nuclear war games in and around South Korea. The critics may hold the North Koreans guilty of violating the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It is not so much North Korea as the U.S. that is in scandalous violation of the NPT, which asks the U.S. and other nuclear-armed countries not to threaten a non-nuclear state and to strive to reduce their nuclear forces. Besides, North Korea is no longer a member of the NPT.

Still unsatisfied, those critics may argue that the North Korean behavior is highly questionable because it violates the spirit, if not the terms, of the Geneva agreement. If a violation of the spirit of the Geneva agreement should matter at all for the Americans, why should they not launch a crash program to meet the target year of 2003 when they are already in indisputable material breach of both the spirit and letter of the accord? Bush should concentrate all his energies on meeting the deadline of 2003.

If Bush has any slightest respect for the Agreed Framework, he should naturally do everything within his power to keep the promise Clinton made in his letter to Kim Jong Il to have the American government directly provide North Korea with two reactors by the target year of 2003 in case the pledged delivery is behind schedule. However, there is no sign that Bush will do so.

US Presence in S. Korea Gross Material Breach of Ceasefire Accord

The Bush Administration should be put in the stocks for contravening not only the Agreed Frame but also the Korean Armistice Agreement. The American military presence in South Korea constitutes a most gross contravention of both the spirit and the letter of the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement that provides for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea and for a political conference to negotiate the peaceful reunification of Korea. Before pointing the finger at the innocent North Koreans, the Americans must redress their flagrant breach of the armistice agreement not only in its letter but also in its spirit.

The Chinese troops left North Korea immediately after the ceasefire went into force. Unlike the Chinese, the Americans have refused to comply with the ceasefire accord since 1953 by keeping its 37,000 troops deployed in South Korea. The US-ROK defense treaty is also in material breach of the ceasefire accord because it justifies the American military presence in South Korea.

The Bush Administration should put an end to such continuing American material breach of the ceasefire agreement. The Bush Administration should take steps for the earliest possible withdrawal of all American forces from South Korea and announce its readiness to attend a political conference of a higher level to negotiate a peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Bush in Material Breach of DPRK-US Joint Communiqué

The DPRK-USA Joint Communiqué, published in October at the end of Kim Jong's special envoy General Jo Myong Rok's visit to Washington, DC, stipulates that the two countries should strive to put to rest their hostile relations, redouble efforts to honor the commitments made in the Agreed Framework and hold bilateral diplomatic contacts on a regular basis.

The first thing the Bush Administration was expected to do was to inform the rest of the world community of nations of its firm commitment to all the international treaties and agreement. What the rest of the world received was a stunning notice that the Bush Administration would pursue the policy of unilateralism and withdraw from any of those international commitments they deem detrimental to the national interests of the U.S. Bush ordered his government to withdraw its commitment to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and other major international conventions and treaties. Turning to Korea, Bush kept on hold for nearly two years the bilateral diplomatic dialogue between Pyongyang and Washington that was promised in the DPRK-USA joint communique.

Bush bent himself backwards to infringe on one of the key provisions of the DPRK-USA joint communique by expressing skepticism of Kim Jong Il and then putting North Korea in the same category of axis of evil with Iraq. In short, Bush totally spoiled the hard won atmosphere of mutual trust it took the Clinton Administration eight years intense diplomatic energy to earn. It is worth quoting Secretary of State Powell as saying that the Bush Administration would pick up where the Clinton Administration left off. However, trained as a soldier, Powell found it inhibitive to disobey the Commander-in-Chief.

American behavior is sheer robbery, and by no means fair play. The U.S. has kept Korea, the world's oldest nation, divided for more than a half century. American nuclear forces are kept deployed in South Korea. The world's sole superpower, equipped with nearly twenty thousand nuclear devices, has been attempting to force one of the world's smallest and poorest countries to abandon its means of deterrence, before improving relations between the two former belligerents.

The above counts of the US' material breaches of the Agreed Framework have left the nuclear agreement virtually brain dead. Kim Jong Il and his people have learned the hard way that the Americans are the last to be as good as their word. As Kim Jong Il often says, the effective way to tame a beast is to wield a whip, that is, to flaunt missile and nuclear capability.

Emergence of A New Nuclear Club Member

As the Asian saying goes, "It is like letting loose a fierce tiger into the wild." Once the cumbersome Agreed Framework has been pronounced brain dead, there is no Western medical recipe for bringing it back to life. Set free from the heavy fetters of the nuclear accord, the North Koreans now feel completely free to fabricate a full range of nuclear bombs, including uranium bombs and hydrogen bombs.

The North Korean regime of Kim Jong Il is ready to join the elite nuclear club as a full-fledged member. They are well confident that the North Korean scientists are resourceful enough to produce miniaturized nuclear weapons. All the North Korean ICBMs, a joke to the American counterparts, can still wreak disastrous havoc on prime targets on the Metropolitan U.S.A. From now on, not a single day will pass without North Korea rolling out a nuclear bomb.

To be candid, there is every good reason to suspect that as early as the mid-80s the North Koreans managed to produce not less than fifty atomic bombs with more than 300 kg of plutonium imported from abroad. However, they will never admit this fact under any circumstances. In other words, when they succeeded in test-firing intermediate-range Scud missiles, a result of reverse-engineering, it is logical to believe that they must have already had scores of nuclear weapons in their arsenal. It is ridiculous to think that the North Koreans ought to have developed missile technology without simultaneously working on nuclear devices.

One estimate indicates that North Korea has now not less than one hundred nuclear warheads. Successful test firing of multistage rockets in 1993 and spectacular blastoff of a multistage rocket to put a tiny satellite into orbit can be better explained in this context only. In short, North Korea is in

an Israeli-like status. One critical difference is that North Korea is capable of striking any strategic target on the U.S. mainland with a tiny fleet of ICBMs.

Three facts may suggest the extent of the North Korean readiness for nuclear exchange. A North Korean official said, "One top-class nuclear scientist and one missile expert are on the Central Committee of the ruling Workers Party of Korea. They are always among the suite accompanying Kim Jong Il on his criss-crossing on-the-spot guidance tour. Most of the population of the nation can be evacuated into deep hardened underground shelters in less than twenty minutes with little panic or confusion. The whole nation can live safely in underground facilities for many months. Fortress North Korea has been designed to withstand a nuclear saturation strike and retaliate in kind. However, it is not the case either with South Korea or Japan or the U.S. The three countries are most vulnerable to North Korean missile attacks.

Any military strike initiated against North Korea will promptly explode into a thermonuclear exchange between a tiny nuclear-armed North Korea and the world's superpower, America. The most densely populated Metropolitan U.S.A., Japan and South Korea will certainly evaporate in The Day After scenario-type nightmare. The New York Times warned in its August 27, 2002 comment: "North Korea runs a more advanced biological, chemical and nuclear weapons program, targets American military bases and is developing missiles that could reach the lower 48 states. Yet there's good reason President Bush is not talking about taking out Dear Leader Kim Jong Il. If we tried, the Dear Leader would bombard South Korea and Japan with never gas or even nuclear warheads, and (according to one Pentagon study) kill up to a million people."

U.S. Perception Counts Most

What counts most is not so much North nuclear and missile capability as the American perception that North Korea may have such capability. No matter how true North Korean nuclear capability may, such capability does not serve the political purposes of Kim Jong Il and his policy planners in dealing with the U.S., unless Washington policy planners perceive North Korean nuclear threat as real. Their view is of the Americans being hoaxed into suspecting that the North Koreans have already nuclear capability.

The Americans are the most skeptical people in the world. Due to the historical background of their nation building, they are least ready to trust what others say. What they trust most is guns and money. This is the reason why the Americans show a strong preference for lie detectors, which are ubiquitous in the U.S. If the North Koreans say that they have nuclear capability, the immediate American response is to doubt the statement. If the North Koreans deny, the Americans have a typical propensity to suspect that they have. Most interestingly, Americans readily accept as true acknowledgement after repeated denial.

It is easy to imagine how stunned James Kelly and American officials were at the reported post-denial acknowledgement by First Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju that the North Koreans have a uranium enrichment centrifuge. As expected, American officials have been ordered into globe-hopping tours, rallying international support for their campaign to apply pressure to bear upon the North Koreans to dissuade them from their alleged nuclear weapons program. Bush, Rice, Rumsfeld and other tough guys took special care to paint North Korea as different from Iraq, offering the North Koreans the striped-pants treatment.

It is too obvious that indirect diplomacy is not effective now matter how hard the Americans may consult their allies and the allies of North Korea. The past consultation with Russia and China failed to produce any positive results, because they have little leverage with North Korea. The four-way talks are a case in point, where the Americans ended up talking with the North Koreans.

Three Options Available

Then the question arises of how to interpret the reported North Korean admission of the possession of a uranium enrichment device. One most likely explanation is that it is more of an invitation to diplomatic negotiations than refusal to talk. There are a few months to go before the target year of 2003 strikes. In other words, the Kang Sok Ju statement means that the North Koreans still keep the nuclear trump card, namely, that the Bush Administration has no choice but to pick up where the Clinton Administration left off.

The Bush Administration is left with three choices: The first is just to ignore North Korea and let the regime of Kim Jong Il emerge a nuclear power with atomic and thermonuclear weapons in their arsenal with a fleet of ICBMs locked on to American targets. This option is most likely to set into motion the domino phenomenon, inducing Japan and South Korea to acquire nuclear arms, making unnecessary the American military presence on their soil with anti-Americanism rising to new heights.

The second choice is for the Americans to initiate military action to knock out the nuclear facilities in North Korea. Without precise knowledge of the location of those target facilities, the American policy planners face the real risk of North Korea launching a full-scale war against South Korea, Japan and the U.S. The North Korean retaliation will most likely leave South Korea and Japan totally devastated with the Metropolitan U.S. being consumed in nuclear conflagration. Looking down on the demolished American homeland, American policy planners aboard a special Boeing jets will have good cause to claim, "We are winners, although our homeland is in ashes. We are safely alive on this jet."

The third and last option is to agree to a shotgun wedding with the North Koreans. It means entering into package solution negotiations with the North Koreans, offering to sign a peace treaty to terminate the relations of hostility, establish full diplomatic relations between the two enemy states, withdraw the American forces from South Korea, remove North Korea from the list of axis of evil states and terrorist-sponsoring states, and give North Korea most favored nation treatment.

The first two options should be sobering nightmare scenarios for a wise Bush and his policy planners. If they should opt for either of the scenarios, that would be their decision, which the North Koreans are in no position to take issue with. The Americans would realize too late that the North Korean mean what they say. The North Koreans will use all their resources in their arsenal to fight a full-scale nuclear exchange with the Americans in the last war of mankind. A nuclear-armed North Korea would be most destabilizing in the region and the rest of the world in the eyes of the Americans. They would end up finding themselves reduced to a second-class nuclear power.

The third option of negotiating a shotgun marriage will most probably have the most sex appeal to Bush. Bush will fly all the way into Pyongyang to become legitimate husband and wife before his American family members, relatives and friends attending. By marrying North Korea, Bush will have a strong chance of being returned to the White House in the next presidential election. Otherwise, like father like son. Bush Senior and Bush Junior will serve combined two terms, each one term.

While on honeymoon, both Kim Jong Il and Bush will receive worldwide acclamation for their dramatic role in saving the mankind from thermonuclear catastrophe and likely share a Nobel Peace Prize.

To look back, Kim Jong Il has only the nuclear and missile cards, but they go a long way as bargaining chips. No other country should try to emulate the North Korean experience. It would be too risky.

III. Nautilus 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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