

Policy Forum 09-009: No More Victims to the Devil of America's Own Creating

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Recommended Citation

"Policy Forum 09-009: No More Victims to the Devil of America's Own Creating", NAPSNet Policy Forum, February 03, 2009, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/no-more-victims--o-the-devil-of-americas-own-creating/>

No More Victims to the Devil of America's Own Creating

Policy Forum Online 09-009A: February 3rd, 2009

By Haksoon Paik

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I. Introduction

Haksoon Paik, is a senior fellow at the Sejong Institute in South Korea, an independent think tank devoted to the study of national strategies of Korea, writes, "The Obama administration should adopt a new pragmatic approach... if it wants to solve the North Korean nuclear issue. There's no other

way but to encourage and accommodate North Korea's willingness to cooperate, getting out of a vicious circle of distrust, as a realistic way to solve key pending issues with North Korea."

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II. Article by Haksoon Paik

- "No More Victims to the Devil of America's Own Creating"

By Haksoon Paik

One of the problems that will test the new U.S. President is the issue of North Korea's nuclear program. What course will the negotiations involving the U.S. and North Korea take? Is there a serious chance for a negotiated resolution? Any answer to these questions will have to resolve the following three challenges.

First, to a large extent, North Korea's negative image as "uncooperative," "untrustworthy," or "deceitful" is a devil of America's own creation. North Korea was simply "evil," a target of regime change and removal for the neoconservatives and hardliners in Washington, who had hidden agendas that benefitted from continuous confrontation with North Korea. For them, the North Korean leadership's motivations, perceptions, interests, objectives, and strategies were not important.

The more tragic fact was that the Bush administration, by adhering to such a nonnegotiable, deceiving, and repulsive image of North Korea, narrowed the scope of its policy options to denuclearize North Korea. President Bush neither offered North Korea opportunities to cooperate nor sought North Korea's cooperation. In other words, the United States became a victim to the devil of its own creation.

Second, contrary to popular belief, North Korea has pursued a consistent policy to put an end to the confrontational relationship with the United States as an "exit strategy" in the post-Cold War era. North Korea has made efforts to end the Korean War, sign a peace treaty, and normalize its relationship with the United States at the earliest possible time for its own interests.

This has been the essence of North Korea's strategy of survival and prosperity for the 21st century, which has been reflected rather faithfully in the key agreements with the United States: the 1994 Agreed Framework, the 2000 U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué, and the September 19th, 2005 Joint Statement. President Bush, however, has lacked the will to carry out these agreements for the most part of his tenure.

Third, North Korea, lacking in trust, has constantly been on guard against U.S. schemes to "entrap" North Korea in the nuclear negotiations. For this reason, the Bush administration has experienced an extremely defensive posture from North Korea even when both were making significant progress in the Six-Party Talks since early 2007.

More concretely, North Korea appears to have perceived that there were at least five times the U.S. attempted to entrap North Korea during the Bush administration: the first trap was set up by James Kelly's visit to Pyongyang in October 2002, scrapping the Agreed Framework; the second was U.S. financial sanctions on North Korea's deposits at Banco Delta Asia (BDA), strangling North Korea's finance, the life line of its economy; the third was the U.S. demand for a "complete and correct" declaration of North Korean nuclear programs, including the "uranium enrichment program"; the

fourth was the U.S. demand for a "strict" verification protocol, even "to confirm the absence of the undeclared facilities, materials, and related activities"; and the most recent one was the U.S. demand for "sampling" to be included in the verification protocol when it could not find any place in the second-phase actions in the minds of the North Korean negotiators.

A serious "trust" issue with regard to the U.S. government itself came up when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice publicly stated in December last year that only an "idiot" would trust North Korea. This must have reminded Americans as well as North Koreans that the U.S. government too was "not trustable," and was just as defensive and inflexible as its North Korean counterpart.

With the inauguration of the Obama administration, we are obliged to ask ourselves once again: do we have to repeat the failed North Korea policy of the past? I would like to strongly recommend the Obama administration to remember that the North Korean nuclear issue is a problem that cannot be resolved without North Korea's cooperation. To our relief, however, we already have an agreed-on solution formula, unlike the Iranian nuclear case.

The Obama administration should adopt a new pragmatic approach to the aforementioned three problems, making a clear departure from what the neoconservatives and hardliners have been doing, if it wants to solve the North Korean nuclear issue. There's no other way but to encourage and accommodate North Korea's willingness to cooperate, getting out of a vicious circle of distrust, as a realistic way to solve key pending issues with North Korea. This will be "the change we need" that President Obama promised during his campaign.

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.

Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
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