

# **Policy Forum 06-22A: Only Continued Pressure, Combined With Inducements, Can Bring End to North Korean Nuclear Program**



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## **"Only Continued Pressure, Combined With Inducements, Can Bring End to North Korean Nuclear Program"**

Essay by Aaron L. Friedberg

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#### **I. Introduction**

Aaron L. Friedberg, an East Asian expert who served as Vice President Dick Cheney's deputy national security adviser from 2003 to 2005, says North Korea has boycotted new talks on ending its nuclear arms program because of the U.S. program of cracking down on North Korean counterfeiting and other illicit activities. But Friedberg says such pressure is the only way to hope for a breakthrough.

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#### **II. Essay by Aaron L. Friedberg**

- Only Continued Pressure, Combined With Inducements, Can Bring End to North Korean Nuclear Program

by Aaron L. Friedberg

Friedberg expresses unhappiness with China's reluctance to crack down on either North Korea or on Iran. "I have to say, I'm rather skeptical of China," he says, noting that recently China has increased aid and economic relations with North Korea. And on Iran, he says, it is clear that China is most reluctant to have to vote for sanctions against that country at the Security Council.

The six-party talks in Beijing on North Korea's nuclear program have seemingly dropped out of the news. There was a bit of a euphoria last September when an agreement in principle was announced and it seemed to some as if a breakthrough was imminent. What's happened since then?

I think if you go back to what actually happened last fall. It was a potentially significant development in that the North Koreans agreed in principle to dismantle their nuclear programs. I think a lot of the enthusiasm at the time was based on the fact that they had agreed to the dismantling and gone further than they had in the past. In retrospect, it looks more as if that was a theoretical agreement to provide lots of wiggle-room and lots of outs for the North Koreans.

Since then, of course, there's been very little progress. The North Koreans made a fuss about several things they raised after the fact: the issue of whether they would be assured of getting light water reactors from the United States after just agreeing in principle to dismantle much of their nuclear program; more recently, they've objected to some measures the United States has taken to crack down on the counterfeiting the North Korean entities are involved in. So the North Koreans appear to be playing this game of dragging things out, of being willing to be brought back to the table and then not really doing anything to make much progress.

Are the six-party talks even worth the time, then? Are they just allowing North Korea more time to build up its nuclear weapons?

I think they're worth the time, they're worth trying. They obviously haven't, as yet, produced the

desired result. And unfortunately, under the cover of participating in these talks, the North Koreans have been going forward in developing their nuclear capabilities. We don't know the full extent of what they are up to, but they admit to processing plutonium. We claim they have a highly enriched uranium program of some sort--at whatever level of development, we're not sure. They deny it, but if it exists, it's probably moving forward. They've tested ballistic missiles; presumably they've been able to do further work perfecting warheads. We think they have weapons but we don't know whether they've gotten to a point where they could put them on top of missiles. The more time they have to work on these things, the more likely they'll have a capability sooner rather than later. And I think they've been using the time we've given them to proceed with that.

Critics of the Bush administration have said that after reaching this agreement in principle in September, it has backed away; that the crackdown on the counterfeiting was linked somehow to the talks, knowing that North Korea would react very negatively. Do you think there's much substance to that?

I think that criticism is unfounded for deeper reasons. People have complained about the timing, and I know the official administration position is that these were not synchronized in any way. I think the official notification about the findings of this North Korean-linked bank in Macau accused of money-laundering was actually published several days before the agreement in principle at the six-party talks. So the argument that we got them to agree to something in principle and then slammed them a few days later is not right.

But the deeper question is whether we can get the North Koreans to agree to do what we want them to do without applying pressure. I don't think we can. I think the notion that we can simply offer them inducements and eventually they will see the light and be willing to undo what they've been doing in return for a big pile of goodies is not realistic, and isn't based on an accurate reading of the people who actually matter in all this, Kim Jong-Il [the North Korean leader] in particular.

What would be your approach?

I've always felt you had to combine pressure with the offer of inducements. If it's nothing but pressure, and you back them into a corner, then you're raising the risk that they could do things that could be very dangerous. On the other hand, if it's nothing but inducements, I just don't think it's going to work.

I think the idea that Kim Jong-Il cares a great deal about the fate of his country or the well-being of his people, and will recognize the desirability of opening up and having economic reforms and so on is misplaced. In fact, I think he sees much of that as threatening to him because it could conceivably loosen his grip on power. But I think we have to both talk and squeeze. We have to be able to do both simultaneously if we're going to have a chance of a peaceful resolution.

How would we squeeze?

I think, ideally, all the parties to the talks would synchronize their policies and increase economic pressure on the North Koreans. Unfortunately, it's really only the Japanese, along with the United States, who have been willing to press harder on the North Koreans since this process has gotten going. Both the South Korean government and the Chinese have been very resistant to increasing pressure, and in fact appear to have stepped up economic aid and trade with North Korea. So we're trying to press, but it's not going to work if the others are doing things that alleviate the pressure.

I think the most useful way to apply pressure would be to do the kind of thing we announced last September regarding the counterfeiting and money-laundering. The North Koreans--and, we believe,

Kim Jong-Il personally--depend very heavily on earnings from a variety of illicit activities. So if we're going to persuade him that this is not the way to work, that this is no longer the way to do things, we have to press down on some of these sources of income.

We've done some things over the last few years. For instance, we've made it harder for him to sell ballistic missiles in the Middle East and Africa and other parts of the world, as he had been doing; we've tried to discourage other countries from doing business with him, such as buying conventional weapons; we've tried to make sure that he doesn't sell or transfer anything that's related to his nuclear program; and we're also going after counterfeiting drugs, phony cigarettes, and other things that the North Koreans seem to be deeply involved in--criminal activities that generate a lot of income for them.

And we could crack down on more companies, you say, besides the bank in Macau? I guess there have been some efforts by the Japanese to crack down.

Right. The Japanese have been very forward-leaning on this, and they've actually cracked down on remittances coming from people of Korean descent living in Japan who, for many years, have sent to North Korea cash that has helped keep the regime afloat, usually through some organized criminal groups. They've cracked down on that. So the Japanese have done a lot on their own. We need the Chinese in particular, I think, to help us do this, because we believe a lot of this activity, just looking at the map, probably goes through China overland, and some of it may go through South Korean ports. So we need more help to squeeze harder.

Is President Roh [Moo Hyun] of South Korea not eager to get involved in this?

No, I think there's a real difference in approach between us and the South Koreans. Our inclination has been to regard this problem as one that's urgent and has to be dealt with in the fairly near term. The risk, the danger, is increasing if we don't do that. The South Koreans have been inclined to take a somewhat longer view. They see this as part of the larger problem of eventually reintegrating north and south. That's something I think they're not eager to do anytime soon. We've tended to emphasize pressure, and they've tended to emphasize inducements. So we're not entirely at cross purposes. I think we have the same stated objectives, and in truth, I think we both want to make sure that the North Koreans don't develop a full nuclear capability. But there are some real differences in how we are going about it.

The United States is counting on China not only on the North Korean issue but also in the Iran situation, being a member of the Security Council with veto powers. I gather from press reports, at least, China's on the verge of signing a big energy deal with Iran. That goes counter to everything the United States is hoping to achieve.

Right. On the North Korean piece first, we've placed a lot of emphasis on this, and on the Chinese role in resolving this problem. I think that's part of the reason why we've pushed consistently for a multilateral approach, rather than as some people had suggested, a bilateral negotiation involving just us and the North Koreans. We've wanted the Chinese to get involved, we've wanted them to take some ownership of this problem and to help us solve it, because, I think, most people in the U.S. government believe it can't be resolved if the Chinese don't want it to be.

The Chinese have gone a certain distance in that direction. They've played more of a leadership role in that sense than they have in the past, and I think that's significant. But you get varying opinions about how much they are willing to work to really solve the problem, or at least solve it by our standards. And I have to say, I'm rather skeptical of China. Some people are more optimistic and believe they really are going to deliver on this, but I'm not so sure. And thus far what they've done is

to consistently organize these talks.

And on Iran?

On Iran, my guess is they've hoped they wouldn't be put in a position where we'd be pressing them to do more. I think for that reason they would have much preferred that the whole issue would not have come up to the Security Council, and they may still be hoping that there's a way out to avoid that as long as this is being handled by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and by the Europeans, as it has been over the last couple years. The Chinese could hold back and hope they wouldn't be put on the spot. Now, since the Europeans seem to be more upset with the Iranians than they were previously and are willing to bump it up to the Security Council, I think the Chinese are going to have to make some decisions about how they will handle the issue.

They clearly don't want to be part of an effort to apply greater economic pressure on the Iranians. They have a lot of interests there. They've done some very significant deals with the Iranians in recent years to develop infrastructure and buy oil and sell arms and technology. They don't want to rock that boat. They don't want to be put in a position of having to choose between making us happy, on the one hand, and maintaining and building their relationship with the Iranians. So I think they'll look for off-ramps, either to encourage the Iranians to do something to placate the other parties that are pressing them, or somehow to prevent this from coming up to the UN Security Council so that they would have to vote on sanctions.

One last thought on North Korea. How did Kim Jong-Il react to the Iraq invasion? Did that encourage him more to have nuclear weapons, or did it frighten him that he might be next?

Well, you hear different stories about this. One thing that it did do is to get the Chinese off the sidelines. They really got involved in this only in the spring of 2003, I think in part because they were concerned about what was going to happen next, and about our willingness to use force to resolve this kind of problem. If you look back at the history, at the chronology, I think it persuaded the Chinese that this was very serious and that they had to step in.

Now you hear stories, and I've read press accounts about how Kim Jong-Il was very concerned about this, and how he disappeared from public view for some long period of time and was very worried that he was next on the list. I don't think he needed any further encouragement in terms of developing greater nuclear capabilities. He had promised that he wouldn't be going back even before the Bush administration, so I think he's wanted these things for some time. He wants them more now than ever, as a guarantee for his security, and also for his dynasty. What he wants is to live out his days on the throne, and to pass it on to one of his sons, presumably. And my guess is that he sees nuclear weapons as the ultimate backstop and the ultimate guarantee against any kind of intervention or undue pressure that might threaten his survival.

### **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](mailto: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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