

Policy Forum 06-14A: Sanctions on Pyongyang Will Backfire

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Essay by Kim Myong Chol

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I. Introduction

Kim Myong Chol, author of a number of books and papers in Korean, Japanese and English on North Korea. He is executive director of the Center for Korean-American Peace, and is often called an "unofficial" spokesman of Kim Jong-il and North Korea, writes, "If the financial sanctions are intended to cut off North Korea's income source to fund the nuclear-weapons development program,

it is highly unlikely that the objective will be accomplished."

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II. Essay by Kim Myong Chol

- Sanctions on Pyongyang Will Backfire
by Kim Myong Chol

The unilateral financial sanctions the Bush administration has imposed on North Korea on alleged charges of money-laundering, drug-trafficking and counterfeiting of US dollars are far from a hallmark of the lone superpower's moral integrity and lofty political principles. They are totally arbitrary and poorly advised steps.

Ill-advised as they are, will the financial sanctions produce political fallout? If the hidden real objective of the sanctions is to keep the North Korean threat alive and continue to justify US arms buildup, including missile defense, the answer is a definite yes.

Keep North Korean threat alive

The financial sanctions serve to infuriate the North Koreans, giving them a pretext to refuse to resume the six-party talks over their nuclear program and prompting them to increase their nuclear arsenal - with the six-party talks in disarray. Second, they serve to allow the US to persist in the policy of hostility toward North Korea and continue to provide *raison d'etre* for an arms buildup, including missile defense. On this basis, the financial sanctions may be called a splendid success.

Successful six-party talks would lead to a peace treaty between North Korea and the US, full diplomatic relations between the two enemies and normalized relations between Pyongyang and Tokyo.

Peace with North Korea will expose China as the true target of US missile defense and the potential threat to US influence. Behind the smokescreen of the North Korean threat the US has strived to beef up its armed forces and encircle China.

The financial sanctions, which will produce the desired results, are fraught with major negative effects.

North Korea is building up its nuclear force at a far higher pace than the Americans expect. North Korea will pass the United Kingdom and France by 2007 to emerge as the world's fourth nuclear power after China. The North Koreans will overtake China not later than 2010 to clinch the spot of the world's third nuclear-weapons state just after the US and Russia.

Three factors make North Korea unique. The first is possession of a fleet of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of unleashing retaliatory nuclear strikes on the US mainland. Second, the North Koreans still torment the Americans as a result of their victory over them in the Korean War. The North Koreans are still locked in the life-and-death state of war with the United States.

The third is that North Korea is well geared for a nuclear exchange with the US, while the population of the US is anything but prepared for the worst-case scenario of the "day after", despite its status as the world's largest nuclear power. Neither is the Japanese population. Nor is South Korea. North Korea has little to lose in war. However, the US and Japan have too much to lose.

Failure to stop North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons is another reminder that there is no preventing nuclear proliferation. This is signified by an abortive bid of the administration of US President George W Bush to restrict the membership of the elite nuclear club.

A net result is a remarkable decline of US prestige and influence as the sole superpower and world's policeman, becoming just one of the great powers. The US is a far cry from what it was. With all its high-tech weapons, ground superiority and air supremacy, it is being badly mauled in Iraq and Afghanistan.

North Korea and China are both nuclear powers and are in the process of strengthening their alliance, political, diplomatic and military, while promoting economic cooperation. Nuclear-armed and on an equal footing, the Korean-Chinese alliance is applying great pressure on the waning US, hastening its decline.

This represents a total reversal of tide for the Americans whose wishful thinking is to drive a wedge between North Korea and China over the nuclear issue. South Korea is further distancing itself from the US, leaving Japan the sole US ally in Northeast Asia. Japan, however, finds itself split between the two giants.

Cutting off funding for nuclear arms

If the financial sanctions are intended to cut off North Korea's income source to fund the nuclear-weapons development program, it is highly unlikely that the objective will be accomplished. The Bush administration is not all that interested in pursuing the sanctions. Making a scene is simply designed to keep the allies in line.

This is a hackneyed witchhunt employed since ancient times. The feudal lord frames a village woman as a witch, deflecting local criticisms for him toward her, and subsequently keeping control of the village.

The North Korean defense industry is guided by the *juche* principle, which calls for domestic funding, brains and self-reliance in materials. The principle of *juche* conflicts with counterfeiting of foreign currency and drug-trafficking to buy foreign materials and equipment needed for the production of nuclear weapons.

The Bush administration's imposition of a financial crackdown on the Far Eastern country is untenable because it is tantamount to denying that *juche* is the leading idea of the Kim Jong-il government.

North Korea successfully developed a nuclear weapon as far back as the mid-1980s. The end of the decade saw successful development of the ICBM. It is sheer absurdity to call for cutting of funding sources for the North Korean development of nuclear weapons and missiles, 15 years after their successful development.

The Bush administration has no hard evidence to support its allegations against North Korea. This having been said, it is characteristic of the Bush administration to apply financial sanctions on North Korea. Truth is the first casualty in the conduct of US policy.

The Korean Broadcasting Service (KBS) reported that Macau-based Banco Delta Asia handed its documents over to US Treasury Department investigators, telling them they found no proof to back up the US allegations. The South Korean National Intelligence Agency dismissed the US allegations as unfounded.

It is common knowledge that the allegation Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, cited by

Washington to warrant an armed invasion of the Middle East country, was a deliberate and complete frame-up.

Most US government officials know there is no truth to charges by the Bush administration that Iran is intent on developing nuclear bombs. The Americans told a big lie to its key ally Japan about the US beef issue.

Toppling the North Korean regime

Suppose one of the key aims of the financial sanctions is to help topple the North Korean government, the answer to whether it will be successful is obvious - no.

The louder the Americans talk about North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles, alleged bad human-rights record, money-laundering, drug-trafficking and counterfeiting, the more dramatically the Pyongyang administration comes across to the North and South Korean people as Korean David, heroically standing up to the arrogant, self-centered American Goliath. It adds to the Korean nationalist credentials of the North's government.

Korean nationalist legitimacy lies in standing up to foreign forces, the Americans and the Japanese among others, and safeguarding the pride, independence, sovereignty and dignity of the Korean people. Pressure from the US is a vital factor that sustains the North's government.

Unlike their Chinese and Japanese counterparts that governed their respective countries, each for up to 270 years, the Korean dynasties ruled the country much longer. Each dynasty lasted nearly 1,000 years, with very few civil wars.

Of all the Korean regimes that have existed in Korea's 5,000-year history, the Kim government is the most stubborn, with the North Korean population closely knit around it.

The North Korean people see a source of boundless pride and glory in holding Kim in high esteem as their national hero and supreme leader. Their dedication is such that they are glad to lay down their lives in defense of his leadership at any time.

The North Korean people find their sacrifices quite satisfying and fulfilling, since the Kim government has built up capability to administer nuclear retaliatory strikes on the US mainland thanks to their sacrifices and has kept the Korean Peninsula from becoming another battleground as a result of its army-first policy and nuclear deterrence.

The Bush administration's talk about North Korean human rights serves only to profit the North Korean regime. Whatever the Americans do only benefits the Kim administration.

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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