



Policy Forum 05-30A: What is the Goal of the U.S. Policy toward North Korea: Nonproliferation or Regime Change?



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Haksoon Paik

CONTENTS

[I. Introduction](#)

[II. Essay by Haksoon Paik](#)

[III. Nautilus invites your responses](#)

I. Introduction

The following is part of a paper presented on March 31, 2005 by Haksoon Paik at the 2nd Korea-U.S. Security Forum, Hyatt Regency Cheju, Korea. Haksoon Paik, Ph.D. is the Director of Inter-Korean Relations Studies Program and the Director of the Center for North Korean Studies at the Sejong Institute, an independent think tank in South Korea. Paik writes: "While the U.S. government does not have any leverage and control mechanism over North Korea's nuclear-related activities, an inter-Korean channel could be an additional support channel for U.S. efforts to achieve the goal of nonproliferation in North Korea."

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.

II. Essay by Haksoon Paik

- "What is the Goal of the U.S. Policy toward North Korea: Nonproliferation or Regime Change?"
by Haksoon Paik

How many of the experts and negotiators believe that the current U.S. policy will solve the North Korean nuclear problem and achieve the goal of nonproliferation on the Korean Peninsula? Not many in my opinion. The limits to the North Korea policy of the U.S. were treacherously revealed by North Korea's recent announcement of its possession of nuclear weapons, its intention to strengthen its nuclear arsenal, and its pledge not to return to the six-party talks until the U.S. takes certain measures. What North Korea meant was that it would return to the talks if, and only if, U.S. cooperation is secured for substantive progress in the talks toward a peaceful coexistence between the two countries, meaning an end to U.S. attempts at regime change in North Korea.

The dilemma for participants in the six-party talks that have cooperated with the U.S. in the North Korean nuclear negotiations is that, rather than leading to an end to North Korea's nuclear program, applying joint pressure on North Korea with a single voice produced the opposite outcome. North Korea announced it was going nuclear in resolute defiance of the joint pressure.

Now the participant states are questioning the validity of the U.S. judgment that pressure on North Korea with one coherent voice will make North Korea give in. Any negotiator in the six-party talks should know by now that North Korea perceives any unilateral concession on its part as disarmament and that the six-party talks in its current format will not get anywhere unless the U.S. takes cooperative measures through bilateral, direct talks with North Korea either within or outside the six-party talks. Now these nations are wondering if the Bush administration has shifted its goal from stopping nuclear nonproliferation on the Korean Peninsula to preventing the transfer of fissile materials, nuclear bombs and nuclear-related technologies out of North Korea and planning on regime change in North Korea, an "outpost of tyranny."

An idea of establishing a direct negotiation channel with North Korea has gained support among South Koreans since the second-term Bush administration has failed to show any flexibility in its policy toward North Korea and has not come up with any new, effective solutions for the North Korean nuclear problem. Under these circumstances, the logical choice left for South Korea is to open a direct inter-Korean channel for nuclear negotiation. While the U.S. government does not have any leverage and control mechanism over North Korea's nuclear-related activities, an inter-Korean channel could be an additional support channel for U.S. efforts to achieve the goal of nonproliferation in North Korea.

A discussion of an inter-Korean nuclear channel in South Korea may serve U.S. interests in the long run, because it is an early warning to the Bush administration of further division and rupture among the participants in the six-party talks. Conflict of interests among the participant countries has been already revealed by the Chinese and South Korean demand for more of U.S. flexibility and accommodation in bringing back North Korea to the negotiation table. This rupture will be more evident if the U.S. tries to use the six-party talks not for the denuclearization of North Korea, but for regime change in North Korea.

The U.S. should be mindful of all of this, but it is most important for the U.S. to know that South Korea and other U.S. allies and friends seek a more flexible, accommodating, and problem-solving U.S. leadership for an early and peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis.

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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[Return to top](#)
[back to top](#)

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:
nautilus@nautilus.org