

CLINTON MUST PRESS AHEAD TO END NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS THREAT

(Updating *Backgrounder Update* No. 190, "North Korea's Nuclear Threat: A Test for Bill Clinton," March 23, 1993, and Asian Studies Center *Backgrounder* No. 119, "Responding to the Looming North Korean Nuclear Threat," January 29, 1992.)

There is little comfort for the United States or the world in North Korea's June 11 decision to "suspend" its March 12 withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The crisis North Korea has precipitated by trying to build nuclear weapons is not over. North Korea's latest decision, following intense discussions from June 2 to 10 between high-level U.S. and North Korean officials, did not include a pledge by the North to resume international inspection of its nuclear facilities. There is a real risk that North Korea is negotiating with the U.S. merely to buy time to build its nuclear weapons—an event that may be imminent. Just last February, CIA Director James Woolsey warned Congress that North Korea may have enough nuclear material to build one bomb. President Bill Clinton must now increase American pressure, in cooperation with South Korea and Japan, to convince North Korea that it can no longer delay the termination of its nuclear weapons program.

PREVENTING NORTH KOREA FROM BUYING TIME

North Korea's June 11 announcement that suspended its decision to withdraw from the NPT was correctly described by Secretary of State Warren Christopher as an "interim step." The next step—and it should be taken immediately—is to convince North Korea to resume inspections of its nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and then by South Korean inspectors. Washington must insure that the latest diplomatic "concession" by Pyongyang does not merely grant it more time to build nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, delaying tactics and a disregard for its promises are characteristic of Pyongyang's efforts to stave off action by the international community, as the following examples demonstrate:

- ◆ Although North Korea signed the NPT in 1985, it refused until 1992 to abide by treaty obligations that required international inspection of its nuclear facilities.
- ◆ After finally allowing six IAEA teams to visit in 1992, and when an inspection late that year showed that North Korea may have produced more plutonium than Pyongyang had previously admitted, the North halted IAEA inspections. When pressure mounted on North Korea to resume inspections, it became the first country ever to announce its intention to withdrawal from the 150-member NPT.
- ◆ North Korea has refused to honor a December 1991 agreement that would have allowed the North and South to inspect each other's nuclear facilities. This agreement was negotiated to create a nuclear weapons-free Korean Peninsula. To assist it, the U.S. withdrew its tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea in late 1991.

North Korea's nuclear program is large and serious. Its one known nuclear research facility, near the city of Yongbyon, has two nuclear reactors. When both reactors begin operation—perhaps later this year—they may be able to produce up to 115 pounds of plutonium a year, enough for about seven nuclear weapons the size of those used by the U.S. against Japan in 1945.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM IS A GLOBAL THREAT

A nuclear-armed North Korea threatens U.S. allies and American security interests in Asia. Nuclear weapons will further enhance North Korea's military power, which includes one million men under arms, over 700 aircraft, and a large arsenal of biological and chemical weapons. The North's possession of nuclear arms also will multiply its ability to threaten South Korea and the 37,000 U.S. troops stationed there. A nuclear-armed North Korea could increase pressure on South Korea and Japan to obtain nuclear weapons, which will further destabilize Northeast Asia. And just as Pyongyang is hawking SCUD ballistic missiles to such dangerous Middle East states as Iran and Syria, North Korea eventually may sell nuclear bombs to terrorist states like Libya or Iran. This would significantly increase the terrible possibility that Israeli or American civilian populations could be subjected to nuclear blackmail or detonations.

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IS NECESSARY TO STOP NORTH KOREA

As North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons would threaten America and the world, the United States must provide the leadership necessary to end North Korea's threat. This means that Washington, in close consultation with Seoul, must set goals and a timetable for results from Pyongyang. The long-term goal must be to convince North Korea to terminate its nuclear weapons program. If this goal is not met by early next year, it may be too late to stop North Korea from building one or several nuclear weapons. The immediate goal must be to convince North Korea to begin inspections of its nuclear facilities by IAEA and South Korean inspectors. Such inspections must begin by the end of July, to give the IAEA and other international experts time to determine the extent of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. If Pyongyang refuses, then it will have shown its duplicity once again. Clinton must then forge a cooperative effort among South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia to convince, or perhaps even force, North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions. If necessary, this pressure should include:

- ◆ **Steadfast support for South Korea.** The U.S. must ensure that North Korea's nuclear weapons program will not jeopardize America's security guarantees for South Korea. An essential element of this guarantee is American steadfastness in maintaining its ground and air forces in South Korea until North Korea ends its nuclear weapons program. When Clinton visits South Korea on July 10 and 11, he should strongly reaffirm America's commitment to defend South Korea.
- ◆ **Rhetorical pressure.** Clinton must use his influence as leader of the free world to identify North Korea as a global nuclear threat. During the G-7 industrial nations summit in Japan in early July, Clinton should seek a statement condemning North Korea's nuclear weapons program.
- ◆ **Increased United Nations pressure.** On May 11 the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution criticizing North Korea that was deliberately cushioned in diplomatic verbiage to prevent China from vetoing the resolution. Pyongyang nevertheless condemned that resolution. The next U.N. resolution must be tougher and include the possibility of U.N.-enforced economic sanctions.
- ◆ **China's and Japan's cooperation.** Japan's cooperation is critical if economic sanctions become necessary. Because the U.S. has no trade with North Korea, the U.S. must ask Japan to be ready to cut its nearly \$500 million a year trade with North Korea. A far more important challenge for the U.S. will be getting China's cooperation with economic sanctions. China, for example, is the source of 60 percent of North Korea's energy needs.
- ◆ **Offer of better relations.** Clinton should offer better relations with North Korea only if it terminates its nuclear weapons program. Such an offer should include better diplomatic relations with, and more trade and investment from, South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. However, such benefits

should not be conferred for piecemeal concessions by Pyongyang, such as the resumption of international nuclear inspections.

- ◆ **Military options.** A new war on the Korean Peninsula would be a catastrophe. It could devastate South Korea and cost far more American and allied lives than the recent Persian Gulf War. Yet, impoverished North Korea remains desperate and volatile. Clinton must not rule out military options and the U.S. should be prepared to repel any North Korean attack on the South.

Pyongyang's June 11 suspension of its withdrawal from the NPT prevented—for now—North Korea's nuclear threat from becoming Bill Clinton's first major foreign policy crisis. Yet, North Korea's nuclear weapons potential remains a major challenge to America's future in Asia. Resolution of this threat—peacefully if possible—will ensure that America benefits from Asia's increasing economic growth. If the President does not take resolute action now, first to convince North Korea to resume international inspections of its nuclear facilities and then to end its nuclear weapons program, the result is likely to be increased instability in Asia. Failure by Clinton will likely result in several disasters: rising prospects of nuclear terrorism, nuclear proliferation in Asia and the Middle East, and possibly even the end of the system of American-Asian strategic cooperation that has maintained peace and prosperity in Asia for decades.

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