

## WARNING TO NORTH KOREA: STOP PROVOCATIONS AND TALK PEACE WITH SOUTH KOREA

(Updating *Backgrounder Update* No. 236, "Clinton's Korea Policy Falls Short: A Call to Congressional Action," January 13, 1995, and Asian Studies Center *Backgrounder* No. 133, "The Clinton Nuclear Deal with Pyongyang: Road Map to Progress or Dead End Street?," November 4, 1994.)

On three different occasions this past week, communist North Korea sent armed troops into the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the border separating the North from South Korea. These provocative moves directly violate the 1953 Armistice Agreement signed at the end of the Korean War. They also raise questions about North Korea's intentions. At risk is not only the security of America's ally, the Republic of Korea, but the safety and security of 37,000 U.S. troops stationed on the Korean Peninsula. These hostile steps come at a time when the Clinton Administration continues its flawed policy of providing economic benefits to North Korea and improving political relations with its government in the absence of any improvement in relations between Pyongyang and Seoul.

President Bill Clinton will visit South Korea on April 16. He will be stopping over on his way to the Japan summit to meet briefly with South Korean President Kim Young Sam. While on Cheju Island, off the peninsula's southwestern tip, President Clinton, in close coordination with President Kim, should make it clear to Pyongyang that unless North Korea takes immediate steps to reduce tensions, the U.S. will curtail its current policy of upgrading U.S.-North Korean relations and bolstering the North's failing economy.

### **Pyongyang Attacks the Armistice**

North Korea's recent military moves are a direct attack on the 1953 United Nations-brokered Armistice Agreement that ended hostilities of the Korean War. The Armistice established a Military Armistice Commission (MAC) to maintain the cease-fire, serve as a military channel of communication, and investigate violations of the Armistice. The MAC, too, is sanctioned by the United Nations. The Armistice also established the existing DMZ and the Joint Security Area (JSA) which straddles the border. The JSA is a small, circular compound where the MAC meetings and occasional North-South negotiations have taken place over the years.

The North has taken steps to undermine the functions of the MAC. It refuses to attend scheduled MAC meetings, thus closing the only channel for military communication along the world's most heavily armed border. On April 4, Pyongyang declared that it "shall give up its duty, under the armistice agreement, concerning the maintenance and control of the military demarcation line and the DMZ." The next day, several hundred heavily armed North Korean soldiers entered the North's side of the JSA and carried out what appeared to be combat training drills. Similar incursions took place on April 6 and 7. These actions are serious violations of the Armistice agreement. Each side is limited to only 35 troops in its sector. Another viola-

tion occurred when on April 7 North Korean troops carried rifles, machine guns, and mortars into the Joint Security Area. Soldiers in the JSA are restricted to sidearms only.

### **The North's Quest for a Peace Treaty with the U.S.**

Pyongyang openly admits that this deliberate destruction of the existing Armistice structure is aimed at a long-standing goal: convincing the U.S. to sign a bilateral peace treaty with the North. Pyongyang hopes that such a treaty would cut Seoul out of the military settlement and pave the way for the withdrawal of American forces from Korea. The Clinton Administration rightly insists that the U.S. will never sign such a deal. Since the U.S. fought in the Korean War under the U.N. banner, it should not be attempting to negotiate with North Korea on its own. The only sensible replacement of the existing structure is a peace treaty negotiated and signed by North and South Korean governments.

### **U.S. Flexibility Encourages North Korean Belligerence**

The North has chosen this bold and provocative course of action because the Clinton Administration's Korea policy is weak and misguided. The foundation of Clinton's policy is the "Agreed Framework" of October 1994. Negotiated in an effort to stop the North's menacing nuclear weapons program, the Framework offered certain benefits to the North, including gradual improvement of trade and political ties with Washington, a \$50 million-per-year fuel oil supply, and the construction of two nuclear reactors in the North worth about \$5 billion. Washington is working with about a dozen allies to raise money to support the deal, but Seoul has pledged to pick up most of the tab. In return, the North agreed to freeze its current nuclear program, thus preventing it from amassing any more weapons-grade plutonium.

However, the Clinton Administration backed down on its earlier insistence that Pyongyang immediately provide a full accounting of the plutonium it has produced. Inspection of its fuel storage sites, which the North is obligated to permit under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, has been delayed for years to come. In the meantime, the North may be constructing nuclear bombs secretly with the enriched fuel it currently possesses. Even the Clinton Administration admits that the U.S. has no way of detecting such a covert program. The North was pleased with the deal since it offers lucrative benefits yet allows it to keep its nuclear card.

Under the Agreed Framework, the North also promised to engage in dialogue with the South and make progress toward tension reduction. But Pyongyang has refused to do this. In fact, as the events of recent days indicate, tensions are as high as ever. The North's million-man army maintains its forward deployment. Its large stockpiles of chemical weapons are of grave concern to U.S. military commanders. The North has a growing missile arsenal which is capable of striking all parts of South Korea.

### **Clinton's Agenda While in South Korea**

The Clinton Administration's Korea policies have failed to protect America's interests on the Korean Peninsula: the reduction of military tension along the DMZ. The North's recent provocations are disturbing evidence not only of its contempt for the Armistice, but for Clinton's Framework agreement as well. While in South Korea on April 16, President Clinton should:

- ✓ **Express strong U.S. condemnation of the North's actions and reiterate Washington's commitment to the defense of South Korea.** The U.S. should bolster U.S. forces in South Korea with AWACS radar aircraft and temporarily deploy one more aircraft carrier to the 7th fleet in the Pacific. These additional forces are necessary to deter the North from undertaking real aggression against the South.
- ✓ **Clearly state that the U.S. will never consider a bilateral peace treaty with the North.** President Clinton should remind the North that, in the Reconciliation Agreement ratified by the North and South in 1992, the two sides pledged to negotiate a North-South peace agreement. Clinton should demand that the North abide by this commitment.

- ✓ **Press Pyongyang for immediate initiation of substantive, high-level talks with Seoul.** The 1992 North-South Reconciliation Agreement is a detailed document outlining practical steps toward easing political and military tensions between the two sides and could serve as a blueprint for future dialogue. The North has refused to implement this agreement and instead has focused its efforts on improving its ties with the U.S.
- ✓ **Remind Pyongyang that the U.S.-North Korean nuclear accord explicitly links tension reduction with the political and economic benefits offered to the North.** President Clinton should warn Pyongyang that if it continues to violate both the spirit and letter of the Framework, it will put at risk further implementation of the Framework agreement.
- ✓ **Discuss with Seoul the appointment of a seasoned American negotiator as a special envoy to jump-start the tension reduction process.** A special envoy could seek regular contacts at the highest levels of Pyongyang's secretive and insular ruling elite. He could make clear to the North that the U.S. and South Korea will no longer tolerate the North's provocations. If this message is not hammered home to Pyongyang forcefully and regularly, the North will continue to underestimate America's resolve and misjudge its intentions.

### **Conclusion**

Now that the Cold War is over, Pyongyang no longer has China and the Soviet Union standing in the wings prepared to back its military aggression. Nevertheless, apparently oblivious to this fact, North Korea is threatening the peace on the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. needs to act now to send North Korea a message: stop the military provocation, live up to its agreements, and start talking peace with Seoul.

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