

Leif-Eric Easley, "Changing North Korea's Nuclear Game Plan: five parties should pressure Pyongyang, then give it face to disarm," *JoongAng Daily* (with *International Herald Tribune*), November 10, 2006, page 7.

Diplomatic wrangling over how to deal with a nuclear North Korea does not end with a United Nations Security Council resolution or resumption of Six Party Talks. Many questions remain about how to answer North Korea's challenge to the global non-proliferation regime and prevent it from using or exporting its nuclear capability. What is clear is that a policy of regime change is too expensive and risky, and engagement has failed to elicit meaningful opening by Pyongyang. An effective strategy rests somewhere in between; the trillion dollar question is where.

There are many reasons why Pyongyang wants nuclear weapons. The most fundamental is that these weapons allow a certain brand of isolation: the kind where others have a stake in your not losing control. North Korea has calculated that the probability of perpetuating its regime in this sort of isolation is better than its chances of retaining control if it opens up to the outside world. Never mind that China has shown the latter path to be extremely profitable; the North Korean regime is obsessed with survival.

North Korea's isolation means a growing nuclear threat to international peace. North Korea's opening up should mean complete verifiable irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear programs, gradual transformation of the regime, and greater prosperity for the North Korean people. Forcing North Korea to strategically opt for the latter requires *decreasing* the probability Pyongyang attaches to regime survival in isolation, and *increasing* the probability it sees for hanging on while opening up.

As in other great games of strategy, there are three bases to cover in the effort to change North Korea's view of the odds.

To reach first base, the five parties -- South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States -- need to coordinate their responses to North Korea's nuclear test. This involves China and South Korea getting tougher by curtailing initiatives that funnel resources to the North Korean regime. Policy coordination also calls for restraint on the part of the U.S. and Japan by withholding measures such as a complete embargo, virtual naval blockade, or hints of military action. First base is reached when there is diplomatic confirmation in all five capitals of a combined approach on North Korea.

Second base is harder: sustained implementation of sanctions. Real punitive measures should make isolation uncomfortable for Pyongyang, and send a signal to other would-be proliferators like Iran. At some point, because of Chinese and South Korean fears of inciting an expensive collapse of the North Korean regime, coordinated

sanctioning will wane. If this happens too soon, it is back to first base. But if North Korea is squeezed long enough, Pyongyang will begin to doubt its previous certainty about maintaining the regime in isolation. In accordance with Resolution 1718, reports are due to the Security Council next week on implementation of sanctions. These UN sanctions on North Korea must be coordinated and sustained before it is time to advance to third.

Third base is re-engagement and offering North Korea a face-saving walk off the field. Engagement includes economic opportunities and assistance, security guarantees, and a path to normal diplomatic relations. For verifiable dismantlement to proceed in step with engagement, however, the North Korean regime must perceive better chances for survival via opening up than via self-imposed nuclear isolation. For this to be true, Pyongyang needs a way to claim victory while giving up its nuclear weapons program.

The way to give North Korea a face-saving way out is to frame its nuclear surrender in terms of "mutual disarmament." The five parties would not offer nuclear concessions to North Korea, but would give Pyongyang face by restating existing commitments. The U.S. and Russia would decrease their nuclear deployments as planned under the Moscow Treaty, China would reaffirm a defensive nuclear doctrine, and South Korea and Japan would promise never to develop nuclear weapons. A new joint statement of the Six Party Talks including these stipulations under the heading of "mutual disarmament" would allow Pyongyang to claim them as concessions for abandoning its nukes.

If Six Party Talks fail, coordinated containment would be called for to prevent the maturing of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic capabilities. But if the talks can agree on "mutual disarmament," a phased process of engagement could remove the North Korean nuclear threat and rescue the global nonproliferation regime. Direct conflict with Pyongyang would be avoided, as would the great costs of forcing regime change. Set on a path of opening, transformation of the North Korean regime would likely be slow, but at least would be in the direction of home plate: prosperity for a long oppressed people, greater security for the region, and eventual unification of North and South Korea.

For now, it remains to be seen whether the five parties can get to second base, and whether they remember to tag up before advancing to third.

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