

**Testimony of  
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**Committee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate**

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Thank you for inviting me to discuss our North Korean problem with you today.

I will focus my remarks on whether there is a diplomatic approach that could achieve a principal American foreign policy objective: the verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities.

First, some unverifiable observations:

- I believe there is little possibility of reaching an agreement to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons capability that would satisfy both the U.S. and North Korea, if only because of the difficulties of verifying North Korea's compliance. It is also hard to have much confidence in their honoring any agreement.
- North Korea may have badly miscalculated the reactions of China and South Korea to their missile tests on July 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, but I conclude at this point, given the international political risks to them for such actions, that Pyongyang has probably given up on the Bush administration as a negotiating partner and considers it an unrelenting enemy. Senior leaders believe they must have a serious nuclear delivery capability to give them greater deterrence and a more powerful negotiating position. They will wait for another American administration two years down the pike. This does not preclude their returning to the six-party talks.
- Some North Korea watchers suspect they may carry out a nuclear weapon test so that any new administration will face an unambiguous nuclear weapons capability. The latter is highly conjectural. We are ignorant of the state of their weapons and of the highest level political debates in Pyongyang. China, their most important patron, would be strongly opposed to any nuclear weapons test; although we do not know what China's redline is on North Korea's nuclear weapons. We also may well be witnessing some deterioration in their public relations. In some quarters the missile firings are seen as also a message to China.

This reading of North Korea may be wrong. However, we cannot determine their willingness to negotiate a deal to eliminate their nuclear weapons capabilities by intelligence analysis or intuition or exhortation. It will have to be done—if at all—by diplomatic exploration.

The American generated six-party initiative to negotiate the elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons has been useful in bringing together the major powers of East Asia for the first time to talk collectively about a major security issue in the area. It has generated some sense of purpose at least among the five. But after three years, the talks have produced one joint statement of principles; a useful document, but only a first step.

There has been a lack of negotiating content in the six-power forum in great part because of our profound strategic difference in approach to North Korea with two countries who have great stakes in this issue—China, North Korea's "best friend," and South Korea, our treaty ally. China has not proven to be the *deus ex machina* who would bring North Korea around by persuasion or economic pressures to resolve the nuclear issue as many predicted when the six-party talks began. China has many common interests with the U.S. on the Korean peninsula, but it also has many other interests at play in North Korea and has not been willing to subordinate those to U.S. purposes. The same has been true in spades of South Korea.

The differing view with China and South Korea on how to manage North Korea has allowed Pyongyang to escape the consequences of bad behavior and has made a negotiation with Pyongyang difficult, if not impossible. More specifically,

- they do not want North Korea to have nuclear weapons but do not share the American sense of its primacy as an issue;
- they do not want to join in bringing concerted pressures to bear on the North fearing it would create serious tensions and potentially affect the peace, stability, and economy of the peninsula;
- while we freeze Pyongyang out except for some humanitarian assistance, they provide sizeable economic assistance, effectively undermining our bargaining position;
- they believe we have been insufficiently forthcoming in our negotiating proposals to the North;
- they want us to talk to the North in any forum, bilateral or multilateral, and do so themselves.

These differences have been mostly papered over by constant toings and froings and the usual diplomatic rhetoric.

The missile tests, however, have clearly had an impact on both countries and throughout the region. China is embarrassed by North Korean behavior and angry at its refusal to listen to their entreaties. It also fears that North Korean action will have damaging regional implications for East Asia, notably causing Japan to reassess its defense requirements. China surprisingly even supported a UN Security Council resolution

censuring North Korea, although Beijing has refused to adopt punitive measures at this time. In South Korea the government's "soft" approach to North Korea has been increasingly publicly questioned, and Seoul, also surprisingly, has suspended some assistance pending North Korea's return to the six-power talks. North Korea is unhappy with its isolation and sputtering badly. It could well isolate itself further by cutting off projects with South Korea in an effort to scare Seoul into becoming more accommodating.

These changing perspectives could open greater opportunities for a diplomacy that might bring closer together the postures of the U.S., China, and South Korea toward North Korea, an indispensable requirement for any serious negotiations with North Korea.

The first part of any new American diplomatic effort must be to try to bridge the gulf with Beijing and Seoul. We might wait to see if there is any further fall-out from Pyongyang's isolation and its unhappiness with China and South Korea. But it is an appropriate time—although hardly the most politically opportune one in Washington—for the U.S. to craft a new approach that might get real Chinese and South Korean support to seriously test the proposition that there may be some package of security assurances, political measures, and economic bait that would cause North Korea to put aside its nuclear ambitions and stop throwing missiles around. That means going further than the statement of principles agreed to last September by the six powers and putting forth a negotiating position beyond expecting the North to accept a Libyan like approach to eliminating their nuclear weapons. Obviously the elements of a negotiating package must be worked out within the U.S. government, which can be enormously difficult given the reported sharp differences within the administration.

We would expect China and South Korea to make clear to Pyongyang that a fair deal has been presented. We would try to secure commitments from both countries on what they are prepared to do if North Korea spurns such a new approach. Whether their commitments would be worth anything if North Korea balked is a risk we would have to take.

Departing even further American political reality, I believe that any new negotiating approach should be accompanied by some dramatic measure to show our willingness to negotiate—not only to North Korea but to our partners as well—such as a visit by Secretary Rice to Pyongyang or an offer to immediately begin negotiations to establish diplomatic relations.

There is also the problem of resuming negotiations. North Korea has insisted on bilateral negotiations. The U.S. insists that bilateral meetings can only continue to take place within the multilateral forum. That is a rather remarkable posture, and makes the six-party talks the only multilateral negotiation, that I am aware of, in which the U.S. insists that it alone will hold bilateral talks with one of the parties only when the multilateral meeting is on. The North Koreans would probably have accepted that, but now insist that before they go back to the six power talks, the U.S. rescind the financial sanctions it has recently imposed to stem a variety of North Korean illicit activities. There must be an

early resolution of this issue or some face-saving way found for Pyongyang to return to negotiations.

We have no credible red lines for North Korea beyond not attacking South Korea and Japan. Nor, as far as I can tell, do we have any concerted policy for dealing with North Korea as a state besides talking to them about nuclear weapons. Every principal party to the issue is tired of the North Korean regime, but China and Korea want to do something about it. China has been trying to turn it into a mini market oriented China. South Korea hopes that by large scale assistance to make them dependent and transform the regime over time. Maybe all that is a triumph of hope over reality. America's policy toward the North seems to be to hold its nose and wait for them to implode or for China or South Korea to see the light and join us in putting serious pressures on North Korea. Hopefully there will be some surprise internal cataclysm—not to be dismissed—that washes the regime away. Waiting for that to happen is not a great basis for policy.

That still leaves the nuclear issue. And we all know there is no good option. Force would be violently opposed by South Korea which has the most at stake. Pressure and isolation requires unity with our friends. Maybe North Korean actions will stimulate our friends to further action, but UN resolutions guarantee nothing. That leaves diplomacy and whether we want to try to seriously pursue it. We should not forget that North Korea is not an 800 pound guerilla. Far from it. It is a failed state dependent very much on foreign handouts, which will one day be on the trash heap of history. But before that happens it can cause great harm and the U.S. should not be afraid of dealing directly with Pyongyang on the nuclear issue. Moreover, if we were to decide to try tougher measures and even force, it makes good sense to put ourselves in the best international position to do it and have gone the extra mile diplomatically.