

## A North Korea Strategy for the Obama Administration

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For the last 20 years our North Korea policy has operated around a flawed strategic concept—that North Korea would give up its nuclear weapons program in exchange for rapprochement and economic assistance combined with a “peaceful substitute” in the form of Light Water Reactors. Such an expedient strategy essentially was a “deal with the devil” approach. It assumed we could live with Kim Jong Il’s regime more or less as is, provided that he did not overtly threaten us with nuclear weapons or nuclear proliferation.

The track record of this strategy has been abysmal. Four times we or the South Koreans have bought more or less the same deal—but gotten very little in return. We have not denuclearized North Korea or lessened its proliferation activities. Moreover, in pursuit of a nuclear roll-back we have in essence funded and protected the Kim Jong Il regime, allowing it to maintain its fascist grip on state and society, including the most ruthless suppression of human rights for any state in the world.

It is time for a new realism in North Korea policy—one that recognizes the Kim regime will not give up its nuclear weapons and that the nuclear program was never intended as a “bargaining chip.” Nonetheless, it is also essential to realize that the Kim regime – in possession of nuclear weapons or not –is an antiquity of the Cold War and is highly vulnerable to change. Provided we define the end-state clearly, understand the points of vulnerability sufficiently, and use the right levers, North Korea can be influenced, shaped, and even changed—externally and internally—without provocative threats or drastic overt actions.

One of the best levers of influence is serious, strong, and sustained engagement. **Engagement for change—not for appeasement, conciliation, or forbearance (as in the past)—should be the key phrase for the Obama strategy toward North Korea with the clearly defined end-state of attaining a reunified Korean peninsula with Seoul as its capitol in the coming eight years.** 20 years after the Cold War ended in the rest of the world, it is time to begin ending the Cold War in Northeast Asia. We can use the same positive diplomatic, non-violent, and non-provocative means we used to win without fighting in Eastern Europe, centered around three foundational elements:

1. **Structured engagement** across diplomatic, economic, military, and cultural lines;
2. **Effective containment:** effective implementation of a regime to counter the threat of continued North Korea nuclear and missile proliferation.

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3. **Enhanced deterrence/preparation for contingencies:** North Korea's likely deployment of nuclear warheads onto intermediate range and intercontinental ballistic missiles cannot be accepted and needs to be countered, if diplomacy continues to fail. Likewise, we need to be much better prepared for the likelihood of a regime collapse or unstable succession.

Allow me to lay out seven key propositions for such a strategy, grouped in baskets for each element.

**Structured Engagement:**

1. **The Kim regime will not give up its nuclear program but that does not mean that all hope is lost. There is a great deal that can be done to lessen tension and open up the regime by flooding it with information and opportunities for human, technical, and strategic engagement.** North Korea has long banked on a so-called "hostile policy" from Washington as a means to avoid obligations toward denuclearization, on the one hand, and to justify both domestically and internationally a reluctance to reform, open, and normalize its behavior, on the other. As with Orwell's governments of Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia in 1984, a mentality of constant war threats or even imminent conflict rings through the themes of editorials and commentaries of various print and broadcast media to which the North Korean people are exposed, reinforced further by indoctrination and study sessions. Nonetheless, though the signs in Pyongyang read "The great leader Kim Il Sung is with us for all eternity," the number of North Koreans "living in the past" and committed to the path father and son Kim chose for this nation are dwindling. A forward-leaning approach by a new U.S. administration, though different in nature from the encouragement Reagan's "evil empire" designation gave dissidents in the former Soviet Union, will demonstrate to the elite of North Korea that the Orwellian existence the Kims have created that depends on a perpetual confrontation with U.S. imperialism and its hostile policy is not the only conceivable future for North Korea. All efforts to engage the North should be cognizant of the public diplomacy need to demonstrate our good intent, and the favorable future available to the North Korean people should Kim or subsequent leaders choose the path of denuclearization and normalization.
2. **A detailed strategic roadmap is critically needed to guide the process—it is the key to "structured engagement."** We have had enough in the way of talking point-driven bargaining sessions and largely unstructured working groups. These tactical approaches that increasingly take place within a longer-term strategic void play to our weaknesses and Pyongyang's strengths. The roadmap should encompass all elements of change for North

Korea—including threat reduction, economic development, diplomatic normalization, and denuclearization (even if the later is not attainable). We should deliver it as a “full up” offer to the DPRK and it should be made public so that no one can say we lack sincerity of commitment or harbor hostility. North Koreans don’t like roadmaps for a reason – because they tend to force them to actually comply with their commitments and benchmark their lack of progress. The roadmap should lay out a major Nunn-Lugar plan for dismantling the WMD factories and weapons facilities and retraining personnel. It also should detail a “Marshall plan” for economic reconstruction and opening. There should be international conferences organized to support both dismantlement and development and study teams should be sent to Pyongyang as soon as possible. If skeptics are correct, Kim will balk at a roadmap. Even so, Washington will have regained the momentum and perhaps even the moral high ground, not only in the Six Party Talks process but also in Northeast Asia. An aggressively engaging Obama Administration deprives Kim of his ability, at least internationally, to continue to blame the “hostile policy” of the United State for his unwillingness to move forward with denuclearization and opening.

- 3. For North Korea the Six-Party Talks have become the proverbial goose that lays the golden eggs.** For the same reason that construction contracts are project-based and not hourly-paid, the Six-Party Talks are destined to a very slow pace with periodic stalling, provocation, and reengagement by North Korea while the ultimate goal of denuclearization is kept deliberately distant. The Six-Party Talks should occur only once North Korea has received the roadmap. The talks are a means to an end, not a means to themselves. They also were never intended to be based permanently in Beijing and though the Chinese have been gracious hosts, they have also used their status as convening party to bog down the process. They must here forth rotate among the capitols.

#### **Effective Containment:**

- 4. The biggest single threat from North Korea is not that it would use its nuclear weapons but that it will sell them.** Unfortunately, engagement in no way provides a safeguard against proliferation. Even in the high times of denuclearization 1990s the DPRK began developing an HEU program at home and marketing key components abroad, selling a plutonium program in the Middle East in partnership with the AQ Khan network, doing high explosive testing for warheads, and developing, deploying, and proliferating a new class of IRBMs and ICBMs. With the passage of UNSC resolution 1718 in the wake of the October 2006 nuclear test, North Korea lost its “sovereign right to proliferate.” That said there has been no actual implementation of this vital resolution. The North Koreans must be held to the resolution as should all UN member states. The best means of effective implementation is simple and verifiable: North Korea’s weapons trading companies, their officers, offices, and bank account should be compelled or forced to withdraw from doing business around the world. Such infrastructure and capital is essential for the DPRK to stay in the weapons proliferation

business. The highly enriched uranium program represents a huge source of clandestinely produced fissile material that could be proliferated but there is no way currently to assess its location and/or safeguard it. Given that the DPRK won't put the HEU program on the table, aggressive moves to contain proliferation by pursuing the DPRK's proliferation networks are all the more urgent, irrespective of the status of the diplomatic process or the impact that counter-proliferation might have on the talks.

5. **North Korea contends it has weaponized the more than 30 kilograms of plutonium** it has declared to its partners in the six-way denuclearization talks, and insists they cannot be inspected. **We must assume the weapons are warheads to go on missiles.** Deployment of nuclear tipped missiles is a highly unsettling development. Maximum efforts in the talks should be made to safeguard the weapons and to compel North Korea to dismantle its nuclear capable missile facilities but we should be aware that these efforts are likely to be unsuccessful.

#### **Enhanced Deterrence and Contingency Planning**

6. **North Korea's nuclear moves have not been deterred via deployment of missile defense nor by the US nuclear umbrella.** Japan is in the uncomfortable position of contemplating its own nuclear options—a move that could impair or undermine the alliance with the US and trigger an arms race in NE Asia. To deter the DPRK, forestall Japan, and perhaps most importantly compel China to take responsibility for stopping its ally from deploying nuclear weapons, the US should begin to consider reciprocal forward deterrence in the form of a countervailing missile threat, most likely based in Japan, akin to the Pershing Missiles we put into Europe toward the end of the Cold War. It is very likely that the threat of such a system being developed and deployed alone would make China crack down hard on the DPRK.
7. **It is clearly time to start planning for a post Kim Jong Il North Korea.** It was truly heartening to hear that Secretary of State Clinton make remarks to the media en route to South Korea about the need to anticipate a change in North Korea's leadership and be prepared. As his illness has made clear, Kim will not be in charge forever. The US, ROK, Japan, and China should begin a process of planning and consultation on a post Kim Jong Il Korea.

Taken together, these three foundational elements (structured engagement, effective containment, and enhanced deterrence and preparedness for contingencies) can serve to support a strong and bold approach by the Obama administration toward North Korea – one that both anticipates and encourages change on the Korean Peninsula in line with the enduring national interests of both the United States and its allies.

