Bush’s Deferral of Missile Negotiations With North Korea: A Missed Opportunity

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Root Room

Following a meeting with visiting South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, President George W. Bush announced March 7 that his administration would not immediately pursue negotiations begun by the Clinton administration to constrain North Korea's ballistic missile development and exports. Bush's remarks differed dramatically from Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement a day earlier that the administration would pick up where the Clinton administration had left off. U.S. negotiators had reportedly been close to finalizing a deal under which North Korea would have stopped its missile development in exchange for satellite-launch services and would have halted missile exports in exchange for nonmonetary compensation. (See Bush Puts N. Korea Negotiations on Hold, Stresses Verification.)

On March 23, the Arms Control Association held a press conference to discuss the ramifications of the president's decision. The speakers were Spurgeon M. Keeny, Jr., president and executive director of the Arms Control Association; Morton H. Halperin, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and director of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department from 1998 to 2001; and Robert Gallucci, the dean of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and the chief U.S. negotiator of the 1994 Agreed Framework, which ended North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

The following is an edited transcript of their remarks and the question-and-answer session that followed.

Spurgeon M. Keeny, Jr.

Good morning and welcome to the Arms Control Association's press conference on President Bush's decision to defer negotiations to curb the North Korean ballistic missile program. We called this press conference because we thought the implications of this decision were so serious that they deserved further attention. I'm sure this issue will be with us for some time.

I believe that President Bush's handling of this affair in the recent meeting with President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea was one of the most serious diplomatic blunders of the post-Cold War era. When Bush announced that the United States had no plans to resume the far-advanced negotiations with North Korea to curb or eliminate the North Korean ballistic missile program, he failed to pursue a major opportunity to improve U.S. security. He compounded this diplomatic blunder by repudiating the position that his own secretary of state had set forth the day before: that the United States would pursue the negotiations initiated under the Clinton administration. Furthermore, he chose to make this announcement after a meeting with President Kim, who has made a major policy effort to achieve reconciliation and resolution to the very difficult North Korean situation. Bush clearly blindsided President Kim and put him in an extremely embarrassing position.

The United States, through long and very difficult negotiations, managed in 1994 to achieve an understanding with North Korea on the so-called Agreed Framework, which stopped an unambiguous and substantial North Korean effort to develop nuclear weapons. Without the Agreed Framework,
today we would be facing a North Korea that had several tens of nuclear weapons in hand and was not so far away from having hundreds of nuclear weapons. That is assuming that military activity did not occur in the interim. Let me remind you that in 1993 and 1994 the situation appeared so serious that usually cautious observers Brent Scowcroft and Arnold Kanter went so far as to publicly propose that unless the North Korean nuclear program could be stopped, we should undertake pre-emptive action against North Korea and its nuclear facilities. I think it would have been quite remarkable if such action had not resulted in North Korean action against Seoul and, very likely, a war on the Korean Peninsula, which could have easily resulted in hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of casualties.

With the apparent resolution of the nuclear situation, attention turned to the North Korean ballistic missile program, and we have struggled with this for the last six years. As you know, many observers, including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, consider this program a near-term threat, not only to the security of the region, but also to the security of the United States itself. After a slow start and with the help of former Secretary of Defense William Perry, the negotiations finally got on track, and in the past year or so considerable progress was made, causing Ambassador Wendy Sherman to write recently that we were "tantalizingly close" to an agreement.

In rejecting Colin Powell's statement that this administration would pick up where the Clinton administration left off, Bush gave as his explanation that North Korea was untrustworthy and that efforts to curb the ballistic missile development program were unverifiable. I believe that, as difficult as North Korea has been, its record on implementing the Agreed Framework has been quite good—probably as good as that of the United States. I also believe that efforts to control the North Korean ballistic missile threat are certainly verifiable. Developments in North Korea's longer-range missile program, which is not far advanced, require testing, which can easily be verified by national technical means. The export of North Korean missiles on any scale that had significant consequences to U.S. security would certainly also be clearly apparent. To deal in depth with all aspects of the missile program is indeed more difficult, but understanding the final details of North Korea's program is not relevant to U.S. or even regional security.

If one thinks the North Korean ballistic missile program is a threat to the United States, one has not only an opportunity but really an obligation to pursue the negotiations which seemed to be on track toward eliminating this threat at the source. The alternative of rejecting this diplomatic track in favor of building a national missile defense—which would not be operational for more than a decade and which, in the form the Bush administration appears to be envisaging, would cost hundreds of billions of dollars—is a very poor trade-off. Doing so would essentially allow North Korea a decade of opportunity to pursue whatever ballistic missile program it may have in mind.

Failure to pursue these negotiations will certainly be widely perceived in this country and throughout the world as a cynical effort on the part of the United States to maintain North Korea as a clear and present danger to the United States and thus as a rationale for pursuing a national missile defense. This is hardly a posture the United States should seek as leader of the free world in efforts to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

On a more optimistic note, I hope that Bush's performance reflected a lack of decision within the administration of what to do about North Korea and that this policy issue is a work in progress. And in the process of formulating a policy, hopefully Colin Powell and other people in the administration who understand the necessity of a diplomatic approach on this issue will eventually win the day.

**Morton H. Halperin**

Let me begin by describing briefly what has come to be called the "Perry process," which developed out of the recommendations in a report by former Secretary of Defense Perry; what the Clinton administration was trying to accomplish; how far it had gotten before the end of the administration; and then what the implications of that are.
The Perry process was begun out of a debate within the country about whether the Agreed Framework was working and also whether we needed more, since the Agreed Framework covered only a part of North Korea's nuclear program and did not at all limit its missile program. The debate was given impetus by the testing by the North Koreans of a longer-range missile, which roused concern not only in the United States but also in Japan that the North Koreans might be trying to develop longer-range missiles and to mate them to nuclear weapons.

The decision was made, without any dissent in the administration, to focus on the nuclear weapons and the missiles, notwithstanding the fact that the Korean Peninsula is the scene of the most intense conventional confrontation that remains in the world and that there is therefore a constant danger of war breaking out. It was decided that the question of changing the conventional balance would be dealt with afterward in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement on the Korean Peninsula. And so the administration approached the North Koreans with the proposal that we discuss further limits on their nuclear program and limits on their missile program, both their indigenous production and their exports.

The North Korean position initially was that they were prepared to talk about further limits on nuclear weapons, but only in the context of full observation of the Agreed Framework. Further, they were prepared to limit and indeed eliminate their missile exports. For them the issue was only money—if we wanted to buy them instead of having others buy them, that was fine. It was not a matter of principle, it was just a matter of how much the exports were worth. But on their indigenous missile capability, the North Koreans began with the proposition that their testing, development, and deployment violated no existing international treaties, that they were not under any obligation not to test or develop missiles, and that this was a matter of their national security and not something they were prepared to discuss.

The United States made it clear that for us any movement toward a change in the relationship between the United States and North Korea, a movement away from belligerency and confrontation, required that the North Koreans be willing in principle to give up further development, at least, of their missile program. And after several rounds of discussions at various technical and political levels, a meeting by the secretary of state with the North Korean foreign minister, a high-level visit of a North Korean official to the United States, and then, finally, a visit by the secretary of state to Pyongyang, the North Koreans clearly accepted that they would be willing to put limits on their ballistic missile program—both their indigenous program and their exports—and further limits on their nuclear program in exchange for what they called compensation and what we called further steps to deal with humanitarian problems in North Korea and to move away from belligerency.

Now, there have been various reports about just how far along we were, and I do not want to get into the precise details; but it was clear, I think, beyond any doubt, that the North Koreans were prepared to forgo additional tests of long-range missiles, and that they were prepared to agree not to develop or deploy longer-range missiles. There were questions of how much verification they would accept. There were also questions about whether they would put limits on the shorter-range missiles that they have had for many years and further questions about whether they would be willing even to eliminate those missiles. As you all know, President Clinton made a decision at the end of the administration not to go to North Korea to try to close this deal. It is these negotiations that remain and that the Bush administration, one hopes only temporarily, has decided to postpone.

Let me say a few words about which agreements I think are possible and which are in our interests. It seems clear to me that how much verification we need and how much assistance we should be prepared to provide to the North Koreans depends very much on how much of a limit they are prepared to accept on their program.

It is important to remember that we started negotiations with the urgent need to prevent the North Koreans from conducting further tests of a long-range missile. That need was based on the estimate of the intelligence community that the North Koreans were going to test and that the purpose of the tests was to develop long-range ballistic missiles, including ICBMs, that would be mated with nuclear weapons and that would be capable of reaching the United States. It was this estimate of the North Korean program that led the Clinton administration to move toward deployment of a national missile defense.
If the North Koreans are prepared to forgo further tests in return for the launching by the international community of some North Korean satellites, without any transfer of technology, then it seems to me clear beyond any doubt that this agreement is in our interest, whether we get any other agreements or not. It is certainly completely verifiable, and the cost of putting up their satellites is well worth having the North Koreans not further test ballistic missiles. If one moves beyond that to trying to get agreements on production and on various kinds of testing of the components of a longer-range missile, then clearly that would require some degree of verification. But the degree of verification required, at least for limits on testing, seems perfectly reachable even in a closed society like North Korea, and such an agreement therefore is also clearly in the interests of the United States.

Whatever one thinks about national missile defense, it seems clear that the North Koreans are much less likely to fire an ICBM at the United States if they do not have one and that it must be in our interest to try to reach an agreement which prevents them from building such an ICBM. The alternative of simply watching them build it, watching them mate it to a nuclear weapon, watching them fire it at the United States, and then trying to shoot it down cannot be the best way to protect the national security interests of the United States. So, even if one thinks that the capacity to shoot down missiles is something we need to develop, it cannot be that, if we are worried about the missile threat, we are not interested in negotiating an agreement that would prevent the North Koreans from developing an ICBM.

If you try to move further to a freeze on existing shorter-range missiles, or even dismantling those missiles, then that clearly requires a much greater degree of verification and clearly will require a greater degree of compensation. There is also the question of whether the North Koreans are actually willing to do that, whether they are willing to accept the degree of verification that would be required to do that, and whether in fact we would be willing and should be willing to pay the cost of dismantling a system that has been in place for many years and that is really part of the conventional military balance. But it cannot be the case that, because such an agreement is either not attainable or not attainable at a price we want to pay, that we should not seek agreements that would deal with longer-range missiles that threaten the United States and Japan.

In addition to the demands for intrusive verification, which I’ve already discussed, we are also hearing that we should not accept an agreement of any kind with the North Koreans unless the North Koreans also agree to changes in the conventional military balance. That is an irresponsible position because it says that we will not try to constrain nuclear weapons and missiles because we cannot at the same moment also get limits on conventional forces. It is important to remember that the decision not to put conventional forces on the table was one that was made by the U.S. government in approaching the North Koreans. To now turn around and say to the North Koreans, “We will not do this unless you agree to agreements on conventional forces,” is irresponsible. We can reach agreements on conventional forces, but only in the context of a comprehensive political settlement on the Korean Peninsula, and a political settlement on the Korean Peninsula requires improved relations between the United States and North Korea. A missile agreement would make a major contribution toward that.

I think we also need to understand that, if this administration is serious about improving relations with our allies, then the path that it has embarked on is an extraordinarily dangerous one. For one, it risks undercutting the South Korean “sunshine policy” because I think it is very likely that the North Koreans will not go much further in terms of improving bilateral North-South relations unless they see it as also bringing improvements in U.S.-North Korean relations, which I think is their primary objective. Second, I think that our relations with Japan and the very important trilateral relationship that we built to deal with the North Koreans will be placed in jeopardy if we simply refuse to negotiate with the North Koreans because at some point one of the consequences of that is almost certainly going to be a further North Korean missile test.

The North Koreans agreed to a moratorium on testing while the negotiations were underway. If the position of the administration turns out to be that we cannot negotiate with the North Koreans because in the future they might violate agreements that have not yet been negotiated or signed, then we have to expect that at some point the North Koreans will say that their unilateral
commitment to a moratorium while negotiations are going on is no longer valid. And if there are tests, this will have important implications in Japan, especially if it appears that the testing occurred because of U.S. unwillingness to negotiate.

So, in terms of our own security interests in preventing North Korean weapons from attacking Americans and in terms of our relations with Japan and South Korea, I think it is important that the administration complete whatever review it is undertaking, go back to the negotiating table, and be prepared to seek to negotiate various levels of limits based upon the degree of intrusive inspection that we can get for those agreements.

Robert Gallucci

I want to start by asking why we're all here this morning. This is easy to answer: I'm here because Spurgeon asked me to be here, and whenever Spurgeon Keeny has asked me to do something in the last 20 or 30 years, I've tried to do it. It's usually right, and I think it is in this case.

Beyond that, we're here because the stakes in this particular issue area are very high. While there are other challenging foreign policy issues that the new administration needs to get a grip on where the stakes are high as well, there's something different about North Korean policy, and that is that there seems to be a fairly clear policy course that one could set that would be successful. I don't think that is necessarily true with the other foreign policy challenges, such as Iraq.

At the beginning of the Clinton administration in 1993, we were already in crisis with North Korea, which had taken steps with respect to the International Atomic Energy Agency and announced it was going to pull out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT]. We concluded that North Korea had a small research reactor that was operational, a somewhat larger 50-megawatt reactor being built, and a much larger 200-megawatt reactor under construction, together with a chemical separation plant. We calculated these would be finished in three to five years and would produce about 150 kilograms of plutonium each year.

Depending on a lot of things, 150 kilograms of plutonium a year is about 30 nuclear weapons each year. That is a large nuclear weapons program, and there were no ambiguities—or not many—about North Korea's capability to complete the program. After all, the small research reactor had been completed and was operating, and it had already produced enough plutonium—a little over 20 kilograms contained in spent fuel—for maybe five nuclear weapons. So North Korea had a real nuclear weapons program that needed to be stopped.

In addition, we were concerned about the impact that North Korean withdrawal from the NPT would have on the international non-proliferation regime. At the same time, we were watching a ballistic missile program that we had every reason to believe would be mated with the nuclear weapons program, making the United States as well as our allies vulnerable to attack by ballistic missiles armed with nuclear weapons. Needless to say, the South Koreans and the Japanese were very concerned about what the United States would do to deal with this problem.

Finally, underlying all of this, was the conventional military situation: North Korea had more than one million men forward-deployed and hundreds of artillery tubes within range of Seoul; we had 37,000 American men and women forward-deployed in South Korea, and we had a treaty commitment to defend the South. So if we managed the nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program poorly, we had the prospect of a major conventional war on the Korean Peninsula, which, in the words of Gary Luck, who was the force commander, would not look like the Gulf War. He said, "I'll be able to win that one for you, but not right away."

So the stakes were very high then and they're very high now. That means one has to be very careful in how one manages this particular security problem.

How do you stop a country, which you've already identified as a rogue, that has a nuclear weapons
program and a ballistic missile program? Well, the last administration decided the best way to do that was to engage it in negotiations, which led to the Agreed Framework. For that, it was accused by some of allowing the United States to be blackmailed, of giving good things to bad people, of rewarding bad behavior, of sustaining a totalitarian regime, and of other catchy phrases. But the Agreed Framework was sustained year after year by appropriations from a Republican Congress. Why, if it was such a reprehensible agreement? It was sustained because it gave the United States and its allies real benefits, and it was certainly better than any other agreement that could have been negotiated or any other solution to the problem of North Korean ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.

Could we have stopped the North Korean program with sanctions? Nobody inside or outside of the administration thought we could then or thinks we can now. Could we have stopped it with military force? Yes, we thought, but we didn't think we could do it without conducting a war on the Korean Peninsula. Could we adopt a strong defense and deterrent posture instead of negotiations, demonstrating that we will not negotiate with rogues? Yes, that would mean containing North Korea, and that's a good, solid position. But the vulnerability of that position is that it means accepting North Korea as a nuclear-weapon state armed with ballistic missiles. Containment does not stop the programs. The alternative was negotiations.

I go through that with you because I think we confront something similar, though not identical, with the ballistic missile problem. The second Clinton administration launched a policy review led by former Secretary of Defense Perry, and one way of characterizing what that review concluded is that the best course was indeed to engage the North in negotiations to see whether the North could be persuaded to give up its ballistic missile program, whether the cost of persuading the North to do that was acceptable to us, and whether we could do that and have high confidence that we had achieved the objective.

I rather liked Secretary Powell's statement that they would follow up where the Clinton administration left off, and I was disappointed, frankly, to see the president pull back the next day and express skepticism about negotiating with North Korea. This will make life a bit harder for the Kim Dae Jung government in South Korea, harder for him to pursue the sunshine policy, and I think that's regrettable.

My own view is that Kim Dae Jung's visit was, in retrospect, perhaps a little premature, certainly from Kim's perspective. It is not, however, terribly surprising that the new administration wants to review policy. I'm not here to criticize the new administration's policy because I don't know what it is yet, and they ought to be given a chance to develop it, in my view. I've expressed some concern about how it develops, but I'll wait and see more myself. At this point, I think a policy review is certainly in order; it's a new administration. I hope they will get on with it.

But I also hope that, in the course of getting on with reviewing our policy to North Korea, the administration remembers that they are now in office and they do not need to run against the last administration any longer. They do not need to criticize Clinton administration policy. They need to set their own policy. And, I'm fairly confident that if they do a policy review, much as Secretary Perry did for the Clinton administration, they will find the prudent course is indeed one which explores negotiations. We shouldn't fail to pursue them because North Korea is a rogue state by some definition.

Finally, on the question of national missile defense, North Korean ballistic missiles, and how these things fit together, it has never seemed to me that any administration does anything with absolute unity of thought among all its members, and I do not know what's in the minds of the senior people in this administration. If anybody's thinking it is a good idea to preserve the threat of North Korean ballistic missiles, I would think that is an idea that was not consistent with American national security interests and I would hope that they would put it aside.
**Question:** There has been some discussion of revising the Agreed Framework in order to replace the light-water reactors with a coal-fired plant. Is that a good idea?

**Gallucci:** The question of reopening the Agreed Framework in order to see whether the North Koreans could be persuaded to accept conventionally fueled plants rather than nuclear-powered plants has been discussed for some years. My own view is that it would be a good idea to continue to explore with the North Koreans—after consulting closely with the South Koreans and the Japanese—any interest they might have in substituting fossil-fueled plants for the two 1,000-megawatt light-water reactors that are envisioned in the Agreed Framework.

The benefits could be substantial to all. I say could be—it depends on a lot of things. Units of smaller size would make more sense given the rudimentary character of the electrical grid in the North. Fossil-fueled plants could also be introduced sooner than the first light-water reactors could possibly come online, and this would be of benefit to the North. From our perspective, those who are involved in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization [KEDO] would not have to worry about the plutonium that would be produced in those light-water reactors if they were replaced with conventionally powered plants, and that would be a plus.

Let me digress for a moment here before any of you have palpitations of the heart. The plutonium produced in a light-water reactor can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons—we certainly knew that when we made the deal. We made the deal because in real life things are measured as in terms of "as compared to what," and a light-water reactor is preferable to a gas graphite reactor system, which we were trying to convince the North Koreans to abandon and we did. But still, from the perspective of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, in a country like North Korea, I prefer a conventionally powered plant to a nuclear plant.

So, I'm sympathetic to and supportive of exploring the idea with these two huge provisos: one, that first we consult with our allies and make sure the South Koreans and the Japanese are supportive of this idea; and, two, that we do it with the approach that it is a substitute and ask the North Koreans, in essence, whether this is of interest to them and then we explore the terms. So, I'm arguing that it may be a good idea to reopen and look at some of the terms of the Agreed Framework, not—I repeat not—to abandon the Agreed Framework.

**Question:** Dean Gallucci, as you were the chief negotiator for the Agreed Framework, I find what you're recommending at this time, revising the Agreed Framework, very provocative. What has made you change your mind? What makes you think that the agreement should be reopened now?

**Gallucci:** Don't find this provocative. I'm not trying to make news. Remember that the negotiations were not a one-day affair. They were quite protracted, beginning roughly in June 1993 and ending in October 1994. During the negotiations, it was not possible to persuade the North Koreans to accept conventionally powered plants as a method of achieving their energy objectives and as the benefit that was in the Agreed Framework. They would not then have agreed to that. They said if they were going to give up their gas-graphite technology—which consisted of three reactors at that point (two under construction and one completed) and a chemical separation plant—they wanted the very best nuclear technology. And the very best nuclear technology, they thought, was modern, light-water reactors.

So you can analyze what was going on in the North Korean calculations in terms of their bureaucracy and their energy needs and come to your own conclusions, but we were not able to persuade them away from that position. And it was not a close call for me to decide which was the better outcome. The choices were a North Korea with two 1,000-megawatt light-water reactors, which they can't fuel without external assistance and where there is no need to reprocess and separate plutonium, or a gas-graphite system that produces weapons-grade plutonium that will, out of necessity, be separated at a plant. There's no contest. So light-water reactors were a good idea. If at any point we could have persuaded them otherwise, I think it would have been a good idea. We were not able to then.

Since that time, any number of people have had a light bulb go on over their head and said, "Gee, 1,000-megawatt light-water reactors. Boy, that doesn't fit very well with the North Korean grid." Yes,
we know that. "But they can't be run safely." Yes, and something will have to be done before those reactors come online safely. We understand all that. We are trying to deal with a problem which threatens the security of South Korea, Japan, the United States, and the international community, and we will have to work toward dealing with that problem. We would prefer to have conventionally powered plants. If at some point the North Koreans decide they would agree to that and our allies are comfortable with the transition—because up to now they have been planning to fulfill the provisions of the Agreed Framework through KEDO—then it's a good idea. It always was a good idea.

**Question:** What is your expectation that the North Koreans would agree to do this? And what about the Japanese and the South Koreans?

**Gallucci:** Well, I don't know. I have not talked to the North Koreans about this since 1994, and that's getting to be a long time ago. I don't know where the North Koreans are on this, and I don't even know where my colleagues who were in the last administration were on this idea. It is to me an important but second-order issue.

**Keeny:** I'd like to add a point from someone who wasn't involved in these negotiations. At this point, given the Bush administration's apparent approach to the North Korean situation, it would be disastrous to come in and suggest that we want to revise the Agreed Framework. If it is even brought up on the margins of discussion as something advantageous to North Korea, it will have to be done in the most cautious and sensitive way because they will look on it as the beginning of the end of the Agreed Framework and start paying more attention to how they resume their nuclear weapons program along with their ballistic missile program. So, to say something is somewhat better is a far cry from saying that this is something one should actively pursue at this time.

**Gallucci:** Spurgeon, I would of course assume that, if the administration explored this, that they would do it cautiously and sensitively.

**Keeny:** Of course, we see the evidence is that the administration is very adept at cautious and sensitive approaches.

**Question:** What does the North Korean case suggest about the administration's general approach to non-proliferation?

**Halperin:** I think it's too soon to tell, and I don't think that one should jump to conclusions. I think as the administration works its way through these issues it will inevitably come to see that negotiations and efforts to prevent proliferation have to be made key components of any serious policy to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

**Gallucci:** I think it's too early to tell.

**Keeny:** It's too early to tell, but the indicators are not encouraging.

**Question:** President Bush sounded very skeptical regarding North Korean compliance with the Agreed Framework. What is your assessment of North Korea's compliance?

**Halperin:** Well, if you read the rather tortured background press briefing that followed Bush's statement, it turns out that it depends on what the meaning of "is" is. "Is" turns out to mean "will." What the administration seems to be saying is that there is no doubt that the Agreed Framework is still being observed, but that the president is skeptical whether, if there were a future agreement, the North Koreans would observe it and whether we would be able to verify it completely, given the closed nature of their society.

And I think that, as I tried to say in my opening remarks, depends on what the agreement is. If the agreement is that the North Koreans will not test-fire a long-range missile, then we will be able to verify that. Korea is a very small country; one cannot test-fire a long-range missile within North Korea. If their agreement is not to export, I believe we will have a high degree of ability to verify that. As you get into agreements to dismantle missiles or not to produce missile components, then obviously the verification becomes more difficult.
But the question one always has to ask is, "Is getting an agreement with some confidence of verification worth it?" And that depends on what you pay to get that agreement. The president's remarks sound like the debate we had about the Soviet Union in the early 1960s when people said, "It's a closed, totalitarian society. We can't verify agreements." And we discovered, in fact, that we could negotiate agreements which were verifiable, which were verified, and which were observed. And I think everyone now agrees that the Agreed Framework with the North Koreans is observed.

**Gallucci:** I think you have to be fairly careful on this issue of verification and trust. When we negotiated the Agreed Framework, we were confident that we could tell whether or not the North Koreans were doing what they said they were going to do at the facilities we were concerned about. We identified particularly a small five-megawatt research reactor, a chemical separation plant that was being expanded into a larger reprocessing facility, a 50-megawatt reactor under construction, and a 200-megawatt reactor under construction somewhere else. That wasn't everything, but it was clear it was virtually everything. And we had high confidence we could tell when those facilities were being mothballed, frozen in place, and when the fuel was going to be recanned, if it was already separated in the pond, because we were going to do the recanning.

Now, critics said, "But wait a minute. They could have a secret program. You've just done a deal with North Korea, and they could be cheating. Don't you know that North Koreans cheat? Don't you know that they could hide things? Don't you know that North Koreans dig tunnels and they can put these secret facilities in the tunnels? So what are you doing an agreement with North Korea for?" Excuse me, but remember the proposition "as compared to what?" Are you better off stopping with high confidence a known nuclear weapons program that has already produced 30 kilograms of plutonium and promises to be producing 150 kilograms a year, or not?

If you decide you are better without an agreement because they might also have a secret program, what are you accomplishing? Indeed, with an agreement, you are better off not only in stopping the known program, but when you develop a suspicion that there is a secret program, as we did in 1998, you can act on it. Had we had no Agreed Framework with the North Koreans, do you really think the North Koreans would have said "Come on in" when we said we want to go look inside that cavern? I don't think so. The only reason we got access to what we thought might be a secret nuclear weapons program was the Agreed Framework and the benefits it contains that the North Koreans wished to protect.

So, be careful here. Make sure that you are considering the real world in which you have to compare real possibilities and outcomes. The Agreed Framework does not automatically give us access to North Korea to check on secret nuclear weapons programs. We have to do that ourselves. Fine. If there was no Agreed Framework, we'd still have to use all our assets to monitor North Korea and see whether they are doing things which we believe are threatening to ourselves or our allies. We'd have to do that anyway. The Agreed Framework gives us better access to deal with the problem if we discover it.

**Keeny:** I'd like to add just two points. First, when the U.S. government became concerned about what was going on in those underground cavities, the North Koreans agreed to let us take a look. They didn't have to do that. So they've gone further than they had to in facilitating the verification process to the extent we have evidence to go on. And, second, I want to underscore again that, in a case of a ballistic missile agreement, it would be easy to verify the development through testing, which would be absolutely necessary for more advanced ballistic missiles, and also the problem of exporting complete systems. That would be the most important part of an agreement because that is what really threatens the region and what might threaten the United States. Those are verifiable with a great degree of confidence. The other things that may be desirable, which require more complicated verification, are not central to what we're trying to accomplish in curbing North Korea's ballistic missile program.

**Question:** I have trouble believing that the administration is using North Korea as a tool to support their missile defense program because, if you ask them about it, they see threats everywhere—next door, across the street—they don't need North Korea to spend billions of dollars on a missile defense. So, what's behind this? Why is this administration turning its back on these negotiations? Is it not
isolationism, pure and simple?

**Keeny:** As I said at the beginning, I am afraid the administration may not want negotiations, both because the threat provides a rationale for going ahead with a national missile defense and because they simply don't like agreements and negotiations. But we've seen lots of changes in administrations in the past. I point in particular to President Nixon's positive approach to arms control, which came as a pleasant surprise to many of us as time went on. I think in this business one cannot abandon hope. And the effort to cut off a major threat to the United States—a threat recognized by the administration—through negotiations seems such an overwhelmingly rational and desirable activity that one can only hope that, when it examines the alternatives, the administration may moderate its position.

**Halperin:** I don't think it is isolationism. I think it is a deep skepticism about negotiating with closed regimes. This is not something that's peculiar to this administration. There were many people in the Clinton administration who were skeptical about whether engaging North Korea made sense or not. But I think that the facts of this situation lead one to a more sober conclusion. The strongest supporters of doing something by agreement is the American military because, as they say, we could defeat the North Koreans in a war, but that defeat will not come anything like in the Gulf War—the casualties will be very substantial and the cost in many ways will be very great. So simply saying we can deal with this militarily is not really an option. And as Bob pointed out, containment is not really an option, because containment means sitting there and watching the North Koreans develop nuclear weapons and missiles. Even if one thinks ballistic missile defense could shoot down a lot of them, that is a very dangerous way to live.

So you end up, I think, having to overcome your own skepticism, your own visceral dislike of dealing with totalitarian regimes and people who you think you can't trust, and say, "Let's see if we can't negotiate something that advances our interests." One can only hope that, as the president's advisers work him through this issue, he will come to the conclusion that, even if you don't like the North Koreans, even if you don't think that you can trust the North Koreans, you can work out agreements that are verifiable and that are clearly in our interests.

**Gallucci:** There is a good quote—I think from Abba Eban—that you can't make peace by negotiating only with your friends. And there's a lot to that. This is hard work. I really want to wait and see what happens. This administration has very experienced professionals in national security issues, and I don't know that they all think exactly alike. So I think it is prudent for anybody who is looking to support good policy to wait and see if good policy evolves.

**Question:** What is the risk of sending a message to North Korea that negotiations are going to be put off?

**Halperin:** Well, I think the risk here is very simple. The North Koreans have demonstrated to us over the years that they think the way to get our attention is to do something provocative, like starting to produce plutonium or testing a long-range missile. And when they get our attention, they then try to negotiate an agreement. But when they think they have lost our interest, they do something provocative again, and the North Koreans have told us exactly what the provocative thing is: it's another ballistic missile test. They have said that they stopped testing at our request while the negotiations were going on, and that there has to be a limit on how long this moratorium remains in effect.

What I fear is that at some point the North Koreans will decide the only way to get the attention of this administration is to do another missile test. That will get the attention of the administration, but in exactly the wrong way. It will persuade people in the administration that the North Koreans cannot be trusted when, in fact, it demonstrates the reverse, that they can be trusted to do what they say they will do. The administration will then say, "See, we told you these guys can't be trusted." That will lead them to a further unwillingness to talk, so the North Koreans will think, "Ah, we will have done something more to get their attention." They will fire another missile, and we will then be in a spiral of sending bad signals which ultimately could then call into question the Agreed Framework and lead us to a much more dangerous situation.
So, I think it is incumbent on the administration to say very clearly and reasonably soon where it wants to go, how it wants to proceed with this issue, and to accept that, if it's not willing to talk, it's going to get missile tests.

**Gallucci:** I think there are two themes here. One is how the North behaves, and in my experience it behaves the way Mort described. It behaves that way tactically in the context of negotiations, and it behaves that way strategically in terms of the way it relates to South Korea and the United States. And we have seen the North Koreans already begin to exercise that one bit of leverage they have. I mean, they have no real assets other than the ability to cause trouble and pain and raise concerns, and what they are doing is suggesting that is what they'll do. We want to avoid precisely the spiral that Mort describes.

The second theme is that I would not like to see us snatch defeat from the jaws of victory here. It doesn't seem to me that we have to go down that road. The road we previously defined is not a nice smooth road—it will be frustrating and bumpy—but we'll keep the North Korean situation from being a problem of foreign policy and prevent it from becoming a crisis for us. It seems to me that there's a course that will do that. And there's another course that may have some rhetorical appeal but that is less prudent.

**Question:** Congress is a player that is often influential early in an administration. Just before the Kim Dae Jung visit, there were a couple of letters from members of Congress to the administration—one from the senior Democrats expressing interest in continuing the dialogue on the missile freeze and one from Henry Hyde and a couple of others expressing some concern about the Agreed Framework. Dr. Halperin, in your experiences working at the State Department during the last three or four years, how would you characterize the concerns that you were hearing from members of Congress about this? Are there partisan views on the approach to North Korea, or is there some sort of bipartisan agreement about at least some aspects of this U.S.-North Korean dialogue and relationship?

**Halperin:** Well, I think by the end there was bipartisan agreement on the Agreed Framework. There are always some members of Congress who think we're paying too much for it, but I think in the end most Republicans on the Hill and most Republicans from outside, many of whom are now in the administration, ended up agreeing that the Agreed Framework is a good agreement, that the North Koreans were observing it, and that it is clearly in our interests to continue with it.

I do not think that the administration's action here was based on congressional pressure or public pressure. I think there was in fact much less criticism of the Clinton administration's move toward North Korea than many people in the administration feared. People kept waiting for the attack on it, but it never came. And so I think this administration has a lot more running room to do it. I think the decision to put off negotiations is a result of the administration's own internal views and the worldview of the president and his advisers more than it is a calculation about domestic politics or congressional roles.

**Question:** North Korea has said on a number of occasions that the United States has not kept up its end of the Agreed Framework, particularly on the economic exchanges, and that contention has been repeated by observers here. What is your opinion?

**Halperin:** Well, we promised the North Koreans that we would eliminate the sanctions under the Trading With the Enemy Act, I think, three times. And then we finally did do it. We have certainly been behind schedule in providing the heavy fuel that we promised them, and we are behind schedule in building the reactors. Now I think that a lot of that is inadvertent: it's the result of bureaucratic delays and various kinds of problems. I don't think that there's been any intentional or systematic violation of the agreement on the American side, but certainly if you look at the record with punctilious observation, you have to conclude that we reacted more slowly than in fact we were committed to do. But I think the North Koreans, on balance, accept the fact that both sides are proceeding in a way that is consistent with the basic agreement.

**Gallucci:** The fundamental obligation of the North Koreans was first cooperating in the canning of
spent fuel that was in the pond and had plutonium in it, and then the freezing of all activity at the other nuclear facilities. They did that. The other thing that they were supposed to do was a lot less clear in the language of the Agreed Framework, which is tortured on this point, but generally we intended the language to put a burden on the North to engage the South directly in discussions that would reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula. This they were slow to do. Of course, in recent times it has not been an issue because there has been very remarkable dialogue between the North and the South.

For our part, the North has complained that we did not remove the limits on economic contacts between the United States and North Korea and that we have not generally been as forthcoming as the Agreed Framework, they believe, would have us be. I was not for a long time sympathetic to that and I am not now because we had our own complaint about North Korea's failure with respect to their obligations to engage the South.

As to the two substantive commitments we have, one is the delivery of the heavy-fuel oil, and the scheduling of the heavy-fuel oil is not what we had told the North Koreans we would try to do in terms of the amount of tons of heavy-fuel oil per unit of time. But it has gotten delivered. The second is with respect to the reactors. I've always been a little unhappy with the suggestion that we are behind schedule. When the North wanted a schedule, I resisted because I knew, based upon what I had been told, that it was going to be very hard to clearly predict how long it was going to take to build two 1,000-megawatt light-water reactors in North Korea. We have a pretty good idea how long it would take in South Korea (and we can still get that wrong) because we've built—with the help of various others—reactors in the South, but no one has built a large reactor in the North. So even apart from the political issues surrounding this, the technical issues can be quite significant. However, we did provide the North a notion of how long it would take, and we're not moving as quickly as we would like with the construction of the reactors.

But I would not want to characterize any of this as failure to take the steps envisioned in the Agreed Framework. These things are complicated—sometimes the language is soft, sometimes the technical obstacles are significant, sometimes the politics causes delays in implementation—but generally we have been proceeding according to the steps envisioned in the Agreed Framework pretty well.

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