

**Kim Jong Il's "Strong and Great Nation" Campaign  
and the U.S. "Imperialist" Threat**

by

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## Introduction

North Korea's new, highly enriched uranium (HEU) nuclear weapons program may be a consequence of Kim Jong Il and his military leaders' paranoid world view. From Pyongyang, one's view of international developments can be dramatically different from that of Washington, D.C. Observers of developments in North Korea are routinely reminded that Kim Jong Il rules behind a vanguard of a million man army, two thirds of which is estimated to be deployed near the South-North Korea border formed by the no man's land commonly referred to as the De-militarized Zone or DMZ. Backing this mighty conventional force are a dozens of medium range ballistic missiles and a concentration of long range artillery aimed at the Seoul metropolitan area, home for nearly one quarter of South Koreans. Additionally, North Korea's arsenal may include chemical, biological and possibly even nuclear weapons. Obviously, this is a potent and threatening military posture.

But the view from Pyongyang is radically different. Pyongyang is the capital of one of the world's poorest and smallest nations. Food and fuel are scarce, the industrial sector is dilapidated and the economy cut off from international trade and investment. Only the military sector is relatively robust. Looking beyond one's borders, a host of apparent enemies seem to lurk. Particularly worrisome is the nearby military might of U.S. air, sea and land forces forward deployed in South Korea and Japan. Complementing them are the ample military and economic resources of Seoul and Tokyo. Together, they form, when viewed from Pyongyang, a powerful and potentially hostile military alliance shielded by the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

No longer does Moscow or Beijing counter balance the military and economic might of the United States, Republic of Korea and Japan. Russia since 1990 has been preoccupied with its own struggle for survival. Beginning in 1998, discontinued its promise of "automatic" defense of North Korea in the event of an "imperialist" invasion. China remains an ally to North Korea, but its 1992 normalization of relations with South Korea significantly diluted its reliability. Washington, on the other hand, commands the resources of the mightiest nation in history.

For half a century, Washington has made Pyongyang a priority concern of its containment and military oriented deterrence policies. Intent upon survival, North Korea's political elite engaged Washington in negotiations between 1993 to 1994. The goal was to secure North Korea's future existence by defusing Washington's displeasure and normalizing diplomatic and commercial relations. The 1994 Agreed Framework was to have been the road

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map for a process of “simultaneous steps” leading to US-DPRK normalization. For various reasons, both sides faltered in their implementation of the agreement. By 1998, both the Clinton Administration in Washington and Kim Jong Il were losing confidence that the Agreed Framework would guide them to their desired outcome.

South Korean President Kim Dae-jung’s “sunshine diplomacy” may have caused Kim Jong Il reconsider his options in 1998. By 1999, North Korea’s hesitant engagement of South Korea suggests renewed confidence that diplomacy and negotiations could garner North Korea the resources it needed for survival. North-South reconciliation complemented the process initiated under the Agreed Framework. But still, achieving a durable peace with Washington remained elusive. At some point after 1998, Kim Jong Il appears to have concluded that he needed insurance for his regime’s survival. That insurance eventually took the form of a clandestine highly enriched uranium (HEU) nuclear weapons program.

Pyongyang’s policy decision process will remain invisible to us for the foreseeable future. But by reviewing the period 1998 to 2002, we might discover hints of why and when Pyongyang decided the risk of resuming its nuclear weapons program outweighed the potential negative consequences. As we shall see, several major developments coincided which North Korea’s military officials could have used to convince Kim Jong Il to pursue a double track policy. On the one hand, while outwardly maintaining faithfulness to the Agreed Framework, research, short of actual development, could have begun on a new nuclear weapons program.

Our search requires that we examine some developments, particularly U.S. government policy, from Pyongyang’s perspective. The intention is to better understand Pyongyang’s leadership, not to rationalize its decisions. Given our very restricted access to the policy formulation process in Pyongyang, we are left no resource other than to examine the official enunciations of the Kim Jong Il’s regime. Actually, as we shall see, these pronouncements can be quite revealing when viewed in their proper context.

### **Kim Jong Il’s Inaugural Year - 1998**

The year 1998 was a watershed in North Korea’s history. In September, Kim Jong Il initiated a new national campaign to build a “strong and great nation,” or *kangsong taeguk* in Korean. The new campaign coincided with the culmination of his carefully crafted succession to his father, Kim Il Sung. Integral to this was the pursuit of a “defense first” policy. Revision of the constitution concentrated administrative power in the National Security Commission (NSC). Naturally, Kim Jong Il assumed the chairmanship. Military officials were elevated to

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unprecedented visibility, and presumably political influence, within Kim's regime. Another major theme was the acquisition of advanced technology. Apparently to commemorate Kim's succession, while also capturing the world's attention, Pyongyang on August 31 launched a multiple stage ballistic missile through Japanese air space. The launching sparked intense criticism from Japan, among other nations. Pyongyang declared the launching had the peaceful intention of placing a satellite in orbit around the work, and that the effort had been successful, despite ample evidence that the rocket had fallen into the northern Pacific Ocean.

### **The Agreed Framework Falters:**

A few weeks earlier on August 17, the *New York Times* had reported that the U.S. intelligence community had detected a huge secret underground facility near the northwestern village of Kumjangni to house a new, clandestine nuclear weapons program. On November 10, a ranking U.S. State Department official, speaking on background to US Information Agency correspondent Jane Morse, said, "... we have some pretty serious doubts about whether they (the North Koreans) are living up to their side of that deal (the Agreed Framework)." North Korea's Foreign Ministry responded on November 24 in an authoritative policy statement which declared, "We no longer feel a need to cling to the (US-DPRK 1994) Agreed Framework if the United States insists on scrapping it, while simultaneously insisting on inspecting the underground facility without compensation." On December 2, 1998, the spokesman for the Korean People's Army (KPA) General Staff stated, "The reason that the U. S. imperialists are making a fuss over an underground nuclear facility and our launching of a satellite is that they need an excuse to spark another war ..." He warned that, "If another war breaks out, it is not only the U.S. invaders but also the South Korean puppets and Japan that will be targets of our attack." North Korea the following year allowed the United States to visit the suspected site in exchange for 500,000 tons of food aid. Although the site was found to be empty, many in the U.S. intelligence community remained convinced that North Korea could not be trusted and possessed a clandestine nuclear weapons development program.

### **Russia's Nuclear Umbrella Ends:**

Moscow and Pyongyang concluded a new bilateral treaty in 1998. Moscow had served notice in 1996 that it would scrap its treaty of friendship with Pyongyang. On December 22, 1998, a DPRK Foreign Ministry official confirmed that a new treaty had been agreed upon. The new

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“Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the DPRK” came into force on March 19, 1999. Absent from it was Moscow’s pledge to “automatically” come to Pyongyang’s aid in the event of external invasion, as had been provided in their 1961 treaty. Instead, the new treaty called upon both parties to consult one another in the event of military conflicts arising on their respective territories. This new arrangement ended Russia’s nuclear umbrella over North Korea, a major set back for North Korea’s defense posture.

### **Washington’s Deterrence Posture:**

While diplomats and technicians in Washington and Pyongyang struggled to implement the Agreed Framework, the United States military pursued policies designed to reinforce the deterrence capabilities of its forces, and those of its allies in Northeast Asia. South Korea’s Kim Yong-sam continued his nation’s Force Improvement Program designed to modernize the South Korean armed forces by equipping them with some of the world’s most sophisticated weapons systems. To further refine their force’s operational compatibility, U.S. and ROK forces continued their annual large joint conventional forces exercises. Per an understanding Washington and Pyongyang reached prior to their signing of the Agreed Framework, the US-ROK armed forces discontinued their previous annual joint exercise named “Team Spirit.” Instead, they expanded a previous joint exercise, “Foal Eagle” to take its predecessor’s place.

### **US-Japan Defense Guidelines:**

In 1997, Tokyo and Washington reached an agreement to expand the so-call Japan Defense Guidelines which defined Japan’s expected role in the event of war on the Korean Peninsula. During the previous decade, Japan had pursued an extensive program of qualitative and quantitative improvements to its self-defense forces. The United States commissioned a number of co-production programs that gave Japan access to some of the world’s most advanced military technology and weapons. The air defense forces received all weather F-15 fighters and sophisticated technology for the design and production of an indigenous fighter. The navy built high technology Aegis destroyers and P-3C anti-submarine aircraft under U.S. license, upgraded its fleet of submarines and arsenal of torpedoes and missiles. The army began co-production of advanced anti-aircraft Patriot II missiles and surface to surface tactical missiles. Command and control would be greatly improved with the eventual acquisition of AWACs aircraft loaded with sophisticated communications and electronic detection equipment. Under the expanded

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guidelines, Japan's impressive new and technologically sophisticated arsenal would be available to complement U.S. and South Korean military capabilities in the event of war on the Korean Peninsula.

### **Pyongyang's Options:**

Pyongyang by 1999 faced a new dilemma. Confidence in the Agreed Framework was waning. North Korea's defensive posture was being eroded by shortages of food, fuel and foreign currency as well as revision of the defense understanding with Moscow. Meanwhile, Washington, Seoul and Tokyo had significantly enhanced their defense capabilities and ability to coordinate military activities. Either Pyongyang could attempt to placate the United States by remaining faithful to the Agreed Framework and begin relinquishing its arsenal of ballistic missiles, as the Clinton Administration demanded, in the hope of reducing the perceived threat to its security. Or Pyongyang could attempt to rectify the increasingly unfavorable military balance in Northeast Asia by strengthening its defense posture. This later course could include consideration of a new nuclear weapons program. Looking back, the domestic policies Kim Jong Il pursued beginning in 1998 appear to have set the stage in Pyongyang for DPRK First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Sok-ju's October 3, 2002 confirmation to U.S. Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly that North Korea was pursuing a new nuclear weapons program focused on highly enriched uranium (HEU).

### **The *Kangsong Taeguk* Campaign**

Kim Jong-il in 1998 stepped out of his father's shadow to launch North Korea on the path to becoming a "strong and great nation" (*kangsong taeguk* in Korean). The phrase first appeared in the August 22 editorial of North Korea's leading daily newspaper, *Nodong shinmun*. (*Vantage Point*, January 1999, p. 1). The initiative coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the DPRK's founding, and the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the North Korean People's Army (KPA). Kim's immediate goal appears to have been one of spurring his twenty million poorly fed and already heavily burdened subjects to revitalize their nation's dilapidated industrial sector while also restoring previous levels of agricultural production. His longer term aim was not to transform, but to preserve his regime by refurbishing its sagging military posture and shrinking economy.

The January 1, 1999 "Joint Editorial," sheds light on Kim Jong Il's intentions and policy priorities. The "joint editorial" resembles the United States President's "Annual State of the

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Union Speech” to Congress in that it establishes priorities for the coming year. The North Korean equivalent is an annual editorial distributed in the nation’s government controlled media. The text is credited to the leadership of the Korean Workers Party (KWP), the Army (KPA) and the Youth League, but the content undoubtedly has Kim Jong Il’s approval. These editorials replaced Kim Il Sung’s annual practice of issuing a “New Year’s Message” following his death in 1994.

The 1999 joint editorial defined “*Kangsong taeguk*” as “the combative slogan our Party and people should uphold. ... A socialist *Kangsong taeguk* is a *Juche*-oriented country that is dyed throughout with the ideas of Great Comrade Kim Jong Il.” The goal is to build “an impregnable fortress” based on socialism. To be defended against are “imperialists’ ideological and cultural infiltration, as well as the enemies’ plot to undermine our society. Anti-U.S. and class education should be intensified ...” In short, the United States is obviously perceived as the primary enemy. The KPA is identified as the pillar of “a militarily strong socialist country and the foremost life-or-death unit safeguarding the *Suryong* (Supreme Commander Kim Jong Il).” Clearly, Kim Jong Il is intent on preserving his domain by modernizing and revitalizing North Korea’s defense posture, economy and access to the international community. All the while, he intends to preserve his father’s legacy as manifested in the *Juche* ideology and North Korea’s authoritarian political institutions.

### **Self Reliant Defense:**

Defense and survival, more than ego or personality cult, propel the endeavor. Kim’s campaign is a logical extension of his earlier writings. In an essay entitled, “The Guiding Principles of the *Juche* Idea,” Kim is credited with having defined “self reliant defence ” He begins by pointing to imperialism as “a constant cause of war,” with the United States being the “main force of aggression and war today,” and identifies political independence with economic self-sufficiency as the foundation for a self reliant defense. “... self-reliant defence means defending one’s country by one’s own efforts,” he proclaims and then adds, “Of course, one may receive aid in national defence from fraternal countries and friends.” Kim concludes that,

“... victory or defeat in modern war depends largely on whether or not manpower and material resources necessary for the war effort are ensured for a long period. ... Upholding the policy of building the economy and defence simultaneously, our (Korean Workers’) Party has made good preparations both militarily and materially and built up both the front-line areas and home front to cope with war.”

(See: Kim Jong-il, *On Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*. Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1995.)

Within this context, the KPA becomes the vanguard of the nation's defense and modernization.

### **The KPA's Enhanced Political Role:**

Consistent with his campaign, Kim Jong Il elevated the KPA's visibility in policy circles to unprecedented heights. On September 5, 1998, North Korea's legislature, the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), in the process of revising the constitution, named the National Defense Commission (NSC) the government's foremost ruling body and designated Kim Jong Il the commission's chairman. High ranking generals dominate the NSC. Of its ten members, other than Kim Jong Il, seven hold the military rank of marshal or vice marshal. ("Kim Jong-il era Dawns, with Military's Status Enhanced," *Vantage Point* (September 1998) 1-6.) The number of military officials elected to the 10<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly nearly doubled to 111 compared to the previous Assembly's 62 military officials. (Kim Gye-dong, "North Korea's Military-first Politics and Anti-South Strategy," *Vantage Point* (January 1999) 30-39). Of the 111 military officials, 75 are two star generals or higher ranking, and include two marshals. Previously, the number of military officials in the SPA averaged around forty representatives since the 1960s. (See: "Two-thirds of 10<sup>th</sup> Term SPA Members are Newcomers," *Vantage Point* (August 1998) 11-14. Also see: "Military Rule in Full Swing," *Vantage Point*, April 1999, pp. 2-9).

### **U.S. "Imperialists" Threat**

On January 5, 1999, an editorial in the *Nodong Shinmun* elaborated further about the "*kangsong taeguk*" movement's purpose. It read in part,

The imperialists are more viciously imposing politico-military pressures upon us and economic sanctions against us, to squeeze our Republic to death. Under the imperialists' siege, we should make our country stronger ideologically and militarily, strengthen in every way our economic power, safeguard socialism of our own style, . . . Our general onward march to glorify this year, as a turning point in building a *kangsong Taeguk*, is a requirement for shattering the

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imperialists' plot against our republic and safeguarding a socialism of our own style.

Kim Jong Il's regime had concluded in 1998 that the United States would continue to be its foremost enemy, despite the Agreed Framework. Washington and Seoul's hesitant implementation of the 1994 US-DPRK Agreed Framework was a contributing factor. Washington's inflexible stance, in Pyongyang eyes, regarding terms for opening liaison offices had created a diplomatic impasse. The Clinton Administration's refusal to quicken the pace of phasing out economic sanctions further frustrated North Korea's efforts at economic revitalization. With considerable reluctance, Seoul only belatedly and reluctantly had begun to contribute to the building of the two nuclear reactors promised in the accord.

Pyongyang, of course, had contributed similarly to the accord's faltering implementation. Twice its submarines, filled with commandoes, had been discovered in South Korea's territorial waters. North Korea refused to end export and development of ballistic missile. Although it declared in September 1999 a moratorium on further testing of these missiles, it continued to export, develop and deploy these weapons. Subsequent US-DPRK missile talks in Kuala Lumpur in November 2000 again proved inconclusive. Also, Pyongyang seemed to drag its feet when it came to cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

But Pyongyang's critics of the Agreed Framework preferred to focus on the other side's shortcomings. Undoubtedly, these critics exaggerated and exploited Washington's and Seoul's hesitation in their opposition to adherence to the Agreed Framework as the key to the regime's survival. As Kim Jong-il's confidence in the accord eroded, so too did the influence of the accord's advocates who asserted that the diplomatic process outlined in the agreement would eventually defuse Washington's hostility and lead to the normalization of diplomatic and commercial relations. At the time, these so-called moderates could point to the United States' leading role in the international humanitarian effort to feed and improve the health of the North Korean people. Also of significance was South Korea's increasing willingness to engage in "economic cooperation," including humanitarian aid and investment.

### **Parallel Policies:**

Between 1994 and 2000, Washington and Pyongyang pursued their own, separate pairs of parallel policies. On the one hand, they attempted to cooperate in the area of keeping the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons while endeavoring to gradually normalize their relations.

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Simultaneously, however, both sides sought to maintain the deterrence capability of their conventional military forces. All the while, the North Korean people were experiencing pervasive food shortages and a worsening economic situation. Kim Jong Il nevertheless continued to give preference to his military in the allocation of scarce resources, particularly food. Materials and fiscal resources desperately needed to revive North Korea's ability to earn foreign currency needed to restore agricultural production and to improve public health instead was invested in the nation's military establishment.

Kim Jong Il's priorities addressed his military leaders' preferences, but at the same time they intensified public resentment in Washington and Seoul for policies which continued humanitarian aid to a regime that appeared intent upon perpetuating its war making capability and suppressing its population. South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's summit with Kim Jong Il only heightened expectations that North Korea was on the verge of transforming itself. These expectations, however, were quickly frustrated when Kim Jong Il within a few weeks of the June 2000 summit demonstrated he was not about to visit Seoul, much less alter fundamentally his nation's "military first" priorities.

Assessed in this context, the Clinton Administration's belated efforts late in 2000 to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with North Korea appear ill timed. For two years the Administration's senior officials focused on domestic woes and the Middle East, largely ignoring North Korea. Meanwhile, the "Four Party Peace Talk" process involving Washington, Seoul, Pyongyang and Beijing ultimately proved a dead end. Secretary of State Albright's October 2000 visit to Pyongyang accomplished no durable progress toward normalization. By then, Pyongyang's confidence in Washington's "political will" to fulfill its pledges, both to the Agreed Framework and any future bilateral understanding, had waned significantly, in no small part because the Clinton Administration had no political future.

Kim Jong Il demonstrated his waning lack of confidence in dealing with Washington via diplomacy by sending his highest ranking military official, not a diplomat to Washington in October 2000. DPRK National Security Commission Vice Chairman Cho Myong-nok's journey to Washington was a highly visible manifestation of Pyongyang's new "strong and great nation" campaign. Cho symbolized Kim Jong Il's determination to defend his domain rather than succumb to Washington's demands and unilaterally disarm without compensation.

### **Bush's Personal Diplomacy:**

Despite the Bush Administration's intense effort to distance itself from the Clinton

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Administration's policies, the two Administrations share common goals regarding North Korea, but their strategies are opposites. President Clinton emphasized a combination of resolute deterrence softened by diplomacy that accented inducements. The Bush Administration has continued deterrence while shifting to a strategy that disallows inducements. In short, Bush's posture toward North Korea can be summarized as a "take it or leave it attitude," punctuated with a warning that grave consequences would follow continued intransigence. Viewed from Pyongyang, President Bush's strategy adds up to a "hostile policy" that aspires to topple the regime.

Bush's resolute stance appears to have fallen short of its goal of convincing Kim Jong Il that the best way to perpetuate his regime is to concede to Washington's demands. No sooner had the results of the U.S. presidential election confirmed that a new Bush Administration would take office, North Korea's Joint New Year editorial proclaimed, "the policy of giving top priority to the army is the permanent strategic objective in the present-time revolution and the all-mighty instrument in socialist construction. .... Our military strength should be made invincible ..."

Within six months, Kim Jong Il and George Bush were at a diplomatic impasse that has since only stiffened. Bush had personalized U.S. policy toward North Korea. At a March 2000 press conference with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, Bush said, "I do have some skepticism about the leader of North Korea, but that's not going to preclude us from trying to achieve common objectives." Somewhat belatedly, President Bush announced in June the completion of his Administration's review of policy toward North Korea. He declared the U.S. readiness to resume dialogue with North Korea. At the same time, however, he persisted in demanding that Pyongyang promptly allow the IAEA to commence the process to determine North Korea's previous plutonium production. This U.S. demand was also at odds with the Agreed Framework. Only when construction of the two light water nuclear reactors was near completion was North Korea obligated, under the accord's terms, to allow the IAEA unrestricted access to its nuclear facilities.

Pyongyang's response was predictably negative. On June 18, Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry spokesman responded, "We cannot construe this otherwise than an attempt of the U.S. to disarm the DPRK through negotiations. ... Our aim is to have a dialogue with the United States to ... carry into practice measures to wipe out the mistrust" between the two nations. He concluded, "The DPRK's conventional armed forces can never be a subject of discussion before the U.S. forces are pulled out of south Korea as they are a means for self-defense to cope with the grave threat posed by the U.S. and its allied forces."

US-DPRK tensions reached a new plateau early in 2002. In his January 30, 2002, State

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of the Union Address to Congress, Bush declared, “North Korea is a regime armed with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.” Referring to “an axis of evil that encompassed Iraq, Iran and North Korea, Bush pledged, “The United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.”

During his February 19-21 visit to South Korea, President Bush at a February 20 press conference in Seoul said,

I will not change my opinion on the man, on Kim Jong-il, until he frees his people and accepts genuine proposals from countries such as south Korea or the U.S. to dialogue; until he proves to the world that he’s got a good heart, that he cares about the people that live in his country. I am concerned about a country that is not transparent, that allows for starvation, that develops weapons of mass destruction. ... We have no intention of invading North Korea. South Korea has no intention of attacking North Korea, nor does America. We’re purely defensive. And the reason we have to be defensive is because there is a threatening position on the DMZ.”

Again, Pyongyang reacted negatively. Its Foreign Ministry spokesman on January 31 characterized Bush’s “axis of evil” remarks,” “This is, in fact, little short of declaring a war against the DPRK.” As for Bush’s remarks when visiting south Korea, Pyongyang responded with personalized invective. The *Nodong Shinmun* in a February 23 editorial labeled the United States an “empire of evil.” The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) declared the United States the “kingpin of terrorism.” As for Bush, “His loud mouthed dialogue with the DPRK does not deserve even a passing note because he is forcing it to change its political system. It is useless for the DPRK to sit with those who do not recognize its political system.

In March 2002, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a summary of the Nuclear Posture Review, a classified Pentagon contingency plans for the possible use of nuclear weapons against seven countries, including North Korea. Pyongyang reacted with outrage. A March 14 Foreign Ministry statement condemned the contingency plan. It went on to state that, “If the plan turns out to be true, this will indicate that (the Bush Administration) has backpedalled (sic) its commitment to the non-use of nukes, which was honored by its preceding administrations as a pair of old shoes.” More specifically, the Foreign Ministry pointed to the U.S. assurance to North Korea that “it would not use nuclear weapons against and threaten the DPRK with them,” a promise contained in the June 1993 US-DPRK Joint Statement that was incorporated into the

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Agreed Framework. The statement concluded, “Now that nuclear lunatics are in office in the White House, we are compelled to examine all the agreements with the U.S.”

### **Powell’s Call for Negotiations:**

All the while, Secretary of State Powell had attempted to put a moderate tone on the Bush Administration’s relatively harsh rhetoric. Powell repeatedly asserted that the United States was ready to resume dialogue with Pyongyang “any time, any where, and without preconditions.” In his June 10, 2002, speech at the Asia Society in New York, Powell affirmed the United States’ willingness to resume dialogue with North Korea, but first,

“... progress between us will depend on Pyongyang’s behavior on a number of key issues. First, the North must get out of the (nuclear) proliferation business and eliminate long-range missiles ... secondly, it must make a much more serious effort to provide for its suffering citizens. ... third, the North needs to move toward a less threatening conventional military posture. .... and finally, North Korea must come into full compliance with the International Atomic energy Agency safeguards ...”

Pyongyang’s foreign Ministry in a June 13 statement dismissed Powell’s overture as being, “...in essence, just like attaching preconditions to dialogue.” subsequently we learned from Powell’s later remarks that the U.S. intelligence community then was reviewing evidence that North Korea might have initiated a new, clandestine HEU nuclear weapons program.

### **U.S. Counter-proliferation Strategy:**

Just before Powell’s Asia Society speech, the Bush Administration was putting the final touches on its “National Security Strategy.” Released to the public on September 17, two weeks before Assistant Secretary James Kelly’s mission to Pyongyang, the strategy paper has amazing parallels with Pyongyang’s rationale for its “military first” and “strong and great nation” priorities. The U.S. strategy paper declares, “Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal government.” It then sets forth a comprehensive strategy to deal with the primary perceived threats to U.S. security which are identified as being a network of international terrorists and a small group of “rogue” nations. These “rogue” states are said to: “brutalize their own people, .... display no regard for

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international law, ... are determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD), ... sponsor terrorism around the globe; and reject basic human values and hate the United States ..." (See "National Security Strategy of the United States," page 10.) North Korea is identified as one such state, along with Iraq and Iran.

To counter the threat of these "rogue" states, the paper asserts, "We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the U.S. and its allies and friends." Furthermore, "Our comprehensive strategy to combat WMD includes: proactive counter proliferation efforts." One page later, this strategy is further clarified, "The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. .... the U.S. will not use force in all cases to preempt emerging threats, ... " but the U.S. "... cannot remain idle while dangers gather."

Nevertheless, Kim Jong Il kept the door open to dialogue. On July 25, he renewed Pyongyang's invitation for Washington to send an envoy to Pyongyang for talks. Powell followed up with a brief meeting with North Korea's Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun on the margins of the late July ASEAN Regional Forum in Brunei. Paek confirmed on July 31 that, "He welcomed the proposal of the U.S. State Secretary to dispatch the special envoy of the U.S. President to the DPRK."

The Bush Administration was slow to act, for reasons then unclear to the public but related to discovery of North Korea's new nuclear weapons program. During the interim, North-South reconciliation resumed in a series of productive meetings and Japan's Prime Minister made a politically daring and totally unanticipated visit to Pyongyang in September. Only then did Bush authorize a senior U.S. delegation to journey to Pyongyang. The outcome of the Kelly mission stunned the international community. Pyongyang confirmed it had indeed initiated a second, HEU based nuclear weapons program. Ever since, intensified US-DPRK tensions have become the cause of mounting international concern.

## **Conclusion**

As of late 2002, Kim Jong Il's "strong and great nation" campaign and "military first" strategy have not secured the future of his regime. On the contrary, his efforts to counter the increasingly unfavorable military balance in Northeast Asia by pursuing an HEU nuclear weapons program has again made Pyongyang a target of intense international distrust. Ultimately, if Pyongyang insists on clinging to its new program, military action against it cannot be ruled out. At the

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same time, the Bush Administration's refusal to negotiate and to consider inducements, accented by President Bush's expressions of personal disdain for Kim Jong Il, do not auger well for a negotiated resolution of the impasse. At least for the time being, Kim Jong Il and his military advisers appear intent upon matching the perceived U.S. threat in word and deed. Meanwhile, Beijing, Moscow, Seoul and Tokyo are attempting to nudge the two adversaries toward the negotiating table. Based on the experience of 1993-94, a diplomatic resolution of the impasse regarding the HEU program appears possible.

The more worrisome issue is President Bush's apparent preference to topple the Kim Jong Il regime. The prominent American journalist Bob Woodward in his book, *Bush at War*, quotes Bush as having told him, "I loathe Kim Jong Il!" Waving his finger in the air, Bush reportedly shouted, "I've got a visceral reaction to this guy, because he is starving his people. ... Maybe it's my religion, maybe it's my – but I feel passionate about this."

At the end of November, the Japanese daily newspaper *Yomiuri* quoted an unnamed, high ranking Department of Defense official as having said during, ... I think we need to stop thinking about what we're going to give (North Korea)". Instead, we need to think about how we're going to change this regime. How are we going to bring this government down? That's the threat, the (North Korean) government. " Responding to a question about whether the final aim of the United States was regime change in North Korea, the Defense Department official responded, "Yes. That's what our President thinks. Our diplomats are uneasy with it but that's what our President thinks. He's very clear on that. "

Pyongyang and Washington appeared to have convinced one another about how to resolve their respective dilemmas. For Pyongyang, the choice has been between engaging in a diplomatic process with the United States aimed at resolving differences via negotiations to achieve normal diplomatic relations, or to reinforce its defense posture with the acquisition of a nuclear capability. The Bush Administration's strategy appears to have convinced Kim Jong Il to continue his pursuit of a "strong and great nation: with a "military first" strategy that encompasses the retention of weapons of mass destruction. Conceding to Bush's demands that he disarm would expose a defenseless North Korea to the United States' military might, a situation Pyongyang's generals would seem prone to reject. They might even go so far as to discard Kim Jong Il as their ruler. At the same time, Kim Jong Il's "strong and great nation" campaign and "military first" strategy appear to have convinced the Bush Administration that only by ending the Kim Jong Il regime will it be possible to halt the North Korean threat to peace in Northeast Asia. For Bush, the solution lies in backing resolute rhetoric with a convincing willingness to employ America's awesome military might.

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Paradoxically, both leaders claim they are intent upon finding a “peaceful” resolution of their differences. Yet at the same time their respective strategies are increasing the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula. Deterrence, like military might and technology, may discourage war, but eventually only the building of mutual trust through extensive diplomacy and engagement can build peace.

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