

**Bush's "Disablement" verse Clinton's "Freeze"
of North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Facilities**

by

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Is the Bush's Administration's "disablement" superior to the Clinton Administration's "freeze" under the 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework that halted North Korea's nuclear program until the end of 2002? I accompanied the first US delegation to Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center in November 1994 and lived and worked at the center for almost six months in 1995. Here is my assessment.

For months U.S. Chief Negotiator to the Six Party Talks Christopher Hill has referred to "disablement" when claiming that the Bush Administration is making substantive progress toward shutting down North Korea's nuclear program by the end of December 2007. When asked what "disablement" means, he has always danced around a concrete definition until his November 3, 2007, press conference in Tokyo.

Hill provided a partial definition. He explained that Washington and Pyongyang had been at opposite poles when defining "dismantlement." The US wanted steps that would require North Korea to invest a year or more effort to restart its nuclear activities while Pyongyang sought to limit the process to minimal steps. In "one of the hardest negotiations" of his career, Hill said that the Six Party Working Group on disablement had reached a definition in Shenyang, China on August 16, 2007.

On November 3, Hill explained that the working group had agreed on "... ten measures that were designed to make sure that, in shutting down the nuclear facilities that they couldn't easily be turned on again." Also by the end of 2007, disablement is to be completed at North Korea's:

- fuel fabrication facility where nuclear fuel rods are made to power and generate heat in the Yongbyon 5 Megawatt reactor,
- 5 megawatt reactor, and
- reprocessing facility where spent nuclear fuel rods are diluted in a chemical bath to separate plutonium from the spent uranium fuel.

Hill added that other steps would include: "cleaning up the pond where the discharged (nuclear) fuel rods from the reactor needs (sic) to go ..." and the reprocessing facility would be rendered "unusable" by "cutting chains; it's taking apart equipment." Hill continued that, "... in ... the reactor and the fuel

fabrication plant -- again cutting chains, this sort of thing.” He confirmed that the nuclear fuel rods would be removed from the reactor.

Taken as a whole, Hill’s definition sounds impressive, at least to those unfamiliar with the Clinton Administration “freeze,” but actually the process is very limited. Cutting chains and removing electrical motors would only delay restarting activity at the three critical facilities by a few days because these chains and motors can be easily and quickly replaced.

Clinton’s “Freeze”

Under the Agreed Framework, North Korea took the first of several “simultaneous” steps intended to end Pyongyang’s nuclear program and to normalize US-North Korea relations. The first step required the “freezing” of all nuclear activities at Yongbyon and allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency to resume its 24 hour, seven day a week monitoring of North Korea’s compliance with the “freeze.”

In November 1994, I accompanied the first US delegation to visit Yongbyon. My job was to help negotiate the terms of the “freeze” and then to live and work at Yongbyon to ensure that the agreements were implemented. We received excellent cooperation from the North Koreans.

During the first visit, it became clear that “disablement” was unnecessary. All of North Korea’s most critical nuclear facilities had already been disabled. The fuel fabrication plant had burned down. At the reactor building North Korean nuclear technicians told us that the fuel loading machine had stopped working in June 1994. This prevented putting new nuclear fuel into the reactor. In the spent fuel storage building we were surprised to see that the spent fuel storage pond was an emerald green. No spent fuel rods were visible. Without visibility, it was impossible to locate and to remove the spent fuel rods. This meant that it was impossible to separate the uranium from the plutonium in each spent fuel rod. Plutonium is the basic material needed to make a nuclear bomb.

The Clinton Administration’s “freeze” was equal, if not superior to the Bush Administration’s “disablement.” In 1994, disablement was unnecessary and the “freeze” was verified by the continuous presence of IAEA inspectors from 1994 to 2002. Also, once “disablement” is concluded at the end of 2007, the next phase will be exactly the same as those carried out by the Clinton Administration.

In the final analysis, the Bush Administration’s seven years of negotiation has achieved less than the Clinton Administration’s eighteen months of negotiations. The only differences are that the Bush Administration does not yet have a comprehensive solution to end North Korea’s nuclear programs. Also, North Korea now has enough plutonium to make between six and ten nuclear weapons and it has successfully tested a nuclear weapon. In 1994, North Korea only had

enough plutonium to make one or two nuclear weapons and had not yet successfully built a nuclear bomb.

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