

DISCORDANT BEIJING SEXTET PLAYS IN HARMONY: BUT FOR HOW LONG?

*TIM BEAL*¹

Victoria University of Wellington

The Joint Statement of 19 September 2005 which brought to an end the current, fourth round, of Six Party Talks in Beijing took most observers, including me, by surprise.² Although there had been optimism earlier, unwarranted in my eyes, there was certainly a sense of stalemate as the talks came to an end.³ On 16 September, for instance, the official North Korean new agency Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in a article entitled 'DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea, i.e. North Korea] Can Never Accept U.S. Brigandish Demand' was adamant that Pyongyang stood by its demand that the provision of a Light Water Reactor (LWR) was an essential prerequisite and that 'we can never accept its [US] demand that we dismantle our nuclear program first.'⁴ This was in response to a dismissive statement the previous day by Christopher Hill, the chief US negotiator, to reports in Beijing that 'NK Demand for Reactor Is Nonstarter'.⁵ The consensus was that the talks were in deadlock.⁶ As usual all the blame was put on North Korea,

¹ Tim Beal (Tim.Beal@vuw.ac.nz) teaches in the School of Marketing and International Business, Victoria University of Wellington, focusing on the political economy of East Asia. He maintains a website on North Korea (<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~caplabtb/dprk/>) and co-edits a bimonthly electronic newsletter, *Pyongyang Report*. His latest book, *North Korea: The Struggle Against American Power* was published by Pluto Press in August 2005. This article draws on papers presented at conferences in Britain and New Zealand in 2005. He would like to thank Ankie Hoogvelt for her invaluable comments and suggestions.

² Anonymous, 'Eleventh-Hour Breakthrough Ends N.Korean Nuclear Talks,' *Chosun Ilbo*, 19 September 2005.

³ For a good description of the final week see Song-wu Park, '6-Way Negotiations Pass Through Turbulent Week,' *Korea Times*, 19 September 2005.

⁴ Anonymous, 'DPRK Can Never Accept U.S. Brigandish Demand,' *KCNA*, 16 September 2005.

⁵ Song-wu Park, 'NK Demand for Reactor Is Nonstarter,' *Korea Times*, 15 September 2005.

⁶ Edward Cody, 'Talks Deadlock Over N. Korea's Demand for Reactor,' *Washington Post*, 16 September 2005.

although the New York Times did carry one story headed ‘U.S. and North Korea Blame Each Other for Stalemate in Talks’.⁷

The quick unravelling of the agreement showed that we were right to be surprised. It transpired that the Chinese had pulled off the Joint Statement by a sort of sleight of hand, and that the parties had not changed their positions during the talks. Most of the press immediately blamed the DPRK: The rightwing Seoul paper *JoongAng Ilbo* editorialised about ‘Backsliding in Pyongyang’ and fulminated that ‘If the North continues to make unreasonable demands, even before the ink dries, no country will trust the North’.⁸ Glenn Kessler in an article in the Washington Post headed ‘Nations Seek to Hold North Korea to Text of Agreement’ reported that,

The United States, Russia and other nations urged North Korea yesterday to abide by a six-nation deal to dismantle its nuclear programs after the government in Pyongyang issued a statement that cast doubt on the agreement it had signed with great fanfare in Beijing on Monday.⁹

Martin Nesirky writing for Reuters, also had no doubt where the blame lay for the agreement coming into question:

North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons until the United States provides civilian atomic reactors, Pyongyang said today in a statement that significantly undermined a deal reached just a day earlier. Six countries, including the North and the United States, had agreed yesterday to a set of principles on dismantling North Korea’s nuclear programmes in return for aid and recognising its right to a civilian nuclear programme. Sceptics had said the deal was long on words, vague on timing and sequencing, and short on action. The North’s comments made clear just how short.¹⁰

The *JoongAng Ilbo* approvingly reported that ‘Washington, [...] made clear it would not “get hung up” on the North’s last minute demands for a light-water reactor before abandoning its nuclear programs’.¹¹

The reality was that both sides were merely re-iterating positions which had not changed substantially. The DPRK insistence on a LWR was by no

⁷ Jim Yardley, ‘U.S. and North Korea Blame Each Other for Stalemate in Talks,’ *New York Times*, 8 August 2005.

⁸ Editorial, ‘Backsliding in Pyongyang,’ *JoongAng Ilbo*, 20 September 2005.

⁹ Glenn Kessler, ‘Nations Seek to Hold North Korea to Text of Agreement,’ *Washington Post*, 21 September 2005.

¹⁰ Martin Nesirky, ‘N. Korea statement puts nuclear deal in doubt,’ *New Zealand Herald* (*Reuters article*), 20 September 2005.

¹¹ Chan-ho Kang and Ser Myo-ja, ‘U.S. stays aloof after comments by North Korea,’ *JoongAng Ilbo*, 22 September 2005.

means a ‘last minute demand’; on the contrary it had already become the major sticking point of the Fourth Round of the talks. Moreover it was the United States in fact which had begun this process of clarification and the much-criticised comments of the DPRK delegation were a response to a press conference Christopher Hill had given on the evening of the 19 September before leaving Beijing after the Joint Statement had been issued and to statements by Adam Ereli, State Department spokesman in Washington that the US would not even ‘discuss’ a LWR until North Korea returned to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and accepted inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹² US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice re-iterated the US position during an interview with *Time Magazine’s* editorial board, a situation second only to a Congressional hearing for giving ungrammatical musings an ex cathedra authority:

Frankly, by that time, when the North Koreans are verifiably denuclearized, we can discuss anything [...] I think you’ll discuss a light-water reactor sometime in the future when the North Koreans have disarmed and are back in the NPT and the IAEA, it seemed worth it (sic).¹³

‘In your dreams’ was, quite literally, the North Korean response. “The U.S. should not even dream of the issue of the DPRK’s dismantling of its nuclear deterrent before providing light water reactors,” a DPRK Foreign Ministry official was quoted as saying.¹⁴

In order to make some sense of this confusing business I will briefly describe the positions of the participating countries, and the forces underlying those positions, before turning to a discussion of the Joint Statement of 19 September. But first, a digression about *JoongAng Ilbo* to illustrate just how Byzantine the complex political manoeuvrings are. This newspaper, as we have seen, takes a very strongly anti-DPRK line. In December 2004 President Roh Moo-hyun, the ‘leftist-leaning’ ROK President, made what seem a very astute move when he appointed Hong Seok-hyun Ambassador to the United States. Not merely was Hong publisher of the *JoongAng Ilbo*, a paper founded by his father in 1965 with the help of the Samsung Corporation, but he had personally worked at the World Bank in Washington after having graduated from Stanford, where Condoleezza Rice had been Provost.¹⁵ It would have been difficult to find an editor more sympathetic to the Bush Administration and given the constant friction between Seoul and Washington over North Korea policy in particular, that was an important consideration.

¹² Wook Sik Cheong, ‘“Simultaneous Action’ Key to NK Nukes,’ *OhMyNews*, 21 September 2005. Jae-soon Chang, ‘North Korea Demands Nuke Reactor From U.S.,’ *Washington Post*, 19 September 2005.

¹³ Song-wu Park, ‘US Prepared to Discuss Light-Water Reactor: Rice,’ *Korea Times*, 21 September 2005.

¹⁴ Brian Lee, ‘North demands reactor at once to keep talking,’ *JoongAng Ilbo*, 21 September 2005.

¹⁵ Myo-ja Ser and Shin-hong Park, ‘Publisher to become envoy to U.S.,’ *JoongAng Ilbo*, 18 December 2004.

However, in July 2005 an embarrassing recording surfaced of a discussion between Hong and Lee Hak-soo, a vice-chairman at Samsung, about the illegal channelling of money to conservative candidate Lee Hoi-chang during the 1997 presidential campaign, and Hong was forced to resign.¹⁶

The Six Party states – policies and motivations¹⁷

The Six Party Talks were engineered by China in an attempt to reconcile the DPRK's desire for bilateral negotiations with the US with the latter's strategy of applying pressure both directly and through the regional powers, so that North Korea could be forced to abandon its nuclear programme without step-by-step American concessions in the style of the Agreed Framework that Clinton had accepted. This is a crucial difference between the two countries which the Joint Statement of 19 September attempted, probably unsuccessfully, to paper over. The first talks, held in Beijing in April 2003, involved only the DPRK, the United States and China as chair and host. Japan, Russia and ROK were brought into the next round in August of that year, bringing the number of participants to six. The second round was held 25-28 February 2004, followed by the third round 23-26 June that year. The fourth round was by far the most drawn-out, lasting from 26 July to 19 September 2005, with a three-week break in between.¹⁸ The fifth round was scheduled, according to the Joint Statement of 19 September that concluded the fourth round, to be held in Beijing in early November 2005.

Whilst we shall discuss each of the six countries' positions below, this should not be taken as construing some sort of equal worth or strength, or equivalence, amongst them. On the contrary, the principal characteristic of the situation is *asymmetry*. The states are vastly different in so many ways. They vary considerably in terms of wealth, economic and political power, and effective sovereignty. The United States has a military budget far bigger than the rest of them combined and hundreds of times greater than the DPRK.¹⁹ The DPRK perhaps has a handful of nuclear weapons, but no long-range delivery capability, while the US has over 10,000 nuclear warheads and global reach. The US not only has bases in South Korea and Japan, but also has

¹⁶ Su-jin Chun and Jong-moon Kim, 'Ambassador Hong to resign,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 27 July 2005. He has since stayed in the US, ignoring a summons, which raises the question of what would happen if the ROK government sought his extradition; Anonymous, 'Former ambassador gets second summons,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 22 October 2005..

¹⁷ The first part of this section draws on, but updates, my paper Tim Beal, 'Multilayered Confrontation in East Asia: North Korea-Japan,' *Asian Affairs* XXXVI, no. 3 (2005).

¹⁸ The website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.fmprc.gov.cn) provides a useful resource for keeping track of the talks. The Fourth Round is at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/dslbj/>

¹⁹ 'World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1999-2000,' (Washington: State Department, 2003); *Military Expenditure Database* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2004 [cited 11 October 2004]; available from http://web.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_data_index.html.

ultimate command over the ROK military through the Combined Forces Command.²⁰ President Roh Moo-hyun is currently trying to wrest 'wartime control' from the US.²¹ The chances of him succeeding are slim, not merely because of American resistance and thorny practical questions (one command under ROK generals? Two separate commands?) but also because of domestic right-wing forces who fear that 'Repeated presidential references to the question could only spur public sentiment toward negative views on the alliance with the U.S.'²²

The severe constraints on ROK sovereignty run the gamut from control of the military through to the economy where ownership of wide swathes has passed to foreign, mainly US hands, since the crisis of 1997, spurring anti-Americanism into previous secure parts of South Korean society.²³ Nearly half of the shares of the top ten chaebol conglomerates, once the symbol of South Korea economic nationalism and self-reliance, are now owned by foreigners and even Samsung, the flagship of the economy is 'vulnerable to foreign takeover'.²⁴ Two recent events illustrate the limits of ROK sovereignty. KT, the main South Korean telecommunications company, has been blocked by the US from installing a fixed-line connection through to the (South Korean-owned) Kaesong Industrial Park in North Korea.²⁵ In testimony to the National Assembly on 22 September South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong-young raised the idea of inviting a North Korean delegation to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting scheduled to be held in Pusan in November. US Under Secretary of State and chief negotiator Christopher Hill reportedly dismissed the idea as 'inappropriate' (which is code for 'unacceptable') at an off-the record talk at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington on 29 September. Hill also criticised Seoul for being 'unhelpful' in the latest round of talks by proposing further economic cooperation with North Korea and for leaking his interest in visiting Pyongyang. Both Washington and Seoul tried to paper over the affair – 'Seoul Denies Report on US Displeasure With Role in Talks', 'U.S. aide says Seoul did a fine job at talks' – but South Korea quickly dropped the APEC invitation.²⁶ However, whilst the ROK

²⁰ 'Gen. Shin Detained Over Embezzlement,' *Korea Times*, 9 May 2004.

²¹ Jin Ryu, 'S. Korea Wants Wartime Command Back From United States: Roh,' *Korea Times*, 2 October 2005. Sung-ki Jung, 'S. Korea, US Will Discuss Wartime Command Transfer,' *Korea Times*, 12 October 2005. Associated Press, 'S. Korea Wants to Regain Military Control,' *Washington Post*, 12 October 2005.

²² Editorial, 'Wartime army control,' *Korea Herald*, 5 October 2005.

²³ Guy de Jonquieres, 'If Korea Is So Cool, Why Is Seoul In A Lather?' *Financial Times*, 13 September 2005.

²⁴ Jae-kyoung Kim, 'Samsung Vulnerable to Foreign Takeover,' *Korea Times*, 2 October 2005.

²⁵ Tae-gyu Kim, 'US Rule Stalls S-N Phone Link,' *Korea Times*, 9 October 2005.

²⁶ Song-wu Park, 'Seoul Denies Report on US Displeasure With Role in Talks,' *Korea Times*, 7 October 2005. Anonymous, 'U.S. aide says Seoul did a fine job at talks,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 10 October 2005. Anonymous, 'Seoul scotches a bid to have North at APEC,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 8 October 2005.

government has limited power to resist American control and pressure, its policies towards the DPRK, and the Six Party Talks, is necessarily very different form that of the US, as we shall see.

Recognising the asymmetry is critical if we are to understand the geopolitics of the issue and analyse the manoeuvrings of the participants. In particular, the talks, and all they embody, are for the DPRK a matter of life and death, continued poverty or economic rehabilitation and growth. For the United States, they are matters in themselves of minor importance, so factors of partisan politics and imperial policy carry much greater weight. Even seasoned commentators such as John Feffer write as if the objectives to the talks of the DPRK on one hand and of the United States on the other, though different, are nevertheless of equal weight and domestic importance. For instance, he says that

The ambiguity of the agreement [of 19 September] speaks not to any lack of diplomatic skill but rather to the eagerness of the key players to achieve some measure of progress in the negotiations. The United States needs a foreign policy victory to balance the twin quagmires of Iraq and New Orleans. North Korea desperately needs a transfusion of energy to revive its industry and agriculture.²⁷

This rather mechanistic balancing of the two sides is misleading. For North Korea everything hinges on the relationship with the United States which an agreement might deliver, of which energy is but a part, albeit a major one. For the United States it is the regional and global ramifications of the agreement that are important, not the relationship with North Korea itself. Earlier, in a piece written in 2003 and entitled 'Fearful Symmetry: Washington and Pyongyang', Feffer had concluded, 'Until the U.S. and North Korea undo their fearful symmetry by getting serious at the negotiating table, East Asia will remain on the precipice.'²⁸ John Feffer is right to point out the interesting parallels between the US and the DPRK; in both countries, for instance, we have a "leader, [who is] a former playboy who owes his position to an irregular political process and the legacy of a more statesmanlike father."²⁹ However, the parallels should not be confused with symmetry; the two countries' approach to the question of negotiations was, as we shall see, very different, and these differences flowed to a considerable degree out of their different positions in world politics. The DPRK is a poor, weak but determined country which needs to negotiate its very existence with the United States. The latter is a superpower which only needs to intermittently focus on

²⁷ John Feffer, 'Uses of Ambiguity in North Korea Agreement,' *Foreign Policy in Focus Talking Points*, 1 October 2005.

²⁸ John Feffer, 'Fearful Symmetry: Washington and Pyongyang,' *Foreign Policy in Focus*, July 2003.

²⁹ Ibid.

the DPRK and only then within the context of its own domestic politics and global concerns.

The other point to stress is the centrality of the United States in the creation and potential resolution of the crisis, and in the foreign policy of the other five countries. Barring an unlikely surrender by the DPRK, only the United States can bring about a resolution of the situation. The other parties can, in their different ways, attempt to persuade and cajole, but none can unilaterally bring about peace; only the US can do that. Furthermore, the relationship with the US is for all of them by far the most important, and so the policies of China, South Korea, Japan and Russia towards North Korea have to be balanced against the greater imperative of not annoying Washington. North Korea, for its part, often criticises 'right wing forces' in South Korea and in Japan for being 'servile' towards the United States.³⁰ The tension this produces is one of the key dynamics of the talks.

DPRK

Whilst North Korea is widely portrayed as secretive and enigmatic, its broad strategic position is, in many ways, quite easy to describe. Supported by a favourable aid/trade relationship with the Soviet Union, able to exploit the Sino-Soviet rivalry, and led by the charismatic and energetic Kim Il Sung (the major figure in the struggle against Japanese colonialism), the DPRK had been one of the stars of the developing world. For decades its economic growth outstripped that of the ROK and it became the most industrialised state in Asia, second only to Japan.³¹ However, the importance of industry, and the dependence of agriculture on industrial inputs, meant that the economy was particularly vulnerable to disruption of external supplies of energy, machinery and parts.

The internal rigidities of over-centralisation, and the continuing military threat and economic sanctions of the United States meant that the DPRK economy was not able to withstand the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1990s saw it plummet into a deep and compounded economic crisis, which caused the deaths of some quarter of a million people.³² Although the economy is recovering the situation is still on a knife-edge and North Korea has been heavily dependent on international aid to feed many of its people. Latest reports indicate that the authorities are trying to phase out food aid from bodies such as the World Food Programme in favour of support for

³⁰ Anonymous, 'Japan's Policy of Toeing U.S. Line under Fire,' *KCNA*, 25 September 2005. Anonymous, 'Japan Urged to Drop Servile Attitude toward U.S.,' *KCNA*, 2 October 2005.

³¹ In terms of industry's share of Gross Domestic Product. Even today, according to the CIA World Factbook (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>) the figures are 33% for North Korea compared with 31% for Taiwan.

³² Estimates vary considerable. See 'NK Death Tolls 'Exaggerated',' *Korea Times*, 21 March 2004.

economic rehabilitation.³³ Economic reforms, especially the marketisation measure of July 2002, have spurred growth but also increased inequality.³⁴

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the main foreign policy objectives of North Korea are removal of the US military threat and economic warfare (of which Japanese sanctions is a major component), and normalisation of relations with the US, and with Japan.³⁵ These are the only two major countries, aside from France, with which the DPRK does not have diplomatic relations. Internal Korean North-South relations fall within a different category; though both are sovereign states, with seats in the UN, neither regard the other as a foreign state. The Pyongyang-Seoul relationship has its own dynamic, especially the shared commitment to reunification, but is inseparable from US policy towards the two Koreas, and their relationship with it. South Korea, with its 'constrained independence' constantly has to attempt to balance pressure from Washington to remain antagonistic with the North, with the realities of sharing a peninsula, a common history and culture, and the desire for re-unification. North Korea, on the other hand, often underestimates the autonomy of South Korea and the importance of public opinion and democratic activities there. Instead of doing all it can to increase the ability of the government in Seoul to resist US pressure it often counterproductively 'punishes' Seoul for Washington's hostile actions. Seoul can best stand up to American demands by marshalling domestic (and foreign) support for its engagement policy and to be able to do this it needs to show that the North is reciprocating. Pyongyang could do much more to assist Seoul, a second leaders' summit this time in the South (or conceivably in a third country) is an obvious initiative which would put the Americans in a awkward spot; would they veto it, with a resultant propaganda reverse, or allow it to go ahead with the danger that a warmer North-South relationship would undermine US strategy?

Since at least the 1960s Pyongyang has been making overtures to Washington and at times – the early years of Carter's presidency and the final period of Clinton's – an ending of 'hostility' seemed on the cards. Jimmy Carter made withdrawal from Korea one of his campaign issues and on taking office in 1977 announced plans to cut logistics personnel down to a 'mere' 12,000 and remove the remaining 26,000 combat troops and their tactical

³³ Bo-mi Lim, 'North Korea Seeks Less Dependence on Aid,' *Washington Post*, 25 September 2005. This is connected with the use, especially by the US and Japan, of food aid for political leverage. See, for instance Ruediger Frank, 'Food Aid to North Korea or How to Ride a Trojan Horse to Death,' *Nautilus Policy Forum Online*, no. 05-75A (2005), and Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, 'Discussion of "Food Aid to North Korea or How to Ride a Trojan Horse to Death",' *Nautilus Policy Forum Online*, no. 05-75A (2005).

³⁴ Perhaps the best source of information on this is Kathi Zellweger of the Catholic aid agency Caritas who in August 2005 made her 49th visit to the DPRK Kathi Zellweger, 'DPRK Trip Report #49,' *Caritas*, 23 July - 13 August 2005.

³⁵ As far as I know, no one has attempted to calculate the cost to the DPRK of sanctions but they must be huge. A recent report said that Cuba claimed that the US embargo had cost it \$82 billion; Ciaran Giles, 'Foreign Ministers Urge End to Cuba Embargo,' *Washington Post*, 13 October 2005.

nuclear weapons units. It will be recalled that the last foreign troops in the North, the Chinese People's Volunteers who came in to rescue the DPRK in 1950, had left 20 years earlier. Carter came up against formidable, and ultimately successful, opposition from within the US government and from Park Chung-hee in Seoul. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) 'discovered' that North Korea had 80% more tanks and 200,000 more men under arms than previously thought. How true this was is unknown. Segments of the US defense community do have the ability to discern things lesser mortals cannot, as was displayed to such good effect in the build-up to the invasion of Iraq. In the event, he managed to withdraw on only 3000 troops. In addition, a proposal to set up a summit between him Park Chug-hee and Kim Il Sung at Panmunjom was abandoned under pressure from advisors.³⁶ He did finally meet Kim Il Sung in 1994 and that led to the Agreed Framework. However, the Carter-Kim meeting was a good 15 years too late. Carter's inability to carry through his peace initiatives ranks with Clinton's failure to visit Pyongyang in 2000 (discussed below) among the great missed opportunities of our times. To what degree Pyongyang bears some blame is unclear. Bruce Cumings argues that,

When the Carter administration (1977-81) announced plans for a gradual but complete withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from Korea...a prolonged period of North Korean courting of Americans began. In 1977 Kim refereed to President Jimmy Carter as 'a man of justice' and the DPRK press dropped its calumny against the United States, including the use of the term 'U.S. imperialism.' Kim gave interviews saying he was knocking on the American door, wanting diplomatic relations and trade, and would not interfere with American business interests in the South once Korea was reunified.³⁷

The response to Carter may not have been sufficient (perhaps nothing that Pyongyang could reasonably have done would have been sufficient) but it was part of a pattern. Macdonald, in the late 1980s, noted that '...north Korea since the 1960s has continually sought direct diplomatic talks with the United States...'³⁸ The urgency of that objective was to increase markedly in the 1990s, as the crisis deepened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s the South Korean scholar Eui-gak Hwang commented 'Pyongyang is desperately seeking to increase various levels of contact with the United States.'³⁹

³⁶ Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). pp. 178-9.

³⁷ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: a Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). p. 460.

³⁸ MacDonald, *The Koreans: Contemporary Politics and Society*, p. 261.

³⁹ Eui-Gak Hwang, *The Korean economies: a comparison of North and South* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 1993). p. 296.

Pyongyang's position in the current Six Party Talks is thus basically a continuation of a long-standing policy of attempting to negotiate an end to American hostility whilst preserving its independence. How well that policy has been implemented is a matter of dispute. The decision to 'go nuclear' might be considered a dreadful miscalculation which played into the arms of conservative forces in Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo. Alternatively it might be argued that its 'robust' strategy has preserved it from the fate of Iraq, Afghanistan or Yugoslavia. Be that as it may, the underlying objective has remained constant. As American authority of US-DPRK negotiations Leon V. Sigal put it in 2002, in a judgement that remains true today:

Pyongyang's bargaining tactics led many to conclude that it was engaging in blackmail in an attempt to obtain economic aid without giving up anything in return. It was not. It was playing tit for tat, cooperating whenever Washington cooperated and retaliating when Washington reneged, in an effort to end enmity.⁴⁰

Japan

Japan is immensely important to North Korea, and normalisation of relations with Tokyo is one of Pyongyang's overarching foreign policy objectives, both for what it would produce in bilateral terms, but also for its potent effect on relations with the United States.⁴¹ The summit between Kim Jong Il and Koizumi Junichiro took place, as we know from Japanese sources, at Pyongyang's initiative. However, asymmetry is at the heart of North Korea's dilemma. Whilst good political and economic relations with Japan, and with the US, are absolutely vital and the key to economic recovery for North Korea, the relationship has no such importance for Japan, or for the US.

At the Pyongyang Summit of September 2002 Kim Jong Il was willing to sacrifice domestic face in return for the promise of normalisation of Tokyo-Pyongyang relations and all the benefits that might flow from that. Japanese *de facto* reparations, if they matched those to South Korea in the 1960s, have been estimated to be worth \$3.4-20 billion, a very large sum for the North Korean economy.⁴² Japan had been North Korea's major trading partner in the early 1990s, but Japanese sanctions and other measure had stifled trade. Just in the year after the Pyongyang Summit, instead of trade with Japan greatly increasing again, as North Korea had no doubt anticipated, it actually

⁴⁰ Leon V. Sigal, 'North Korea is no Iraq: Pyongyang's Negotiating Strategy,' *Arms Control Today*, December 2002.

⁴¹ Woo-suk Nam, 'Anticipated Economic Effects of Normalized N.K.-Japan Relations,' *KOTRA*, 9 September 2002.

⁴² Mark E. Manyin, 'Japan-North Korea Relations: Selected Issues,' (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2003).

fell to \$174 million from \$234 million the previous year. Exports to China, on the other hand, continued to grow strongly and as a result the shares changed significantly. In 2002 China and Japan received each roughly one-third of North Korea's exports; by 2003 China's share was over one half while Japan's share had fallen to less than a quarter.⁴³ Japan was also a major source of aid and remittances, both of which were squeezed considerably by the post-summit crisis.

It is very difficult to imagine any reason why North Korea should violate the Pyongyang Declaration, as Japanese spokesmen have alleged.⁴⁴ It had everything to lose and nothing to gain. That does not exclude miscalculations at the top and obstruction below, but it does make very suspect the suggestion that it is Pyongyang that has brought about the renewed crisis in the relationship between the two countries. There are good reasons for inferring that political forces, and persons, within Japan and the United States, would be happy to see the Pyongyang Declaration come to naught. A perceived threat from North Korea fuels the argument for remilitarisation, the revision of the Peace Constitution and the acquisition of nuclear weapons. The abductees issue, the resolution of which was at the heart of the Japanese rationale for the Pyongyang summit has become a very emotive one in Japan and politicians, and media, garner popular support by playing on it. In addition, the rapprochement that the summit presaged would have cut across the bows of US strategic policy in East Asia.⁴⁵ Japan has heavily played the abductees card in the recent round of the Six Party Talks, to the anger of the DPRK, and the annoyance of ROK, and presumably China and Russia.⁴⁶

Russia

After a decade of neglect under Yeltsin, Korean affairs regained attention under Putin, and he was the first Russian/Soviet head of state to visit DPRK.⁴⁷ Russia shares with China and South Korea a common desire for peace, for the survival of the DPRK and its economic rehabilitation. The long-awaited linking of the Korean railway systems, which may take place this year, offers prospects of the Trans-Siberian Railway becoming a major conduit for the trade of Japan and South Korea to Europe. Although the most peripheral of the Six Party states, Russia has played a reasonably strong role in the talks. At

⁴³ M A Cho, 'North Korea's 2003 Foreign Trade (Abstract),' *KOTRA*, 13 August 2004.

⁴⁴ Yoshida & Takahara, 'Remains Not Those of Yokota'.

⁴⁵ These issues are discussed in some detail in Beal, 'Multi-layered Confrontation in East Asia: North Korea-Japan.'

⁴⁶ Kwang-jong Yoo and Brian Lee, 'Six-party talks start with strain between Pyongyang, Tokyo,' *JoongAng Ilbo* 2005. Xian Wen, 'Six-party talks enter delicate stage,' *People's Daily (Overseas edition)*, 3 August 2005.

⁴⁷ Anonymous, 'Anniversary of DPRK-Russia Joint Declaration Marked,' *KCNA*, 19 July 2005.

the same time, Russia is becoming increasingly worried by US policy and the threats of the US-Japan alliance and this has led to a warming of the Beijing-Moscow relationship.⁴⁸ Significantly, for the first time at least since the 1950s, there were joint Russian-Chinese military exercises, and in the Yellow Sea region, facing US bases in Japan and South Korea.⁴⁹ Russia is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which brings together Russia, China, and the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to combat 'terrorism' (i.e. for China and Russia, Islamic separatism) and to counter US influence in Central Asia.⁵⁰ The speed with which the US has moved into Central Asia has clearly disconcerted Russia, and China, and must influence attitudes towards the Six Party Talks.

China

China has been both the initiator and the host of the Six Party talks. One of the (presumably unforeseen) results of US refusal to negotiate with North Korea has been to yield to China the leading role in Asia/Pacific diplomacy.⁵¹ China's position on Korean affairs parallels that of Russia. It fears that an escalation of tension would derail its surging economic growth. A nuclear-armed North Korea would give encouragement, or an excuse, for the nuclearization of an already remilitarising Japan.⁵² The collapse of the DPRK needs to be prevented because that could send a flood of refugees into China; it currently has about 50,000 – far more than the 6-8,000 in South Korea and the handful in the United States. While a rehabilitation of the DPRK economy would facilitate its burgeoning economic ties with South Korea and whilst the economic (and political) reunification of the peninsula under South Korean hegemony would have its own drawbacks, these are minor compared with the *status quo*, with the collapse of the DPRK or, worst of all, with war. Furthermore, the Chinese leadership is unlikely to have any illusions about US Korea policy, which is largely underpinned, as discussed below, by the desire to contain China.

South Korea

The current administration of Roh Moo-hyun follows that of his predecessor (Kim Dae-Jung) in North Korea policy, and this inevitably brings it into conflict with Washington. Kim Dae-jung recognised that a collapse of the

⁴⁸ Anonymous, 'Pilot cross-border rail to start in October,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 1 August 2005.

⁴⁹ Kwang-jong Yoo & Brian Lee, 'Russian, Chinese Forces Reportedly to Drill Jointly', *JoongAng Ilbo*, 25 March 2005.

⁵⁰ Chien-peng Chung, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Institutionalization, Cooperation and Rivalry,' *Japan Focus*, 14 October 2005.

⁵¹ Charles Krauthammer, 'China's Moment,' *Washington Post*, 23 September 2005.

⁵² Some Americans openly advocate Japan (and South Korea) becoming nuclear weapons states; Jin Ryu, 'S. Korea, Japan Need Nukes,' *Korea Times*, 24 December 2004.

DPRK, even a 'soft collapse' on the lines of German reunification, would impose huge, perhaps disastrous, economic and social costs on the ROK.⁵³ An actual full-blown war would be disastrous; estimates vary but one US source suggests one million casualties.⁵⁴ However, even limited military operations could produce horrific consequences. A South Korean simulation of a bombing of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon (one of the 'muscular actions' that some Americans advocate), showed that it

... could cause enormous destruction, with nuclear fallout as far away as China and Japan [...] If the 8 megawatt research reactor and 5 megawatt test reactor at Yongbyon were destroyed by bombs while they were in operation, the simulation showed that radiation would affect people as far as 1,400 km away. Eighty to 100 percent of those living within a 10-15 km radius of the reactors would die within two months, and only 20 percent within a 30-80km radius were expected to survive. As Seoul is about 200 km away from Yongbyon, the capital would suffer direct radiation damage.⁵⁵

Kim Dae-jung's 'Sunshine Policy', recognising that the alternatives were absolutely unacceptable, was an attempt at defusing tension and economic cooperation as a way of leading to eventual measured and consensual reunification. Despite the antipathy towards it of Bush administration, this policy has continued and this was symbolised in December 2004 by the first sales in Seoul of products made by a South Korea company in the Kaesong Industrial Complex. This economic zone in Kaesong, a North Korean city close to the border with the South, and quite close to Seoul, has been specifically designed for small South Korean companies. The products, kitchenware labelled 'made in Kaesong', went on sale in the Lotte department store and were sold out in two days.⁵⁶ The venue has added symbolism since the Lotte group was founded by a Japanese-Korean. Significantly, it seems unlikely that products made by South Korean companies in Kaesong will be allowed into the American market.⁵⁷

However, policy on North Korea (and hence relations with the United States) is very much contested territory. To some extent this follows party lines, with the ruling Uri Party leaning more to engagement with the North and attempting to assert independence from the United States. However, the leader of the opposition Grand National Party, Park Geun-hye, the daughter of the military dictator Park Chung-hee has also advocated engagement, has

⁵³ 'Sunshine Policy Still Valid: Kim Dae-jung,' *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 26 March 2004.

⁵⁴ Donald Macintyre, 'Kim's war machine,' *Time Asia*, 24 February 2003.

⁵⁵ 'Seoul Simulated Bombing of N.Korean Nuclear Plant,' *Chosun Ilbo*, 6 June 2005.

⁵⁶ Dong-shin Seo, "'Made in Kaesong' Sold Out in Two Days,' *Korea Times*, 17 December 2004.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, 'Americans unlikely to see Kaesong goods,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 5 November 2005.

called on the US to negotiate with North Korea and has put herself forward as an emissary to the North.⁵⁸ At the same time there are strong conservative political forces opposed to engagement and there is the military, with a vested interest in confrontation and with strong ties to the United States. The commander of the US forces in Korea, currently General Leon LaPorte, is also commander of the South Korean military through the Combined Services Command (CSC).⁵⁹ The CSC periodically has high-profile joint US-ROK military exercises to reinforce the perception of a 'threat from North Korea'.⁶⁰ The centrality of the role of the ROK military, and US dominance of it, was emphasised when US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited South Korea on her Asian tour in March 2005. She first went straight to the underground command bunker where US commanders "would direct any war against North Korea".⁶¹ Only the following day did she call on President Roh Moo-hyun. Marginalisation of political parties, and further erosion of ROK political sovereignty, is a very real possibility.

The problems Seoul faces with this relative lack of control over its destiny lie deep. Not merely would the precipitate demise of the DPRK, through war or collapse, impose huge burdens on the ROK but the reunification of the economy is probably essential if it is to surmount the long-term challenges it faces. If on the political front it is squeezed between the US and North Korea, on the economic and technological front it is increasingly sandwiched by Japan and China. The IMF remedy imposed after the financial crisis means that Korean companies are increasingly in foreign hands and subject to the tyranny of quarterly returns affecting share prices and so militating against the long-term planning that was a component of South Korea's amazing economic growth.⁶² There is a feeling in South Korea that Japan's economy is rebounding, with its productivity and technology 'surging', while Korea's is in a stall.⁶³ 'The Korean economy is losing vitality' with corporate investment in a slump compared with the US, Japan, and notably, China.⁶⁴ China, is the big worry. The 'manufacturing centre of the world', as it is now often called, is sucking in foreign investment. Investment that in the past might have gone into South Korea now goes into China, and this is joined by investment from South Korea itself, and from foreign companies leaving

⁵⁸ Sung-ki Jung, 'GNP Leader Wants NK Visit'. *Korea Times*, 20 March 2005.

⁵⁹ Sung-ki Jung, 'Gen. Bell Nominated as New USFK Chief,' *Korea Times*, 20 September 2005.

⁶⁰ Won-sup Yoon, 'CFC Proposes ROK-US Joint Military Drill'. *Korea Times*, 16 February 2005.

⁶¹ Joel Brinkley, 'Visiting Korea Base, Rice Sends Forceful Reminder to the North'. *New York Times*, 20 March 2005.

⁶² This is my interpretation of comments made by Lee Kyung-tae, President of Korea Institute of International Economic Policy at the 9th International Conference on Global Business & Economic Development, Hanyang University 27 May 2005.

⁶³ Editorial, 'Japan surges, Korea stalls,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 15 September 2005.

⁶⁴ Jae-kyoung Kim, 'Korea Isolated in Global Business Investment Boom,' *Korea Times*, 31 July 2005.

Korea.⁶⁵ Low wages (a tenth of the South Korean level), looser environmental regulation and cheaper land give China a huge competitive advantage in production and export of goods, and services, with a high labour component.⁶⁶ But the Chinese challenge doesn't stop there. China is moving ahead very fast technologically, as the second manned space flight in October 2005 graphically illustrated. And if all that weren't bad enough, Chinese *kimche* is now coming to dominate the South Korean market.⁶⁷

Reunification would not automatically solve any of these problems but it would help in two major ways. Firstly, the division of the peninsula and the alliance with the United States ensures that the military budget is huge, and growing. The ROK Defense Ministry currently has a 15-year plan to increase expenditure by 11.1% per year, totalling \$650 billion over the period.⁶⁸ By comparison, North Korea's annual military expenditure is variously estimated at between \$1.4 billion and \$5 billion and has fallen considerably over the last decade.⁶⁹ On top of the financial cost is the impact on human resources. The ROK currently has 681,000 troops and a mandatory two-year military service for all males over 18.⁷⁰ Two years spent in 'the very strange social order that is the Korean military, which includes enduring minor but continuous humiliation, degradation and abuses of power' is scarcely good training for the challenges of the 21st century with its buzzwords of knowledge society, innovation and creativity.⁷¹

Secondly, it would enable the South to access the resources of the North, natural and human. Natural resources cover a wide range, from minerals to tourism and on to geographical location, adjacent to the burgeoning Chinese economy. Human resources are even more valuable, and this means more than cheap labour, which would only be a temporary palliative. Indeed, as Taiwan has found, there is a danger that availability of cheap 'local' labour, with its language and cultural advantage over foreign labour however cheap, can deaden the drive to increase technology input and productivity. Despite internal and external constraints the DPRK has significant intellectual resources and potential. In particular, it has strengths in software development.⁷²

⁶⁵ Anonymous, 'Foreign Firms Leave Korea,' *Korea Times*, 15 July 2005.

⁶⁶ Keith Bradsher, 'China Economy Rising at Pace To Rival U.S.,' *New York Times*, 28 June 2005.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, 'Chinese kimchi takes over in local market,' *JoongAng Ilbo*, 13 May 2005.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, 'Seoul Briefs Envoys on Military Plan,' *Korea Times*, 17 October 2005.

⁶⁹ The lower figure comes from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the higher from Chaiki Seong, 'A Decade of Economic Crisis in North Korea: Impacts on the Military,' *Korea Institute for Defense Analyses Papers*, October 2003.

⁷⁰ Sung-ki Jung, '9 in 10 Officials Completed Military Service,' *Korea Times*, 10 October 2005.

⁷¹ The quotation comes from a review of a recent, highly acclaimed, South Korean film; Soh Joon, "'The Unforgiven': Portrait of a Soldier as a Young Man,' *Korea Times* 2005.

⁷² Tim Beal, 'Information and Communications Technologies in the two Koreas: Contrasts, Commonalities, Challenges,' *Global Economic Review*, 2001; Chan-mo Park, 'Current status of software research and development in North Korea' (Pohang: Pohang University of

United States

The US continues to tower over East Asian affairs, and the Six Party Talks cannot be understood in isolation from broader US policy. Furthermore, US policy cannot be understood without recognising the centrality of its fear of the rise of China. US policy towards Japan, towards South Korea and crucially towards North Korea, revolves around China. North Korea is often used as a surrogate for China; for instance it provides the justification for missile defense which is really aimed at China.⁷³ This concern with China, and obfuscation with the myth of the ‘threat from North Korea’ is echoed in Japan. As Chalmers Johnson notes in a recent and important paper, ‘Japan may talk a lot about the dangers of North Korea, but the real object of its rearmament is China’.⁷⁴

A second aspect of contemporary US policy that should be noted is the drive by the Bush administration to unravel the foreign policy agreements of the Clinton administration, not least in Korea. That specifically meant the destruction of the Agreed Framework signed between Washington and Pyongyang in 1994. This agreement had basically traded North Korea’s suspension, and eventual decommissioning, of its nuclear programme – which was suspected of having produced some weapons-grade plutonium – for the construction of two light-water reactors (which would be less suitable for weapons), interim provision of heavy fuel, the lifting of sanctions and the move towards normalisation of relations. Richard Armitage, Deputy-Secretary of State for East Asia in the first George W. Bush administration, thought he could have done better than the Agreed Framework, and it seems he set out to prove that.⁷⁵ The Clinton agreement had four major characteristics which the Bush administration has rejected or resisted.

Firstly, it involved bilateral negotiations between the US and the DPRK. Although the latest round of Six Party Talks has incorporated substantial bilateral discussions this has only come about because of Chinese pressure. If Christopher Hill does visit Pyongyang, as rumoured, then that would be a significant step towards bilateralism and the DPRK quickly welcomed the idea.⁷⁶ But it goes against the grain. As Dick Cheney famously said: “We don’t negotiate with evil, we defeat it”.⁷⁷ ‘Evil’ in this context means not badness as such, however defined, but being small and weak enough to be defeated. The United States does, of course, negotiate with large countries it

Science and Technology, 2002) and Jiho Shin, ‘North Korea’s Response to the Globalization and Informatization Era,’ *New Asia* 12, no. 1 (2005).

⁷³ Joe Biden, ‘China and National Missile Defense,’ *Congressional Record*, 14 July 2000.

⁷⁴ Chalmers Johnson, ‘No Longer the “Lone” Superpower: Coming to Terms with China,’ *Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper*, no. 105 (2005).

⁷⁵ Richard L. Armitage, ‘A Comprehensive Approach to North Korea,’ *National Defense University, Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategic Forum*, no. 159 (1999).

⁷⁶ Brian Lee, ‘Pyongyang aide says U.S. envoy welcome to visit,’ *JoongAng Ilbo*, 24 September 2005.

⁷⁷ Graham Allison, ‘‘94 Deal With North Korea Holds Lessons for Today,’ *New York Times*, 20 July 2004.

regards as evil, and it quite happily accepts things in large and strategically valuable countries that it condemns as 'evil' in small countries such as North Korea. The US endorsement of the Indian nuclear programme in July 2005 highlighted this.⁷⁸ As a South Korean official said anonymously, "The U.S. is trying to keep China in check by helping India become a major power. The U.S. doesn't consider North Korea a party with which to cooperate."⁷⁹

Secondly, it focussed on the DPRK's plutonium programme and did not bring up other issues about which the US claims concern, such as missiles, human rights and, crucially, enriched uranium. This focus was the subject of Republican attacks on Clinton's Korea policy.⁸⁰ It was the last issue, an alleged heavy enriched uranium (HEU) programme which the Bush administration claimed in 2002 violated the Agreed Framework and led them to abrogate it. Back in 1999, Republican Representative Benjamin Gilman, chair of the (wholly-Republican) North Korea Advisory Group, fulminated:

Remarkably, North Korea's efforts to acquire uranium technologies, that is, a second path to nuclear weapons, and their efforts to weaponize their nuclear material do not violate the 1994 Agreed Framework. That is because the Clinton Administration did not succeed in negotiating a deal with North Korea that would ban such efforts. It is inexplicable and inexcusable.⁸¹

Thirdly, it was a traditional, sequential, step-by-step agreement of the sort that is common in diplomacy and business, especially where there is mutual mistrust. For instance, the DPRK reactors were to be mothballed while the light water reactors were being built and installed and 'Dismantlement of the DPRK's graphite-moderated reactors and related facilities will be completed when the LWR project is completed.'⁸² The Bush administration, on the other hand, has demanded that the DPRK dismantle its nuclear programme *before* the US offers any concessions.

Fourthly, it explicitly recognised the DPRK's right to nuclear energy generation by exchanging one type of reactors (LWRs) for another (the original graphite-moderated ones). The main difference between the two, it

⁷⁸ Dana Milbank and Dafna Linzer, 'U.S., India May Share Nuclear Technology,' *Washington Post*, 19 July 2005.

⁷⁹ Song-wu Park, 'India's Nukes Incomparable to Pyongyang's', *Korea Times*, 21 July 2005.

⁸⁰ Richard L. Armitage, 'A Comprehensive Approach to North Korea,' *National Defense University, Institute for Strategic Studies, Strategic Forum*, no. 159 (1999). For a defense by the Clinton team see Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

⁸¹ Benjamin A. Gilman, 'Gilman releases North Korea Report,' *Press release*, 3 November 1999.

⁸² 'Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,' 21 October 1994. Clause I.3.

was argued, was that the LWRs were less likely to produce material for nuclear weapons. This approach was consistent with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by which non-nuclear-weapons-states – NNWS) gave up the right to nuclear weapons in exchange for help in developing nuclear energy from the nuclear-weapons-states (NWS). The NWS were also committed to nuclear disarmament, and to not threatening NNWS. That that has not come to pass is part of a larger story, though the DPRK decision to develop a nuclear deterrent should be seen within this context.⁸³ It should be added that opposition to the DPRK having nuclear energy, though often discussed, has only become an explicit part of the Bush administration over the last year. It was ambiguously hinted at during the second round of the Six Party Talks in February 2004 but it was not until the latest round, in September 2005, that it became a sticking point.⁸⁴

There is naturally no consensus about the process by which the rapidly-improving relationship between Washington and Pyongyang in the final months of the Clinton administration turned within two years under his successor to crisis, and the reactivation of the North Korean reactor. It will be recalled that Secretary Albright visited Pyongyang in October 2000 and brought an invitation for Clinton to visit and bury the enmity of the past.⁸⁵ Gore lost the election and Clinton did not go but he did leave George W. Bush a relationship with both Koreas that was on the cusp of a historic transformation. Peace was around the corner. And that may indeed have been the problem.

The dismantling of the Agreed Framework

According to a seminal paper by Jonathan Pollack, in the (US) *Naval War College Review* no less, it was the Koizumi-Kim meeting in September 2002 that triggered the crisis.⁸⁶ Pollack argues that two new factors propelled the Bush Administration to send James Kelly to Pyongyang in October 2002. Firstly he thinks that US intelligence had new information about an heavily enriched uranium weapons programme in North Korea. Secondly,

Four weeks later, the stunning disclosure of Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi's impending visit to Pyongyang triggered movement in U.S. policy. In the aftermath of the Japan-North Korea summit, the Bush administration confronted the prospect of abrupt and unanticipated changes in the Northeast Asian political and security environment. The United States believed that Pyongyang had defaulted on fundamental policy

⁸³ Bob Rigg, 'Bubble, bubble, oil and trouble,' *Listener*, 1-7 October 2005.

⁸⁴ Tim Beal, 'Commentary,' *Pyongyang Report*, April 2004.

⁸⁵ This is dealt with at length in my book Beal, *North Korea: The Struggle Against American Power*.

⁸⁶ Pollack, 'The end of the Agreed Framework.'

commitments to Washington, at the precise moment when the DPRK had opened the door to a new relationship with America's most important Asian ally and, prospectively, a major aid donor to the North. There was a real possibility that U.S. options on the peninsula would be driven increasingly by the policy agendas of others, perhaps enabling Pyongyang to achieve substantial breakthroughs at the expense of U.S. interests and without paying any price for its covert enrichment activities.⁸⁷

Kelly came back from Pyongyang claiming that he had presented the North Koreans with evidence that they had a HEU programme, and that they had admitted it. This dual allegation – of the existence of a programme and an admission to it – was uncritically accepted by most Western commentators, sometimes with rather amusing results. One Japanese academic earnestly analysed what he called Pyongyang's 'confessional diplomacy'.⁸⁸ David S Maxwell, an American Special Forces officer based in South Korea mused that perhaps this 'revelation' by the North Koreans was synchronised with Iraq and Al Qaeda to disrupt the US 'War or Terror'.⁸⁹

In fact, Pyongyang soon denied both allegations, and has reiterated that frequently ever since, but this has seldom been reported in the Western press.⁹⁰ However, using the HEU 'admission' as a justification, the US forced the suspension of heavy fuel oil deliveries, thus abrogating the Agreed Framework. With the Agreed Framework dead, Pyongyang announced that it was reactivating its reactors and in 2003, when the US still refused to negotiate, it said it would develop a nuclear deterrent. It made various statements about this deterrent programme over the following months and on 10 February 2005, it announced that it had a nuclear deterrent and was suspending its participation in the Six Party talks until the US dropped its policy of hostility and agreed to peaceful coexistence.⁹¹

Pollack was right about the danger a Japan-DPRK rapprochement would pose to US hegemony in East Asia but he seems to have given too much credence to intelligence claims about an HEU programme (defaulting 'on fundamental policy commitments to Washington'). He was writing at a time before US claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were revealed as bogus.

Selig Harrison, a former Washington Post correspondent, one of America's foremost commentators on Korea, and the man responsible for

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Noriyuki Katagiri, 'North Korea's nuclear programme: analyzing "confessional diplomacy",' *CDI.org*, 28 October 2002.

⁸⁹ David S. Maxwell, 'Is the Axis of Evil Synchronizing its Asymmetric Offensive?' *Nautilus Policy Forum Online*, 20 December 2002.

⁹⁰ 'J. Kelly Failed to Produce 'Evidence' in Pyongyang: Framed up Admission Story (Interview with DPRK FM Director O Song Chol),' *People's Korea Website*, 19 January 2003.

⁹¹ Anonymous, 'DPRK FM on Its Stand to Suspend Its Participation in Six-party Talks for Indefinite Period,' *KCNA*, 10 February 2005.

Carter's historic visit in 1993, published an important essay on the issue in *Foreign Affairs* in January/February 2005 entitled 'Did North Korea cheat?' Firstly, Harrison brings South Korea into the picture, pointing out that the US was concerned about the warming of North-South relations as well as the Kim-Koizumi meeting. Secondly, he suggests that it was likely that the Koreans had an uranium enrichment programme for producing feedstock from their abundant supplies of natural uranium for the light water reactors promised under the Agreed Framework. This, it might be added, would be part of the same search for energy security that is common around the world, from Iran, to India, China, and indeed Muldoon's New Zealand ("Think Big").⁹² Energy security was clearly high on the list of motives for the US invasion of Iraq. Ironically, the technology used for uranium enrichment in DPRK reportedly came from Pakistan which had acquired it from Europe where it had been developed in the 1970s to provide energy security and enable 'Britain, Germany and the Netherlands ... to develop centrifuges to enrich uranium jointly, ensuring their nuclear power industry a fuel source independent of the United States.'⁹³

Thirdly, Harrison notes that the US has not produced any evidence to the other countries in the Six Party Talks that North Korea 'cheated' by having an HEU programme.⁹⁴ This last point has been corroborated by various sources. In particular China has made it clear that it does not accept the American allegations.⁹⁵

This pattern of disinformation was repeated in early 2005 when the US, in an effort to put pressure on the other members of the Six Party Talks, alleged that it had evidence that the DPRK had exported nuclear material to Libya. This, if true, could have been construed as a violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁹⁶ (But then, the American supplies for the British Trident programme could also be construed as a violation of the NPT). The American commentator John Feffer noted that 'Precipitating the latest crisis were headlines that North Korea had crossed the ultimate red line by supplying nuclear material to Libya'.⁹⁷ Feffer, and others, pointed out that whatever evidence there was pointed to Pakistan, rather than to Libya. This was an important difference because whilst Libya was a signatory of the NPT, Pakistan was not. Export of nuclear material to Pakistan was therefore not a

⁹² For example Siddharth Srivastava, 'India-China-US and the Energy Conundrum,' *Japan Focus*, 30 June 2005. Chietigj Bajpae, 'Setting the Stage for a New Cold War: China's Quest for Energy Security,' *Power and Interest News Report*, 25 February 2005.

⁹³ Craig Smith, 'Roots of Pakistan Atomic Scandal Traced to Europe,' *New York Times*, 19 February 2004.

⁹⁴ Selig S. Harrison, 'Did North Korea Cheat?' *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005.

⁹⁵ Anonymous, 'China Irks U.S. in Stand on North Korean Weapons,' *New York Times*, 6 February 2004. Anonymous, 'U.S., China Disagree on N. Korea Weapons,' *New York Times*, 7 February 2005; Joseph Kahn, 'China Doubts U.S. Data on North Korean Nuclear Work,' *New York Times*, 7 March 2005.

⁹⁶ Anonymous, 'Wrong Information on NK Nukes,' *Korea Times*, 22 March 2005.

⁹⁷ John Feffer, 'Caught in the Muddle — Round Two of Bush vs. North Korea,' *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 2005.

violation of the NPT. However, it was not until the *Washington Post* published an article by Dafna Linzer on 20 March 2005 that things turned sour for Washington. Linzer's article, which was headed, "US Misled allies about nuclear export", took the issue to another level.⁹⁸

Against this background the Chinese managed to get various rounds of talks held in Beijing. Pyongyang was always a reluctant participant on the grounds that talks without substantial bilateral negotiations between it and Washington were pointless. Beijing, and probably Seoul and Moscow, seem to have argued that the only way in which the Bush administration could be persuaded into de facto bilateral negotiations was within the framework of the Six Party Talks. The US pushed for complete verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament (CVID) *before* granting any concessions, or more accurately allowing the South Koreans to do so, and the alleged HEU programme was explicit in this. The CVID position was clearly unacceptable to Pyongyang, as it would have been to any government, and was attacked by American liberals, such as Peter Beck, who were worried that the Administration's strategy was leading to a nuclear-armed North Korea:

At the heart of the Bush Administration's current objective vis-à-vis North Korea is a slogan that all officials are required to repeat over and over in public: the complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear programs. Such a policy begs a question given the thousands of tunnels and holes in the ground that North Korea has dug over the years: short of regime change, just how exactly can we verify that any dismantling is complete, much less irreversible? Moreover, the Bush Administration refuses to explicitly state what the North will receive in return for compliance. In a sense, we are telling the North, take off your clothes, and then we can talk. As if this were not enough to block any potential breakthroughs, the State Department's director of policy planning, Mitchell Reiss, set the bar even higher on March 12 in a speech at the Heritage Foundation. In order to gain economic assistance from the United States, he insisted that the North must completely revamp its economy. How many adjustments can we expect North Korea to undertake all at once? Or, like pressing North Korea on its human rights record, is this just a signal that short of regime change, there can be no deal with the North? ... According to Chris Nelson's *Nelson Report*, one Washington wag has found a more accurate meaning for CVID: Confusion, vacillation, indecision and delay.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Dafna Linzer, 'U.S. Misled Allies About Nuclear Export,' *Washington Post*, 20 March 2005.

⁹⁹ Peter M. Beck, 'The Bush Administration's Failed North Korea Policy,' *Friends Committee on National Legislation website*, 14 April 2004.

The Administrations' policy of virtual non-negotiation was also attacked from the right. Colonel Maxwell argued that the US should give Pyongyang (or the 'Kim Family Regime' as he prefers to call it) security guarantees and recognition in exchange for a freeze of the nuclear programme, while waiting for it to collapse.¹⁰⁰ This was, in many respects, the Agreed Framework strategy. Clinton's Secretary of Defense, and one-time special envoy for North Korea, William Perry criticised the Administration's refusal to negotiate, quoting Democratic scripture as it were, not that that was likely to cut much ice with the Republicans:

Some in the administration seem reluctant to deal with the North Koreans, believing talking with them somehow rewards them for their bad behavior. To them I can only quote one of my favorite presidents, John F. Kennedy, who said, "Never negotiate from fear, but never fear to negotiate."¹⁰¹

Perry's remarks were echoed by fiery New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof who, with a rather perverse forgetfulness of US refusal for decades to establish diplomatic relations with China and with Vietnam, argued that:

Ultimately, the solution to the nuclear standoff is the same as the solution to human rights abuses: dragging North Korea into the family of nations, as we did with Maoist China and Communist Vietnam. Our first step should be to talk directly to North Koreans, even invite senior officials to the United States.¹⁰²

The North Koreans claimed that there had been a certain shifting of the US position evident in the third round in July 2004. The DPRK Foreign Ministry statement said

Unlike the previous talks each party advanced various proposals and ways and had a discussion on them in a sincere atmosphere at the talks. Some common elements helpful to making progress in the talks were found there. This time the U.S. side said that it would take note of the DPRK's proposal for "reward for freeze" and seriously examine it. An agreement was reached on such issues as taking simultaneous actions on the principle of "words for words" and "action for action" and mainly discussing the issue of "reward for freeze". This was positive progress made at the talks.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ David S. Maxwell, 'Beyond the Nuclear Crisis: A Long Term Strategy for the Korean Peninsula,' *Institute for Korean-American Studies*, 19 May 2004.

¹⁰¹ William J. Perry, 'Nuclear Confrontations with North Korea: Lessons of the 1994 Crisis for Today,' *YaleGlobal Online*, 28 May 2003.

¹⁰² Nicholas D. Kristof, 'Where The Right Is Right,' *New York Times*, 24 July 2005.

¹⁰³ 'DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Six-Party Talks,' *KCNA*, 28 June 2004.

The phrase ‘reward for freeze’ refers to the precedent set by the Agreed Framework in which a freeze of the DPRK reactors was matched by rewards on the US side. The principle of “words for words” and “action for action” was code for step-by-step reciprocal action, again a characteristics of the Agreed Framework and in antithesis to the Bush Administration’s ‘CVID – before – concessions’ demand. This crucial principle was to resurface in the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005 as article 5:

The six parties agreed to take coordinated steps to implement the aforementioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action.”¹⁰⁴

Apart from the question of sequencing, the other main point of contention was the alleged HEU programme. The US said that the programme existed and must be verifiably dismantled; the DPRK denied that such a programme existed. The problem (as alluded to by Peter Beck in the quotation above) was that a uranium enrichment programme, unlike the harvesting of plutonium from a reactor, can be dispersed in small, hidden locations through the country. The US never claimed to know the location of any uranium enrichment centrifuges, only saying that they knew from Pakistan that they had been delivered to the DPRK.¹⁰⁵ If the Koreans did not have a programme, then they could not prove it. As no less a person than US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, apropos of allegations that President General Musharraf knew of Pakistan’s ‘nuclear trafficking’: “You can’t prove a negative.”¹⁰⁶ Whether the Koreans had a programme or not, they feared the US would use it as a excuse to penetrate their hidden defences: This is aimed to scour the interior of the DPRK on the basis of a legitimate mandate and attack it just as what it did in Iraq....¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the US could always claim to be unsatisfied that it had investigated everywhere and so refuse to honour any commitments it had made. The Administration is secure in the knowledge that as long as the DPRK exists, no one can prove that a HEU programme does not exist. The Chinese, and others, may not believe the US, but they cannot disprove the American claims.¹⁰⁸ The crunch would only come, as in Iraq, with a US occupation.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Text of Joint Statement From Nuclear Talks,’ *New York Times*, 19 September 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Seymour M. Hersh, ‘The Cold Test: What the Administration knew about Pakistan and the North Korean nuclear program,’ *The New Yorker*, 27 January 2003. David E. Sanger and Jim Yardley, ‘U.S. Offers North Korea Evidence That Nuclear Secrets Came From Pakistani’s Network,’ *New York Times*, 29 July 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Reuters, ‘Rumsfeld Clears Musharraf of Nuclear Trafficking,’ *New York Times*, 28 March 2004.

¹⁰⁷ ‘DPRK FM Spokesman Refutes U.S. Story about “Transfer of N-Technology” to DPRK,’ *KCNA*, 10 February 2004.

¹⁰⁸ Glenn Kessler, “Chinese Not Convinced of North Korean Uranium Effort,” *Washington Post*, 7 January 2004.; Jon B. Wolfsthal, “Crying wolf on Iraqi WMD costs US credibility on North Korea,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 January 2004; “China Irks U.S. in Stand on North Korean Weapons,” *New York Times*, 6 February 2004.

Recognising the intractability of the HEU issue, the Task Force on U.S. Korea policy, chaired by Selig Harrison, argued that, since the Administration had not provided evidence either to Congress or the other participating countries in the Talks that a substantial programme existed, it should be relegated to a later stage:

Given the greater urgency of the threat posed by the plutonium program, the start of the negotiation process should no longer be delayed by the continuation of the stalemate that has resulted from attempting to compel North Korean acknowledgement of a weapons-grade uranium enrichment program... Whether a weapons-grade program exists...would be difficult to determine without North Korean cooperation as part of an agreed denuclearization process with intrusive inspections. The Task Force recommends, therefore, that the United States should give priority to dealing with the clear and present threat posed by the plutonium program and confront the uranium issue in the final stages of the process after greater trust has been developed through step-by-step mutual concessions.¹⁰⁹

One problem with that, as Ralph Cossa, Kelly's successor as president of Pacific Forum Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), put it:

North Korea knows – or should realize – that President Bush cannot yield on this point: to turn a blind eye toward the uranium program now does more than “reward bad behavior”; it says that the whole crisis was unnecessary in the first place. Both election year politics and sound strategic reasoning preclude such a step.¹¹⁰

As if the HEU were not enough, the Bush Administration's line on nuclear energy for the DPRK hardened during the talks. By mid-2005, during the Fourth Round, US representative Christopher Hill was adamant and explicit and just prior to the end of the round he re-iterated, ‘NK Demand for Reactor Is Nonstarter’.¹¹¹

The Joint Statement

The Joint Statement of 19 September 2005 appeared to mark a breakthrough. It seemed to have miraculously jumped over all these intractable problems. However, it did this by being very ambiguous; the devil may be said to lie in

¹⁰⁹ Selig S (chairman) Harrison, ‘Ending the North Korean Nuclear Crisis,’ *Task Force on US Korea Policy*, 10 November 2004.

¹¹⁰ Ralph A. Cossa, ‘North Korea: Searching for A.Q. Kim,’ *Korea Times*, 12 July 2004.

¹¹¹ Park, ‘NK Demand for Reactor Is Nonstarter.’

the lack of detail. The use of ambiguity reflected a Confucian approach to such matters, where agreement and contracts are seen as establishing a relationship, the details and workings of which are sorted out later by the parties acting in good faith. The Americans, as any textbook on international business will say, prefer hard and fast contracts, and Hill was clearly unhappy with the ambiguity. 'Some delegations prefer to leave some things more ambiguous, my delegation would like to see things less ambiguous,' Hill was reported as saying.¹¹² It was reported that he 'had misgivings because the vaguely worded agreement left unaddressed the date by which disarmament would happen, and hinted at a concession to North Korea that President Bush and his aides had long said they would never agree to: discussing at an appropriate time to provide North Korea with a civilian nuclear power plant'.¹¹³

The inclusion of the nuclear power plant was clearly a setback for the Americans, as was the reference to a step-by-step process. In addition, the Joint Statement was marked by two curious omissions, one in the text and one in the cast. Firstly there was no explicit mention of HEU. The Bush Administration had torn up the Agreed Framework, had forced or allowed the DPRK to develop a nuclear deterrent of some sort, and had prolonged the Six Party Talks over the issue and yet it was now signing a statement that omitted it. A South Korea commentator pointed out that,

Debate has arisen over whether the joint statement signed by the six parties in Beijing incorporated a caveat on the enrichment of uranium within the phrase "existing nuclear programs."¹¹⁴

The Americans made it clear that, in their view, HEU was included. The Washington Post reported that 'The Bush administration plans to press North Korea to prove its commitment to the agreement by publicly acknowledging the existence of its uranium enrichment program.'¹¹⁵ However, they were rather vague about verification

The officials said they want North Korea to follow the model of Libya, which voluntarily gave up its incomplete nuclear development program, rather than set up another Iraq, with inspectors scouring every cave looking for it. "It is not our intention that we – that is, the collective 'we', the international community – would go into the DPRK and begin a sort of Easter egg hunt for weapons and for programs," Hill said, using the

¹¹² Park, '6-Way Negotiations Pass Through Turbulent Week.'

¹¹³ Joseph Kahn and David E. Sanger, 'U.S.-Korean Deal on Arms Leaves Key Points Open,' *New York Times*, 20 September 2005.

¹¹⁴ Joo-hee Lee, 'North Korea's Nuclear facilities: a South Korean perspective,' *Korea Herald*, 29 September 2005.

¹¹⁵ Peter Baker and Glenn Kessler, 'U.S. to Push Koreans On Nuclear Program,' *Washington Post*, 5 October 2005.

initials for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's formal name. "We expect the DPRK as part of its voluntary commitments to cooperate with us."¹¹⁶

This could be interpreted in two ways. The US might be saying that it made mistake over HEU (as with WMD in Iraq) and being conscious of the consequences of pursuing the matter wants to let it quietly drop, as long as face is saved by the DPRK admitting to some sort of pilot programme. Or it could be holding it in reserve to be used perhaps to abrogate unwelcome commitments; by not putting it to the test, through intrusive inspections, it could always claim that North Korea 'had not come clean'.

The other omission was the seeming absence of Vice-President Dick Cheney when it came to giving Hill the go-ahead to sign the Joint Statement. Cheney is widely seen as the architect and controller of US North Korea policy (as well as much else of course). Chris Nelson, publisher of the *Nelson Report* in a confidential report for the South Korean embassy in Washington inadvertently sent out on his subscriber's list (he pushed the wrong button) commented:

Real power concerning Korean issues, including whether to negotiate with North Korea, is with Vice President Dick Cheney. It's almost impossible to influence Cheney. This is because the vice president has a long experience with Korean issues, so he doesn't regard advice from outside experts as necessary.¹¹⁷

There are numerous stories about Cheney's decisive role in so much of US foreign policy, especially on Iraq and on North Korea.¹¹⁸ Last year it was a direct intervention from Cheney that scuttled Chinese attempts to produce a joint statement at the end of the second round in February 2004.¹¹⁹

Joseph Kahn and David Sanger, in what seems a particularly well-informed piece in the *New York Times* on the lead-up to the signing of the Joint Statement reported that

the Chinese increased pressure on the United States to sign – or take responsibility for a breakdown in the talks. "At one point they told us that we were totally isolated on this and that they would go to the press," and explain that the United States sank the accord, the senior administration official said.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ 'Wrong Click Publicises Workings of U.S. Korea Policy,' *Chosun Ilbo*, 30 June 2005.

¹¹⁸ Richard W. Stevenson and Douglas Jehl, 'Leak Case Renews Questions on War's Rationale,' *New York Times* 2005.

¹¹⁹ Glenn Kessler, 'Bush Signals Patience on North Korea Is Waning,' *Washington Post*, 4 March 2004.

¹²⁰ Kahn and Sanger, 'U.S.-Korean Deal on Arms Leaves Key Points Open.'

Whatever the Chinese pressure in Beijing, it was back in the United States that the decision was taken:

Several officials, who would not allow their names to be used because they did not want to publicly discuss Mr. Bush's political challenges, noted that Mr. Bush is tied down in Iraq, consumed by Hurricane Katrina, and headed into another standoff over Iran's nuclear program. The agreement, they said, provides him with a way to forestall, at least for now, a confrontation with another member of what he once famously termed "the axis of evil." So after two days of debates that reached from Mr. Bush's cabin in Camp David to Condoleezza Rice's suite at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York to Tokyo, Moscow and Seoul, Mr. Bush gave the go-ahead on Sunday evening, once he had returned to the White House, to signing a preliminary accord with Kim Jong Il, a leader he has said he detests. Had he decided to let the deal fall through, participants in the talks from several countries said, China was prepared to blame the United States for missing a chance to bring a diplomatic end to the confrontation.¹²¹

The key player here is Rice, who is said to have argued for accepting the ambiguous Chinese draft on the understanding that the parties could later give their interpretation. There was no mention of Vice President Cheney.

The mysteries of US policy making

There is a virtual consensus amongst commentators that the main focus of US policy with respect to the Korean peninsula is to prevent the DPRK from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. This consensus stretches from the mainstream media through to critical academic experts such as Gavan McCormack. But whereas the media accepts this uncritically, McCormack suggests some of the eddies below the surface:

For the United States, elimination of any North Korean nuclear weapons and related programs is the overriding goal, but the US also seems to want to deny North Korea any right to a civilian nuclear energy program. It also wishes to deal with its missile program and human rights record. Beyond this, there are also within the Bush administration those who are absolutely committed to regime change.¹²²

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Gavan McCormack, 'The Umbrella and the Mushroom: Realism and Extremism on North Korea,' *Japan Focus*, 24 August 2005.

However, there is a problem in interpreting US policy, because over the years it is arguably the American side which has created and exacerbated the nuclear issue. There are many US commentators, from liberal to 'neo-con', who argue that Pyongyang has always wanted nuclear weapons; the liberals, such as Peter Beck think it might just be negotiable, the neo-cons, such as Nicholas Eberstadt, think that negotiations will not work.¹²³ However, the evidence suggests that Pyongyang would not have embarked on a serious nuclear weapons programme had it not felt threatened by the United States, and its allies, and that it has always been willing to negotiate the end of it if conditions are acceptable.¹²⁴

Many commentators argue that negotiations with North Korea are necessary, but would be difficult. On the contrary, negotiations would be relatively easy, but from the point of view of the Administration, and especially the neo-cons, they would necessarily entail concessions, and in an order that would be unacceptable. Leon V. Sigal has pointed out that Pyongyang's demands are really very modest: 'North Korea isn't asking for much'.¹²⁵ Chalmers Johnson has noted:

Japanese officials also claim that the country feels threatened by North Korea's developing nuclear and missile programs, although they know that the North Korean stand-off could be resolved virtually overnight – if the Bush administration would cease trying to overthrow the Pyongyang regime and instead deliver on American trade promises (in return for North Korea's giving up its nuclear weapons program).¹²⁶

If, to use the New Zealand phrase, North Korea's weapons programme could be frozen, and ultimately destroyed, 'before lunch', why does the Bush Administration not negotiate a deal? All of Pyongyang's demands – security guarantees, lifting of sanctions and economic warfare, normalisation of diplomatic relations – are consistent with, and indeed enshrined in, the charter of the United Nations. The demand for nuclear energy in exchange for abandoning nuclear weapons is consistent with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

There are a number of explanations for this. One, quite fashionable at the moment, is *incompetence*. The Bush Administration is seen by many, Republicans as well as Democrats, to be particularly incompetent. All

¹²³ Peter M. Beck, 'Does N. Korea Really Want to Make a Deal? (interview),' *Ohmynews*, 12 October 2005, Nicholas Eberstadt et al., 'Nuclear North Korea or Regime Change? (interview),' *Ohmynews.com*, 27 May 2005. Eberstadt et al., 'Nuclear North Korea or Regime Change? (interview).'

¹²⁴ For an authoritative description of US nuclear threats see Bruce Cumings, 'Korea: forgotten nuclear threats,' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 2004. However nuclear weapons are only part of the US menace to North Korea

¹²⁵ Leon V. Sigal, 'North Korea's Tactics,' *Nautilus Policy Forum Online*, 15 February 2005.

¹²⁶ Johnson, 'No Longer the "Lone" Superpower: Coming to Terms with China.'

governments, not least the one in Pyongyang, struggle to do things right, but the gap between the resources of the current US Administration and its outcomes seems marked. Lawrence Wilkerson, a former State Department official, recently made a swinging attack of the Administration:

“I would say that we have courted disaster, in Iraq, in North Korea, in Iran, generally with regard to domestic crises like Katrina, Rita – and I could go on back,” he said. “We haven’t done very well on anything like that in a long time.”

Mr. Wilkerson suggested that the dysfunction within the administration was so grave that “if something comes along that is truly serious, truly serious, something like a nuclear weapon going off in a major American city, or something like a major pandemic, you are going to see the ineptitude of this government in a way that will take you back to the Declaration of Independence.”¹²⁷

Another explanation, which the Wilkerson outburst also illustrates, is *dissension*. The Bush Administration has been notably divided on many issues, of which the struggle between Powell and Cheney over North Korea policy is particularly pertinent. The scuttling of the Chinese draft statement in February 2004, described above, was brought about by Cheney. Secretary Powell, in theory in charge of foreign policy, only found out about it the following day.¹²⁸

Another charge levied at the Bush Administration is ‘*strategic incoherence*’. Again this comes from the right as well as the left of the US political spectrum.¹²⁹ Its roots might be seen to lie in dissension, and perhaps the incompetence for failure to sort that out. The Clinton Administration was also charged with this and the solution was seen to be the bringing in of a top-level technocrat, something that Bush has resisted, though Hill seems to have more authority than his predecessors:

We have seen that this challenge requires senior level officials with broad authority to handle this portfolio. It was only when former Secretary of Defense William Perry was named the North Korea Policy Coordinator that the Clinton administration was able to overcome what one critic labeled its policy of “strategic incoherence” towards the North. More recently, it has been Secretary of State Powell’s direct intervention on the North

¹²⁷ Brian Knowlton, ‘Former Powell Aide Says Bush Policy Is Run by ‘Cabal’,’ *New York Times*, 21 October 2005.

¹²⁸ Glenn Kessler, ‘Impact From the Shadows,’ *Washington Post*, 5 October 2004.

¹²⁹ Fareed Zakaria, ‘Morality Is Not a Strategy,’ *Newsweek*, 13 January 2003. Eugene B. Kogan, ‘Pyongyang palliative is Bush’s bitter pill,’ *Japan Times*, 11 September 2005. Maxwell, ‘Beyond the Nuclear Crisis: A Long Term Strategy for the Korean Peninsula.’

Korea issue that has improved chances for a diplomatic solution to the current crisis.¹³⁰

In fact, Powell was clearly not the solution to the administration's 'strategic incoherence'.

Partisanship is another constant in US policy and the Bush Administration has raised this to new levels with its ABC – Anything But Clinton – policy.¹³¹ The refusal to reactivate the KEDO programme and provide the DPRK with a 'proliferation-resistant' reactor lies not so much with the supposed danger of the Koreans getting weapons material, but because that was Clinton's policy. Moreover, as Jack Pritchard, the top State Department Korea expert, who resigned in protest at Bush's policy, has pointed out, the expectation is that the US will end up 'owning' the reactor, via 'a reunified peninsula [which] will be ruled by a democratic government allied to the United States'.¹³²

Whilst all these explanations have some persuasive power the roots are deeper and broader and the key is Niall Ferguson's observation that the United States is an empire, but an empire 'in denial'.¹³³ That means that while the US talks, and to a large extent internalizes, the rhetoric of liberal democracy, in reality it follows the logic of empire. There are two aspects of that logic that obtain here, the global and the regional.¹³⁴

The global logic demands that the DPRK be made an example to other small (and not so small) countries that might have the temerity to defy the United States. Iran is an obvious case in respect of the nuclear issue.¹³⁵ It must be forced to submit to American power, with any benefits given as compensation for the loss of effective sovereignty coming afterwards as acts of generosity rather than being concessions wrested in negotiations between nations equal in sovereignty. It would be a grave mistake, according to this logic, to engage in negotiation because that would legitimise defiance. Iraq disarmed and was invaded; what would be the lessons to the likes of Iran if North Korea was able to bargain nuclear disarmament for peaceful coexistence? The IAEA Director General, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, who whilst he has had his spats with the Bush Administration (which reportedly opposed the renewal of his contract) generally marches in step with

¹³⁰ Mitchell B. Reiss, 'Negotiating with North Korea: lessons learned (and relearned?),' *Nautilus Policy Forum Online PFO 02-35A*, 30 January 2003.

¹³¹ Beck, 'The Bush Administration's Failed North Korea Policy.'

¹³² Charles "Jack" Pritchard, 'Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on North Korea,' 15 July 2004.

¹³³ Michael F. Hopkins, 'Imperial America: Niall Ferguson's Perspective on the United States in the World,' *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 1.

¹³⁴ I have touched on the 'logic of empire' in Tim Beal, 'Commentary,' *Pyongyang Report*, August 2005. This was reproduced in Tim Beal, 'The Logic of Empire,' *Korea Quarterly*, Fall 2005.

¹³⁵ William R. Polk, 'North Korea, Iran and the United States: the Dangerous Games Nations Play,' *Japan Focus* (2005).

Washington, has warned against what he calls 'nuclear blackmail'.¹³⁶ Moreover, as long as the DPRK resists, the country, and its people (the 'collateral damage'), must be made to suffer both the fear of attack and economic strangulation.

Intersecting this global necessity, and at some variance from it, is the regional one. Here China is seen as the main issue, with a North Korea that can be portrayed as threatening merely an important component in its containment.¹³⁷ The United States has been assiduous in erecting a pan-Asian alliance to encircle China, with India being the latest recruit.¹³⁸ However, it is Japan that is the lynchpin of this strategy, and the US is working with domestic forces in Japan to promote remilitarisation, free from the constraints of the 'Peace Constitution'.¹³⁹ And if a nuclear-armed North Korea leads to a nuclear-armed Japan then perhaps so much the better.¹⁴⁰ The 'North Korean threat' is also a key rationale for Missile Defense and the development of a new generation of low-yield nuclear weapons ('bunker busters'). The Administration has recently had a setback in Congress for funding of bunker busters but despite sanguine reactions by American Americans and, surprisingly, in Pyongyang it seems unlikely that the drive to develop these weapons will abate.¹⁴¹ By this logic of containing China the continued existence of the DPRK is desirable, as long as it is poor, hungry and seen as threatening. Here demands such as that the DPRK abandon nuclear energy are tabled not so much to shackle the North Korean economy but rather to place Pyongyang in a position where it has to reject the demands, thus continuing the crisis. With South Korea planning to raise the proportion of its electricity from nuclear generation to 60%, North Korea is scarcely likely to consign itself to permanent deprivation and lack of energy security.¹⁴²

There is constant dissension within the American government about foreign policy, but underlying all of this are the imperatives of empire. These imperatives may sometimes be unclear (even to policy makers) but they are the ultimate drivers of US policy. They are also in some contradiction to each other, but because of the nature of denial they cannot be lucidly discussed (at least in public) and the conflicts resolved. For instance, the refusal to negotiate

¹³⁶ Mohamed ElBaradei, 'No Nuclear Blackmail,' *Wall Street Journal*, 22 May 2003.

¹³⁷ Michael T. Klare, 'Revving Up the China Threat,' *The Nation*, 24 October 2005.

¹³⁸ Conn Hallinan, 'India, Iran, & the United States,' *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 19 October 2005. Hallinan argues that not merely is the US providing India with nuclear technology but also missile technology so it will be able to hit any target in China.

¹³⁹ Chalmers Johnson, 'No Longer the "Lone" Superpower: Coming to Terms with China,' *Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper*, no. 105 (2005). Dan Blumenthal, 'The Revival of the U.S.-Japanese Alliance,' *Asian Outlook*, 25 February 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Ryu, 'S. Korea, Japan Need Nukes.'

¹⁴¹ Lawrence S. Wittner, 'Why Bush Abandoned the Plan for New Nukes: Stopping the bunker buster,' *Japan Focus*, 6 November 2005. Anonymous, 'Rodong Sinmun on U.S. Senate's Decision to Cut down Cost for Research of Smaller Nukes,' *KCNA*, 13 October 2005.

¹⁴² Tae-gyu Kim, 'Korea to Raise Dependence on Nuclear Power Up to 60%,' *Korea Times*, 11 July 2005.

bilaterally with the DPRK (the global logic) has enhanced the role of China, at variance with the regional logic. This irony is often noted but the analysis is frequently facile, confused and, at times, delusional.¹⁴³ Denial does not make for good formulation and implementation of policies, not least in the acquiring and maintenance of empire.¹⁴⁴

The Joint Statement of 19 September did not resolve any of the issues between the parties, but it did provide a setting in which progress could be made if the DPRK capitulated or the United States opted for peaceful coexistence. Neither of these seems probable. The 'Beijing Sextet' will continue to play, and the music will be as complex as anything written by Bach. There will be counterpoint and discordance but it is unlikely that harmony will prevail.

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¹⁴³ Krauthammer, 'China's Moment.'

¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to contrast the current American approach to empire with the meticulous preparation Meiji Japan made to join the imperialist club; see Alexis Dudden, *Japan's colonization of Korea: discourse and power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

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