

Re-Engaging North Korea After Kim Jong-il's Death: Last, Best Hope or Dialogue to Nowhere?

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Richard C. Bush, Director of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies at Brookings, and W. David Straub, Associate Director of the Korean Studies Program at Stanford University's Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, for their valuable comments on this draft.

The Brookings Institution wishes to acknowledge the generous support of The Korea Foundation in helping to make this publication possible.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kim Jong-il's death has dramatically changed the context of efforts to resume multilateral denuclearization talks with North Korea, removing from the scene the mastermind of its development of nuclear weapons. But did it also eliminate the one person who might have been able to end Pyongyang's nuclear program? We will never know whether Kim, who exercised tremendous power during his 17-year reign, would finally have made the strategic decision to denuclearize North Korea. But we do know that his youngest son and successor, Kim Jong-un, will now face that decision. It will be a difficult, perhaps even impossible, step for a young, inexperienced, untried leader likely to be even more dependent on the military and on the nuclear and missile totems than was his father. Making the wrong decision could hasten the demise of his regime.

Kim Jong-il died just as U.S.-North Korean dialogue on restarting denuclearization talks seemed about to produce results. That bilateral dialogue will probably resume soon, and we should welcome it. Pyongyang needs the talks, and the forces that had compelled the DPRK to seek them have not changed. But if Six-Party denuclearization talks follow from the dialogue, the United States should ensure that the new North Korean leader and his inner circle understand both the benefits that would flow from ending the nuclear program and the damage that continued pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles would do to their country's already bleak future. A strong and clear message, carefully and authoritatively delivered, could help shape the emerging leadership's perceptions as they contemplate the survival of their regime.

Washington is justifiably skeptical about Pyongyang's willingness to give up its nuclear program. Such skepticism could grow as the United States assesses the new North Korean ruler's ability to alter his country's nuclear fixation. Washington may even be tempted

to try to "manage" the North's nuclear challenge in the belief that actually resolving it has now become even more difficult, if not impossible. That would be a mistake and would only allow North Korea more time and opportunity to develop its nuclear and missile capabilities.

The United States should continue to give top priority to the ultimate and complete denuclearization of North Korea. At the same time, and in the short and medium term, it should pursue a package of interim steps that limits those elements of the North Korean program that create a current danger in Northeast Asia, as long as those steps bring us closer to the ultimate goal of complete denuclearization. Measures that merely sustain an empty diplomatic process should be rejected. To that end, Washington should create a dialogue process that maximizes prospects for achieving the denuclearization goal. This must include engaging the North Korean leader and his key advisers, who need to hear directly how denuclearization can help Pyongyang avoid further isolation, deindustrialization, and regime collapse.

Such an approach will incur risks for the United States and, at the end of the day, it may not succeed, but the one we have taken in the past has clearly not worked. The goal of denuclearization is more important than ever as we contemplate Pyongyang's growing missile and nuclear capabilities and the prospect that they will threaten the American homeland in the not-too-distant future. The sooner we negotiate a deal with North Korea that will result in its complete denuclearization, or conclude that a deal is not negotiable, the better off we will be. If a deal is made, all parties win. However, even if a deal proves impossible, the United States will have obtained important clarity about the North's intentions, an essential ingredient if tougher measures towards the North become necessary.

RE-ENGAGING NORTH KOREA AFTER KIM JONG-IL'S DEATH: LAST, BEST HOPE OR DIALOGUE TO NOWHERE?

KIM'S DEMISE AND U.S.-DPRK TALKS

When North Korean leader Kim Jong-il suddenly died on December 17, 2011, U.S. and North Korean nuclear negotiators were reportedly preparing for a bilateral meeting in Beijing to discuss a possible return to multilateral denuclearization talks in the coming year. That meeting, now postponed, would have been the third in a series that began with a late-July encounter in New York City. The New York meeting between then-U.S. Special Envoy for North Korea Policy Stephen W. Bosworth and DPRK First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan re-established a senior diplomatic channel that had been suspended for almost 18 months.¹

After the New York meeting, U.S. and North Korean defense officials met in Bangkok on October 21 and quickly agreed to resume joint efforts to recover the remains of American troops missing in the Korean War.² Only days later came another round of senior-level diplomatic talks, this time in Geneva, October 24-25. Ambassador Bosworth called the discussions “very positive and generally constructive” and noted that the two sides had “narrowed” some differences and “explored” other areas of disagreement. Bosworth added that the two sides had made progress in discussing “what has to be done before we can both agree to a resumption of the Six-Party Talks.”³

After stepping down as Special Envoy after the Geneva talks, Bosworth was much more positive, saying he expected a resumption of “formal dialogue

with the North Koreans on issues of substance some time in the relatively near future, both perhaps bilaterally, but also in the multilateral Six-Party Talks.”⁴ Bosworth’s statement was the clearest indication to date that the two sides were on a trajectory that could eventually lead to renewed multilateral talks.

The bilateral dialogue reached a new stage when, the day before Kim’s death, U.S. Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea Robert King concluded two days of talks with his DPRK counterpart in Beijing about the resumption of U.S. food aid. The December 15-16 talks followed a May visit by King to Pyongyang—the first time a U.S. human rights envoy had ever been received in North Korea.

News of King’s Beijing discussions was eclipsed by the announcement of Kim Jong-il’s death, but it was clear that the two sides had come close to an agreement under which the United States would provide 240,000 metric tons of monitored “nutritional assistance” to the most vulnerable people in North Korea. In return, North Korea would agree to freeze operation of the uranium enrichment facility at its Yongbyon nuclear complex, allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitors to oversee the freeze, and accept other U.S. preconditions for the resumption of multilateral denuclearization talks.⁵

A NEW BALLGAME AFTER KIM'S DEATH?

One of the first questions prompted by Kim Jong-il’s death was whether the U.S.-DPRK dialogue would

continue. Kim's demise prompted speculation about the imminent collapse of the North Korean regime. Some suggested that political infighting or even a coup might occur, or that his designated successor, Kim Jong-un, the deceased leader's youngest son, would unilaterally end talks with the United States or launch provocations to demonstrate his military leadership. Some called for the United States to back away from further talks and adopt a wait-and-see posture, suggesting that the United States would not be able to do business with the new North Korean leader.

The Obama Administration's measured approach after Kim's death reflected a very different take on events than that contained in the speculation cited above. The U.S. response to Kim's demise included a carefully worded statement by Secretary of State Clinton that used the late leader's formal title, conveyed America's "thoughts and prayers" to the North Korean people, and pointed to the possibility of improved relations.⁶ After U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta conferred with his South Korean counterpart, U.S. forces in the South were directed to maintain their normal alert levels.⁷ The Obama Administration also wasted no time in reaching out to New York-based DPRK diplomats only two days after Kim's death to follow-up the Beijing dialogue on food assistance.⁸

Washington appears to have concluded that the new developments in North Korea do not warrant a change in the U.S. approach and that continuing the current policy, while carefully observing North Korean behavior after Kim's death, represents the best path forward for now. There is an expectation in Washington that there will be continuity in the North, at least in the near term.

This judgment is based on several factors, one of which is the understanding that Kim Jong-un has been part of the DPRK decision-making process that had approved the North's outreach to Washington (and Seoul) in recent months. Washington has probably also assessed that the new leader will avoid raising questions about his father's legacy by making any significant departures from his father's policies for now. Washington also understands that the two

key institutions in North Korea—the military and the party—both endorsed the young Kim's leadership precisely because he is his father's son, underscoring the fact that all political legitimacy in the DPRK derives from continuing this all-important family tie.⁹

The administration knows that the young Kim's succession had been carefully charted for more than three years since his father suffered a stroke in the summer of 2008. And they are aware that, since the announcement of Kim Jong-il's death, we have been observing the implementation of an elaborate game plan that was long in the making, even if the suddenness of Kim's death may not have given the regime all the time it may have wanted to refine the plan.¹⁰ Washington's cautious outreach to the North after Kim's death probably reflected a decision to carefully test the waters in Pyongyang to confirm these judgments.

TROUBLE ON THE HORIZON?

Despite the signs of continuity, Kim Jong-il's death raises important questions about the longer-term stability of the North Korean regime. The DPRK is increasingly burdened by its isolation, international sanctions, a deteriorating economy, and a continuing inability to feed its people. Under the elder Kim's iron hand, the North managed to survive these and other challenges for 17 years, but there is good reason to question whether his inexperienced successor and coterie of advisers will be able to hold things together in the long run. Accordingly, Washington will be carefully monitoring developments in the North, in conjunction with its South Korean ally, for signs of instability, dissent, or dissatisfaction, particularly among the North's elite. And the United States will almost certainly want to assess whether and to what extent the North's vulnerabilities might provide an opportunity for progress in nuclear diplomacy in the coming weeks and months. I will discuss this in more detail later in this paper.

Washington will also watch for any signs that the shift in power in North Korea might lead to more adventurous or aggressive behavior by the North.

I argue later that, while this is always a possibility, there is reason to believe that the DPRK may exhibit caution in the near future as it focuses on completing the succession process.

U.S.-DPRK CONTACTS: WHAT'S GOING ON?

I began this paper before Kim Jong-il's death, to study the origins and implications of the recently revitalized U.S.-DPRK diplomatic dialogue. I was struck by the fact that, with the recent New York, Pyongyang, Geneva, and Beijing talks, U.S. diplomats had now spent more time negotiating with their North Korean counterparts over the course of seven days than during the past three years. If, as I have suggested, this exploratory effort is likely to continue, it is important to understand how it might develop after Kim Jong-il's death. If it does lead to new Six-Party Talks, we should ask whether these will be any different from previous rounds, which raised hopes and expectations but, in the end, failed.

What has prompted the Obama Administration to explore returning to a negotiating process that, despite best efforts, failed to prevent Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons over the past 17 years? Has the administration discovered a new approach that will finally convince the DPRK to abandon its nuclear program—a goal that eluded three previous U.S. administrations?

Moreover, how should we interpret the direct North-South Korean talks seen in recent months? What accounts for the evident easing of South Korea's policy towards the North? Has Seoul decided to forgive and forget the sinking of one of its warships by a North Korean torpedo and set aside the November 2010 shelling of its territory by North Korea? Has Seoul found a way to deal with its anger and seek a reset in relations with the North, particularly after Kim Jong-il's death?

And what should we make of Pyongyang's pursuit of talks with Washington? Had North Korea under Kim Jong-il decided that serious denuclearization talks are now in its interest? If so, could this decision be reversed now that he is gone? Is Kim Jong-un

more or less likely than his father to denuclearize North Korea? Could he undo Pyongyang's previous declaration that it would never abandon its nuclear weapons "even in a dream"?¹¹

What has been driving Beijing's intense efforts to bring about the resumption of the Six-Party Talks, which collapsed in late 2008? Does Beijing see better prospects for talks this time? If so, why? Or is Beijing still trying to manage the North Korea situation, continuing to fear instability in the North more than it is concerned about the North's nuclear weapons development?

TALKS REDUX?

The flurry of diplomatic activity between Washington and Pyongyang in recent months has been notable. Until the summer of 2011, high-level U.S.-DPRK dialogue had been conspicuous by its absence since the December 2009 visit to Pyongyang by then-U.S. Special Envoy Bosworth. That visit took place after the collapse of the Six-Party Talks and after the North's missile and nuclear tests in the spring of 2009 brought bilateral relations to a low point.

Any hopes that Bosworth's 2009 trip would lead to a resumption of Six-Party Talks evaporated, however, when the DPRK sank the ROK corvette *Cheonan* in March 2010. The North's attack on South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island on November 23, 2010, further damaged prospects for talks and raised military tensions on the peninsula to an almost unprecedented level.

Concerned at how close the situation had come to a major military confrontation, the Obama Administration began exploring ways to reduce tensions and resume dialogue with Pyongyang in the spring of 2011. The initial result of this effort was Ambassador King's May 2011 trip to Pyongyang, followed by the string of U.S.-DPRK diplomatic contacts described earlier.

THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

For the United States, any return to multilateral denuclearization talks has been conditioned on

Pyongyang's willingness to accept U.S. demands for "pre-steps." The United States has insisted that the DPRK demonstrate in a concrete way its seriousness about denuclearization and its preparedness to implement its commitments under the September 19, 2005 Six-Party denuclearization agreement.¹² Washington's "pre-steps" include suspending operation of the North's uranium enrichment facility at Yongbyon, allowing International Atomic Energy Agency monitors to return to the nuclear complex, ceasing missile launches, re-engaging in dialogue with the ROK, and implementing a moratorium on its nuclear program.

For the United States, these actions are an important admission ticket to talks for North Korea. There is no support in the Obama Administration for a negotiation that offers no prospect for reducing the threat posed by Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. There is also deep concern over the North's uranium enrichment program, which would provide the DPRK with a hard-to-detect second path to weapons development. Hence the demand for concrete steps by the North that would allow talks to resume with Pyongyang's nuclear activities at Yongbyon in suspension.

WHY TALKS? – THE U.S. POSITION

What has prompted the United States to explore a possible return to multilateral talks with Pyongyang? A key factor is concern over the possibility of military confrontation with the DPRK. The provocations of 2010 were serious, and in certain respects without precedent. The torpedoing of the *Cheonan* took place in South Korean waters and killed 46 South Korean sailors—the largest death toll of any military incident since the Korean War. The artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island was a major violation of the Korean War Armistice Agreement, and the first time that the North's artillery shelled South Korean territory since the Korean War.

After the attack on Yeonpyeong, U.S. and ROK forces sent a strong deterrent message to the North. Nevertheless, the boldness of the attack, as well as its potential to escalate into a broader conflict, unnerved

Washington. Because of the attack, South Korea adopted new rules of engagement that made it virtually certain that it would carry out a vigorous military response to a new North Korean attack. This raised the stakes in any future provocation by Pyongyang.

Administration contacts have told me that the danger posed by this situation encouraged the view that one way of reducing the possibility of North Korean provocations was to get Pyongyang "invested" in a dialogue process that could yield significant benefits and make clear to the DPRK what it would lose if it carried out new attacks. Being at the table with the DPRK could also offer useful insights into the North's thinking that could help anticipate its behavior. And having a reliable channel of communication is useful when dealing with an unpredictable adversary, especially if it can be used to deliver strong warnings about certain DPRK behavior.

Officials with whom I have spoken acknowledge that such an approach provides no guarantee against provocations. This is an important point, for it would be a mistake to believe that talks with North Korea can, by themselves, deter military action. In this connection, some have argued that North Korea does not engage in nuclear or missile provocations when it is negotiating with the United States.¹³ Such a view unfortunately overlooks the history of U.S.-DPRK diplomatic engagement as well as the nature of North Korean tactics.

For the DPRK, provocations are part of its unique approach to negotiations and are often carried out to change the dynamics during talks. In a variation on Clausewitz, the North sees provocations as the continuation of diplomacy by other means.

Examples of this occurred in the summer of 1998, when the DPRK threatened to remove and reprocess fuel rods from its five-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon, just as discussions were underway with the United States about the October 1994 Agreed Framework. As those of us involved in the talks concluded at the time, the intent of this move was to pressure the United States by introducing a new threat into an ongoing negotiation. To add to the sense of crisis, the North

launched a Taepodong-II long-range missile over Japan and into the North Pacific on August 31, 1998. The launch occurred while U.S. and DPRK diplomats were discussing the North's earlier threat, and as the United States was conveying its concerns over another major challenge—the U.S. discovery of a large underground facility at Kumchang-ni that Washington suspected might have a nuclear role.

There is something to be said for using talks to discourage bad behavior. But we should be realistic. Relying largely on negotiations to deter the DPRK from military action would be a mistake. It could also allow North Korea to believe that the best way to get America's attention at the negotiating table is to engage in, or threaten to engage in, provocations. We saw a troubling example of this in 2006, when the United States responded to North Korea's first nuclear test by returning to the Six-Party Talks within a matter of weeks.

U.S. interest in re-engaging with North Korea is also driven by concern that, in the absence of a negotiating process, there is no practical way to restrain North Korea from expanding its nuclear and missile programs. After the Bush Administration's negotiating approach on North Korea fell apart in late 2008, nothing prevented North Korea from manufacturing new nuclear weapons or developing and testing the missile systems with which to deliver them.

North Korea exploited this opening. With its nuclear test of May 25, 2009, Pyongyang demonstrated how quickly it could resume work on developing a more sophisticated plutonium-based nuclear weapon. After the collapse of the Six-Party Talks, Pyongyang revealed a new capability—uranium enrichment—that sent the international community a stark message that the DPRK now had a second path to nuclear weapons development.

Pyongyang revealed this capability—one that the United States had long suspected the DPRK was secretly developing—to U.S. nuclear weapons expert Dr. Siegfried Hecker and a visiting delegation in November 2010.¹⁴ The revelation served to dramatically underscore the fact that the Obama Ad-

ministration's policy approach was not meeting the goal of ending the North Korean nuclear program.

Critics of the Obama Administration have made much of this failure. They have focused in particular on the administration's policy of "strategic patience," which has held that the United States would not rush back into negotiations until the DPRK changed its behavior. While this approach had insulated the administration from charges it was entering into unproductive negotiations, it has also opened it up to criticism from both supporters and opponents of dialogue with Pyongyang. Each group, for very different reasons, has accused the administration of ignoring the threat posed by the North's growing nuclear and missile capabilities.¹⁵

Nothing in the aftermath of Kim Jong-il's death appears to have changed the basic U.S. calculus behind its interest in re-engagement with the DPRK, even if there are uncertainties about the North's new leader and concerns about the future stability of the regime. The potential for military provocation remains a worry, but Washington may see renewed dialogue as a useful way of warning the new leadership in Pyongyang about the consequences of adventurism. The Obama Administration may also view Kim's death as an opportunity to urge the North's emerging leadership to change its position on nuclear weapons and missiles. At a minimum, Washington may want to use new talks to explore how post-Kim Jong-il politics are affecting the North's negotiating behavior.

THE ROK FACTOR: SEOUL'S NEW STANCE

Washington's exploration of re-engagement with Pyongyang has been greatly influenced by the changing posture of South Korea. Indeed, U.S. efforts to explore a way back to talks would not be possible without Seoul's support, and the Obama Administration has made coordination with its Korean ally the centerpiece of its policy. Meanwhile, Seoul has been pursuing its own outreach to Pyongyang, and in doing so provided useful "cover" for Washington's efforts.

The ROK has come a long way since 2010. The DPRK's two attacks that year angered the South Korean people and ended any near-term prospects for dialogue. Meanwhile, there was no appetite in Washington for talks with Pyongyang while America's ally was still reeling from the deaths of its citizens.

After the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong attacks, Seoul opposed negotiations with Pyongyang until the DPRK apologized for its aggression. In supporting the ROK, Washington made clear that the path to resumed U.S.-DPRK dialogue required Pyongyang to first deal with Seoul and assuage its anger over the attacks. Within weeks after the sinking of the *Cheonan*, however, Seoul was hinting that something less than an outright apology might be acceptable and that the incident was not necessarily a barrier to resumed multilateral dialogue.¹⁶ The attack on Yeonpyeong Island produced another spike in South Korean anger, but since then Seoul's insistence on an apology has become more muted.

The ROK has begun to deal with the North in a more nuanced fashion. Seoul has conducted two meetings with DPRK Six-Party negotiators, the most recent in Beijing on September 21, 2011.¹⁷ The North's participation in these meetings may have been tactical, but Pyongyang conceded an important principle in agreeing to discuss nuclear matters with Seoul, and in doing so has met an important U.S. requirement by engaging directly with Seoul.

With the important exception of the South Korean-operated Kaesong Industrial Complex in North Korea, which for the DPRK remains an important cash cow and, for the ROK, a useful conduit to influence North Korean attitudes, inter-Korean cooperation has been largely dormant since a South Korean tourist was shot and killed by a North Korean soldier in July 2008. Family reunification visits—once the emotional centerpiece of North-South exchanges—have not taken place since the DPRK's attack on Yeonpyeong. A senior ROK official told me recently that North-South cooperation would likely remain the area most deeply affected by the lack of an apology from North Korea. Absent an apology, he said, it will also be difficult for Seoul to

provide non-emergency food assistance and fertilizer to the North.¹⁸

The ROK's more flexible approach to the North has intensified since the pragmatic Yu Woo-ik replaced the tough-minded Hyun In-taek as unification minister. Minister Yu has approved several initiatives designed to signal a relaxation of the ROK's approach, including allowing a large multi-denominational religious delegation to visit the North and approving a joint South-North archaeological project near Kaesong. Simultaneously, ROK President Lee had begun to hint at his willingness to hold a summit with Kim Jong-il, but with the elder Kim's death arranging a summit with the new leader during the remainder of Lee's term may be even more difficult.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Seoul's response to the death of Kim Jong-il has been cautious, even conciliatory. Military alert levels were raised as a precautionary step, but the South was careful not to take any gratuitous military actions that the North might view as provocative. President Lee emphasized the ROK military's low profile and stressed the South's lack of hostility towards the North in a widely reported meeting with senior ROK political leaders days after Kim's death.²⁰ To reinforce the South's message of non-confrontation, its defense minister announced that the South would not illuminate large Christmas tree-shaped towers near the DMZ that the North had found offensive.²¹

The ROK's official statement after Kim Jong-il's death conveyed official "sympathy" to the North Korean people. While the South elected not to send an official delegation to Pyongyang, it granted permission for the widow of the late ROK President Kim Dae-jung and others to travel across the border to pay their respects.²² Lest the ROK's intended message be lost on the North, the South's Unification Ministry spokesman expressed hope that the delegation's visit would lead to inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation.²³ Seoul's reaction to Kim Jong-il's death suggests it is inclined to continue to moderate its policy towards Pyongyang and explore whether the political transition in the North may offer an opening for renewed dialogue. Thus far, Pyongyang's

response has been anything but positive, but barring a major reversal in course by the DPRK, Seoul seems willing to be patient.

The South's new approach seems driven in part by the electoral calendar. South Korea will hold National Assembly elections in April 2012, and voters will return to the polls in December to elect a new president. With these votes looming, the Blue House and the ruling conservative Grand National Party (GNP) are concerned about the recent defeat of the ruling party's candidate in Seoul's mayoral election. The center-left candidate's victory in Seoul is widely regarded as evidence that the political pendulum is swinging in favor of the opposition.

To deal with this possibility, the GNP has been moving to the center on a range of issues on which the left-leaning opposition, newly reorganized and renamed as the Democratic Unity Party, is seen as having an advantage, including social welfare and economic justice. The GNP is also trying to appear more moderate on North Korea, an issue on which the left has accused the GNP of being excessively hard line. The GNP is mindful of the fact that, despite lingering anger over the attacks of 2010, many South Koreans support engagement with the North and most South Koreans were supported the government's expression of sympathy on Kim's death. South Korea's complicated views of the North and the general support for engagement with Pyongyang explain why themes of engagement, trust-building, and inter-Korean cooperation were at the center of a recent *Foreign Affairs* article by Ms. Park Geun-hye, the presumptive candidate of the conservative Grand National Party in next year's presidential race.²⁴

With just over a year left in office, President Lee's personal views may also be a factor behind Seoul's new posture. It is not certain that Lee regards a major advance in North-South ties as an essential part of his presidential legacy (as many of his predecessors did). But if he does, the window of opportunity for achieving one is closing, and some step forward on North-South ties would likely also help Lee's party in upcoming election.

NORTH KOREA'S STAKE: THE NEED FOR A VERY GOOD YEAR

The year 2012 is an important one for North Korea. Kim Jong-il had promised that in the 100th anniversary of his father's birth, the DPRK would open the door to becoming become a "strong and prosperous nation." By any measure, achieving such a goal will be impossible for North Korea, a country whose per capita GDP today stands at a meager \$1,200, where chronic malnutrition is a way of life, and where industrial output has stagnated since its implosion in the early 1990s.

With Kim Jong-il's death, his son now faces the need to fulfill his father's commitment to his people. Lacking the resources to do so, probably the best the new leader can hope for in 2012 is to obtain the food, fertilizer, fuel, and other benefits that might flow from successful negotiations with foreign powers. If becoming a "strong and prosperous nation" is not in the cards, at least the North's new leader might be able to offer its people a slightly less dismal future.

The North faces other challenges, as well. The missile and nuclear tests of 2009 and attacks on the South in 2010 left the DPRK deeply isolated and saddled with more international sanctions than at any point in its history. Sanctions may not have convinced the North to change its ways, but they are having an effect, including making it more dependent on China and narrowing its room for maneuver. That cannot sit well with a North Korean regime that prides itself on its self-reliance, nationalism, and skill at manipulating ties with its neighbors to its advantage.

While North Korea's interest in returning to talks is largely the product of necessity, it is partly the result of Chinese pressure.

China, nominally Pyongyang's treaty ally, was disturbed by the North's artillery attack on the South in 2010 and the potential that incident had to draw China into a larger military confrontation. The attack brought the United States and the ROK more closely together and led to a significant increase in U.S.-ROK

military activity in and around the Korean Peninsula, including the Yellow Sea. A worried China reacted strongly but in the end could do nothing to reverse a situation its ally's aggression had created.²⁵

After the Yeonpyeong attack and in response to calls by the United States to rein in its ally, Beijing appears to have weighed in with the DPRK to discourage further provocations and to prevent a broader conflict on its doorstep.²⁶ During a conversation in Beijing, a senior Chinese official who had just returned from Pyongyang confirmed as much to me, saying China had made its views known at senior levels "behind closed doors."²⁷

Meanwhile, the succession has almost certainly influenced North Korean interest in dialogue. Since the sudden illness of Kim Jong-il in 2008, the succession process has gone through several phases, each of which has had an effect on Pyongyang's external relations. The first occurred when the elder Kim's stroke created an urgent need for a mechanism to ensure a smooth transfer of power in the event he did not survive. The hardening of North Korea's posture towards the South and the United States we saw in late 2008 and early 2009, the toughening of its position on nuclear and missile issues, and the escalation of its martial rhetoric during this period coincided with this urgent phase of the succession. I believe this behavior was the manifestation of an internal process designed to reaffirm the loyalty of key stakeholders as the leadership dealt with the succession challenge.²⁸

With the selection of Kim Jong-un as the designated heir, a second phase of the succession occurred in 2009-2010 as the regime began to praise the younger Kim's leadership skills and boost his public profile. The bestowal of senior military rank on Kim Jong-un was designed to enhance his credibility as a military leader. It was during this period that Kim Jong-un, eager to further burnish his military credentials, might have played a central role in the 2010 attacks on the South.²⁹

The attacks backfired on the North and led to further isolation, a cutoff of ROK aid, and increased pressure from China. After reflecting on this setback and

with Kim Jong-un now in charge, the North Korean regime may shift into a new phase as it seeks to reduce external pressure, buy time to focus on serious domestic economic challenges, and strengthen the young Kim's domestic power base for the future. A confrontation with the United States or the ROK at this time would make it impossible to pursue these priorities. Dialogue with Washington and Seoul would help.

CHINA: GOOD COP, BAD COP

China has pressed the DPRK hard to return to the negotiating table. As the host and sponsor of the Six-Party Talks, Beijing has a stake in their success. In private conversations, most Chinese officials acknowledge their deep skepticism about Pyongyang's willingness to denuclearize in the near term, but they also stress that the current absence of dialogue makes it impossible to test North Korea's sincerity.

China also believes that isolation and economic decline will ultimately compel the DPRK to adopt Chinese-style economic reforms and moderate its position on the nuclear issue. In recent conversations, Chinese officials seem more optimistic than ever that North Korea is ripe for economic change. Much of this optimism is based on China's belief that Kim Jong-un's accession to power and generational change will create the conditions for reform. In private conversations, Chinese contacts say the PRC has been using its unique relationship with Pyongyang both to urge the North to introduce economic reforms and to make clear to Pyongyang that the price for China's much-needed economic support is a return to nuclear talks.³⁰

China's interest in dialogue is also motivated by security concerns. Beijing's nightmare remains the potential for conflict and instability on the Korean Peninsula, and PRC diplomacy reflects its attempt to prevent this possibility. China's current efforts resemble the major initiative it undertook in late 2009 and early 2010 to restart Six-Party Talks—an effort interrupted by the North's sinking of the *Cheonan*. This time, China hopes its cautionary words to the North about provocations will yield a better result.

China has not been coy in delivering its message about the need for dialogue. During his October 23-25, 2011 visit to Pyongyang, PRC Vice Premier Li Keqiang met with both Kim Jong-il and his son in what appeared to be a high-profile endorsement of the succession. During the visit, Li urged the North Korean leader to improve relations with both the United States and South Korea. He also provided Pyongyang with a not-too-subtle reminder of what its priorities should be, saying “China supports North Korea maintaining a correct focus on engagement and dialogue.”³¹

With the elder Kim’s death, those remain Beijing’s priorities. And with the young Kim now in charge, China will now have a chance to see whether its hope for reform, opening, and systemic change has been in vain.

IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR DENUCLEARIZATION?

Washington, Seoul, Pyongyang, and Beijing each have reasons for reengaging in multilateral denuclearization talks. And if Pyongyang meets the U.S. preconditions, all six parties (including Russia and Japan, which presumably would not block a consensus) could find themselves back at the negotiating table.

But if talks resume, the United States and South Korea will return to the table knowing that the ultimate goal of those talks, the complete denuclearization of North Korea, is more distant than ever, and might even be unachievable. The stark reality that will face the negotiators in a future round of Six-Party Talks is that the DPRK is determined not to give up its nuclear weapons capability. Among officials in Washington, Seoul, and Beijing and non-governmental experts in all three countries, it is virtually impossible to find anyone who disagrees with this assessment, or with the judgment that the complete denuclearization of North Korea remains a remote possibility, at best, at least within the context of the current negotiating paradigm.

Most experts believe the DPRK no longer shares the goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. They are con-

vinced by the North’s words and deeds that the DPRK believes its interests lie in retaining nuclear weapons as a way of defending itself, assuring the survival of its system, and as a way to bring the United States and others to the negotiating table on its own terms.

A BITTER LEGACY

The story of how these judgments came to be made is a familiar one and need not be retold here in detail. But as the United States edges back towards renewed nuclear dialogue with North Korea, it is worth recalling some of the developments that shaped current thinking about the prospects for denuclearizing North Korea.

A critical point occurred in 2002. Disturbing reports that the North was secretly pursuing an alternative path to nuclear weapons development through uranium enrichment dashed any hope that the two countries could reestablish the dialogue that existed at the end of the Clinton Administration. The uranium enrichment revelations destroyed trust in the DPRK’s good faith and killed the October 1994 Agreed Framework, which had charted a path to the eventual normalization of relations as North Korea gave up its nuclear program.

The North’s nuclear test in 2006 dealt remaining hopes a powerful blow. The test was a troubling watershed. It meant that the challenge of a nuclear-armed North Korea was no longer theoretical. It signaled the prospect that, having carried out a nuclear test, there might now be no turning back for the DPRK in its pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability.

Further damage was done as new information about Pyongyang’s uranium enrichment program became public, including its link to the A.Q. Khan network. And in 2007 the Israeli Air Force’s destruction of a nuclear reactor construction site in Syria was followed by revelations, including video footage, indicating a North Korean role in the reactor’s construction.³²

The DPRK’s pursuit of an alternative path to nuclear weapons development and the news that it had also engaged in the proliferation of nuclear know-how sent

shock waves through the U.S. expert community, the Congress, and the media. Washington now insisted that Pyongyang had to accept an intrusive protocol to verify the nuclear declarations it made in mid-2008. Pyongyang refused and the Bush Administration ended with the Six-Party Talks in suspension and its agreements unraveling.

North Korea's actions and rhetoric during the Obama Administration further fueled U.S. concern. Even before the inauguration, as members of the president-elect's team were signaling hopes for a better bilateral relationship, a North Korean delegation visiting New York dismissed that prospect. The DPRK visitors told some of their American interlocutors, including me, that the United States would have to deal with the North "as a nuclear state" and that America would "have to live with" a nuclear-armed DPRK for the foreseeable future.³³

The North Korean visitors also said that the only basis for denuclearization and better relations would be the elimination of what they described as the U.S. "threat." They explained that they meant the "threat" posed by U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula, the existence of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, and America's commitment to use its strategic deterrent to defend its ROK and Japanese allies. Eliminate these things, they argued, and a better relationship with the United States might be possible and the DPRK would consider resuming denuclearization discussions. Similar statements were made in Pyongyang to a delegation of influential U.S. experts in February 2009, and this argument has been heard frequently in subsequent Track II dialogues with North Korean officials. It is more than a bargaining position.

As the new U.S. administration took office in Washington, the message from Pyongyang was tough and uncompromising. This despite the fact that, as a candidate, President Obama had taken a considerable risk in making the case for engaging America's adversaries, including North Korea. The "outstretched hand" enunciated by President Obama in his inaugural address was greeted by North Korea with a missile launch and a nuclear test.

NORTH KOREA'S GOAL: PERMANENT NUCLEAR STATUS

Today, many U.S. experts believe the primary goal of the DPRK in any future bilateral and multilateral talks will be to gain acceptance as a de facto nuclear weapons state, or at least to make its long-term possession of a nuclear arsenal a fait accompli. Pyongyang may try to convince the United States to normalize relations with a nuclear-armed North Korea. The North may argue that, after normalization, a less "threatened" North Korea might be more willing to rid itself of nuclear weapons. Pyongyang will seek to focus new negotiations on its longstanding demand for a peace treaty, which would have to be concluded before it would give up its nuclear weapons.

The DPRK is deeply committed to the possession of nuclear weapons. It has conducted two nuclear tests. It has invested considerable national treasure in the development of its plutonium- and uranium-based weapons programs. It has endured onerous economic sanctions and international isolation in order to do so. It risked losing the considerable benefits that would have accrued to it via the Agreed Framework and ultimately showed it was willing to sacrifice these to develop a second path to nuclear weapons development. The record now shows that its pursuit of a uranium enrichment technology dates back more than a decade, perhaps even to the mid-1990s—further evidence of its longstanding determination to possess this capability.

Over several U.S. administrations, diplomatic and economic normalization, food and energy assistance, membership in international financial institutions, security assurances, infrastructure and agricultural aid, and much more have been offered to Pyongyang in return for denuclearization. Nothing has been sufficient to deter the North's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

And now, the reins of leadership in North Korea have been transferred to a young, inexperienced man who will need time to consolidate his power. We do not know if he will be able to dominate the decision-making and policy-making process, as his

father and grandfather did. It is not hard to imagine that he will be more, not less, dependent on the “security” that nuclear weapons provide against real or imagined threats and that he will have to tread carefully in dealing with entrenched military and security bureaucracies. And even if his exposure to the West in his youth, his facility in foreign languages, his affinity for aspects of Western culture, and the exposure he has had to the way the world really works have made him a reformer, he will be faced with a system that is deeply unwilling, and probably unable, to change.

All this suggests that U.S. negotiators will face an enormous challenge if negotiations resume. The DPRK has crossed an important physical and psychological threshold by carrying out two nuclear tests and trumpeting its nuclear status. Pyongyang has acknowledged, after years of denial, that it is enriching uranium and has shown the world a sophisticated enrichment facility. In the view of experts, such a facility could not have been built quickly, and the level of technology demonstrated at the site suggests that this effort was preceded by years of work, including at other sites.³⁴ To further complicate things, the fact that the DPRK built the facility without being detected in the middle of the Yongbyon nuclear complex makes it essential that any future verification agreement with Pyongyang must be even more intrusive than the one the DPRK refused to accept in 2008 if it is to have any credibility.

WHY RE-ENGAGE?

Despite the downbeat prospects, there is good reason to re-engage with the North on nuclear matters, despite our doubts about Pyongyang’s intentions. Complete denuclearization of North Korea may not be possible now and, as many believe, could be impossible as long as the current regime is in power. But giving up on this goal is unacceptable. Doing so would send a dangerous signal to our allies and partners that we are prepared to accept for the long haul North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons. It would seriously damage the international non-proliferation regime. And it would inadvertently help legitimize North Korea’s long-time pursuit of

nuclear weapons and violation of its bilateral and multilateral obligations.

At the same time, leaving in place an unconstrained DPRK nuclear program undermines the U.S., ROK, Japanese, and Chinese interest in a stable and predictable Northeast Asia. An agreement or series of steps that imposed meaningful constraints on this program **and** lays the groundwork for complete denuclearization would reduce the current level of danger and be in our collective interests. An agreement that merely freezes North Korea’s programs in their present state would not be.

While pursuing the complete denuclearization of North Korea, there are goals short of full denuclearization that could be achieved in the near term. One of these is the elimination of the remaining elements of North Korea’s plutonium-based nuclear program at Yongbyon, including the 5-megawatt reactor, the fuel fabrication and reprocessing facilities, and the fresh fuel for this reactor and a 50-megawatt reactor on which construction has been halted. Existing Six-Party agreements call for these facilities to be frozen, disabled, and eventually dismantled. Any new negotiation should hold Pyongyang to the commitments it has made to do so.

Ironically, Pyongyang’s success with uranium enrichment may make this goal more attainable if the North comes to the table prepared to negotiate away its plutonium production program in the belief that it has a reliable alternate route to nuclear weapons via uranium enrichment. Even if it does and even if such a negotiation succeeds, it will still leave U.S. negotiators with a daunting task. Eliminating the North’s plutonium-based program at a known location has proven terribly difficult to achieve over the past 17 years. Even tougher will be the complete elimination of a uranium-based nuclear weapons program that can be easily hidden and about which we know little may be impossible, but we must nonetheless try, initially by seeking to dismantle those elements that have already been revealed to us.

This process should begin with North Korea’s acceptance of a monitored freeze of its uranium enrichment

facility at Yongbyon—one of the United States’ pre-steps. There are signs that the DPRK might accept this. Moving beyond a freeze to the dismantlement of this facility will be more problematic, but it must be a central focus of Six-Party negotiations, as should putting in place an agreed process to deal with other enrichment activities that may be discovered later.

PRINCIPLES OF RE-ENGAGEMENT

The first principle that should inform any resumption of Six-Party Talks is the need to implement existing Six-Party agreements. If that principle is agreed by the DPRK, it will help ensure that the United States and other Six-Party partners will not have to pay again for the North to carry out its commitments.

There are other principles that will be no less important if there is to be serious progress in talks. One of these is that Pyongyang must understand that normalization of relations with the United States in the absence of the North’s complete denuclearization will be impossible. The United States must also make clear to the North Korean leadership that America will never abandon its commitments to defend the ROK or Japan as the “price” for any denuclearization agreement.

For the United States, and for our ROK and Japanese allies, it will be important to accept that we, too, will have reciprocal responsibilities if renewed talks are to make progress. We must be ready to carry out our part of the bargain with Pyongyang, including offering security guarantees, providing energy and other assistance, and entering into negotiations on a peace regime and the eventual normalization of relations, as long as the North keeps its word.

THE BENEFITS OF DIALOGUE

While retaining a healthy skepticism about Pyongyang’s intentions, the United States should not avoid talks. Engaging North Korea at the negotiating table enhances U.S. credibility by highlighting our determination to pursue diplomacy, not confrontation. Our good-faith participation in talks can, if Pyongyang proves once again to be less than serious, make it easier to gain the support of the international

community, including for sanctions or tougher measures, if these become necessary.

The United States can use direct and multilateral talks with Pyongyang to separate the North’s bombast from its bottom line. Talks can reduce the chance of miscalculation and misunderstanding and perhaps give Pyongyang some pause if it is considering new provocations. Talks can affect North Korea’s understanding of its options. Direct discussions with Pyongyang are the best way to deliver unfiltered warnings about unacceptable behavior and remind North Korea of U.S. bottom lines and redlines. Negotiations can explore new inducements that might bring about real progress towards denuclearization. Talks offer the best way of taking stock of DPRK positions in light of the recent leadership change. But North Korea’s price of admission to renewed talks must be its readiness to deliver on its commitment to freeze, dismantle, and eliminate its nuclear weapons programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS³⁵

I have argued that there is value in renewed dialogue with North Korea, even if the ultimate goal of complete denuclearization remains elusive. If talks resume, however, this time they must produce more than just chimerical outcomes. The history of denuclearization talks has been filled with frustration and, more often than not, failure. We have seen bitter failure followed by renewed negotiations, only to be followed again by bitter failure. Today, a cynic would have a point in suggesting that the cycle seems about to begin again. As a long-time observer of this process, it is hard to imagine how American interest in engagement and patience with a regime that has frustrated us so many times before would survive yet another disappointment. It is easy to imagine that a failed negotiation will raise calls in the United States for a more confrontational approach with Pyongyang.

CHANGE THE PARADIGM

To increase the chance for real progress, the United States must change the paradigm of past negotiations.

If real progress towards full denuclearization is the goal, our first task should be to create the kind of dialogue that maximizes this possibility.

Had this essay been published before Kim Jong-il's death, I was prepared to argue that changing the paradigm necessarily means engaging the North Korean leader. Today I suggest we must engage his successor.

If we have learned nothing else from years of negotiating with North Korea, it is that the Pyongyang regime is a “top-down” system, with negotiations being carefully orchestrated by the leadership. The history of past negotiations also tells us that North Korean diplomats have been charged with maximizing the benefits obtained through negotiations, minimizing concessions, and preserving the North's core nuclear weapons capability. They have been remarkably successful.

And we also now know how important the North's nuclear program is to Pyongyang. The DPRK's nuclear weapons have taken on an almost totemic function, including as a symbol of the North's sovereignty and as a guarantor of its system. It is therefore impossible to believe that a serious effort to give up the nuclear program in the North could ever be undertaken by anyone below the leadership level.

THE PATH TO DENUCLEARIZATION

With this in mind, it is time to try a negotiating approach with North Korea that is more suited to its decision-making system. If our goal is the complete denuclearization of the DPRK, it is time to engage the only group in North Korea who can make the strategic decisions we seek to bring about this outcome—Kim Jong-un and his inner circle.

A key problem with the U.S. negotiating approach over the years has been that the late North Korean leader was the one critical actor in North Korea with whom we had the least contact, and yet he is the one person who had the power to give us what we wanted. Over the years, Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Russian officials engaged Kim Jong-il directly. Even a cursory review of the record of these

exchanges suggests that they were qualitatively different than those with even senior-level DPRK officials.

And now Kim Jong-il is gone. We will never know whether Kim, who exercised tremendous power during his reign, would ever have made the strategic decision to denuclearize North Korea. But we do know that Kim Jong-un will now have a chance to make that decision, and we should reach out to him in a way that compels him to do so. The sudden demise of Kim Jong-il has presented us with an important, even historic, opportunity. We should exploit it and use the chance we now have to shape the understanding that Kim Jong-un and his inner circle have of the choice they face between either reaping the benefits of denuclearization or facing the end of their regime as they know it.

Towards this end, the U.S. president should appoint an elder statesman (or woman) who would personally represent him in meetings with the new North Korean leader. The U.S. president's personal envoy should have sufficient rank and stature so that there would be no question that he/she is acting on behalf of the President of the United States (a former senior cabinet official could serve in this role). Kim Jong-un would appoint a similar senior envoy to represent him.

The U.S. envoy would convey to the DPRK's leader what the United States can and cannot do in reaching new agreements with the DPRK. Messages, including U.S. redlines, would be conveyed in the name of the president. Pyongyang's envoy would meet with the U.S. president to convey the DPRK leader's commitments with respect to nuclear and other matters. The envoys would travel between capitals, meet with leaders, and work with each other to craft the outline or core principles of a denuclearization agreement. This process would produce a series of leadership-approved bilateral commitments that would be provided in the form of instructions to each side's negotiators, who would then work on the details and the implementation plan. The U.S. envoy would also meet with senior leaders in Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow to coordinate with

the other partners. Close coordination among the United States, the ROK, and Japan would be an essential component of this effort.

Our experience in dealing with the North Korean regime over the years suggests that if the DPRK's leader is not committed to and engaged in the diplomatic process, agreements will have little value. And in private conversations with me, senior DPRK officials have complained that they have always harbored strong doubts about Washington's willingness or ability to deliver on its side of the bargain. My proposal seeks to deal with both these problems by bringing the two countries' leaders more directly into the process, a step that would enhance the credibility of each side's commitments. This would also provide a valuable test of the North Korean leader's seriousness about denuclearization.

Let me stress that I am *not* arguing for summit-level engagement with the new North Korean leader. There may come a day when such a meeting makes sense diplomatically and politically, but that day is not now. And this does nothing to change the important role our senior diplomats must play, since they will be responsible for negotiating the details and implementing mechanisms for the understandings reached by the leaders' personal envoys.

COMPONENTS OF A DEAL

Let me conclude by offering a few other suggestions designed to enhance our negotiating approach and increase the chance of achieving real progress with North Korea at the negotiating table:

- No agreement on denuclearization will be credible unless it contains a concrete plan for the identification, inspection, verification, and elimination of all the DPRK's nuclear weapons and related facilities, including all those connected with its plutonium **and** uranium production efforts.
- As an early step in negotiations, the U.S. and the DPRK should agree on significant good faith measures as "down payments"

toward the eventual complete elimination of nuclear weapons and the normalization of bilateral relations. For example, Pyongyang could agree to the immediate removal of a specific amount of fissile material or a specific number of centrifuges from the DPRK. The U.S. could commit to a multi-year food and agricultural assistance package or agree to set up a fund for the education and training of DPRK students and scholars in the United States. Both sides could agree to open up liaison offices in their respective capitals on a specific date.

- Initial "down payments" should be agreed with the understanding that they will be followed by additional measures designed to take us closer to the goal of full denuclearization as quickly as possible. The actual implementation of "down payments" would provide each side with a credible measure of the other side's seriousness in carrying out its commitments.
- Early "down payments" could also include establishment of a bilateral working group on defense conversion, which would seek to conclude an agreement to retrain DPRK scientists and engineers and provide the North with necessary technical and other advice towards this end.
- As a further "down payment," the U.S. should form a multilateral working group, to include representatives from appropriate international financial institutions, to draw up plans for the construction and international funding of conventional power-generation facilities in the DPRK.
- The two sides should revisit the important agreements and understandings concluded during the visit of the late Marshal Jo Myong-rok to the United States in 2000 with an eye towards implementing the cooperation and dialogue envisioned in those agreements.

- As part of a renewed dialogue process, the U.S. and the DPRK, together with the other partners in the Six-Party process, should draft a detailed roadmap of steps that each party would take in the fulfillment of denuclearization and other commitments, together with a detailed implementation timeline. Emphasis should be placed on firm “deliverables” in specific timeframes.
- Renewed dialogue must also result in an agreement on the North’s medium- and long-range ballistic missile programs. Such dialogue could take place between the United States and the DPRK, although it would have to be closely coordinated with our allies and Six-Party partners. In return for a DPRK commitment to suspend indefinitely the flight-testing, deployment, and export of such systems, an agreement could be concluded to provide launch services for DPRK meteorological and communications satellites and retraining for those employed in the North’s missile-related industries.
- The parties should agree that any nuclear-related verification protocol must contain provision for reciprocal visits to U.S., ROK, and DPRK military and nuclear facilities.
- All working groups established under the February 13, 2007 agreement should meet on a fixed schedule. Priority should be given to the working group on U.S.-DPRK normalization as a demonstration of the two sides’ good faith.³⁶
- A special working group on humanitarian assistance should be established to assess the DPRK’s humanitarian needs and draw up an action plan to meet them.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I have strongly questioned Pyongyang’s willingness to eliminate its nuclear weapons. Having so argued,

I have also presented a negotiating approach designed to test the DPRK’s seriousness about complete denuclearization, including steps designed to take us closer to that goal.

The United States, too, must be serious about denuclearization. Faced with Pyongyang’s determination to retain its nuclear capability, the United States must not be content with merely “managing” the North’s nuclear and missile threats or hoping that the collapse or transformation of the North Korean regime will eventually solve the problem for us. An approach that defers the pursuit of full denuclearization or does not deal with missiles will only give North Korea more time to develop its capabilities.

Instead, we should put maximum pressure on Pyongyang to give up these programs before they become a threat to the American homeland. The sooner we negotiate a deal that leads to denuclearization or conclude that a deal is not negotiable, the better off we will be. And if a deal is ultimately unattainable, we should make it clear to North Korea that we will do what is necessary to defend our allies and ourselves. That is one of the central messages that should be conveyed by a U.S. presidential envoy directly to Kim Jong-un.

Meanwhile, we should keep in mind that Pyongyang is facing growing challenges posed by its rapidly declining economy, its deindustrialization, its food needs, and the isolation and pressure of international sanctions. It is only a matter of time before North Korea’s new leader will have to deal with fundamental, existential questions to preserve his regime. Herein lies an opportunity for the United States.

I believe that China would support a U.S. initiative to reach out directly to the new DPRK leader. I have reason to believe, based on previous discussions with DPRK officials, that the North might have accepted a high-level envoy if Kim Jong-il were alive. With his death, DPRK acceptance of such an envoy would be a clear indicator of the new leadership’s self-confidence and seriousness about denuclearization. Pyongyang’s refusal of the idea would also

speaking volumes about both these points, and would send an important signal about the value and likely outcome of new talks.

Admittedly, the approach I propose involves some political risk for the United States, especially in the midst of a presidential election, and it would require a bolder way of dealing with the North than we have seen thus far in the Obama Administration. It would also require a bipartisan consensus in support of the various commitments that would need to be made—or demanded—by the United States as part of this process. In the current divisive atmosphere in Washington, achieving such a consensus may be difficult, although opponents would be hard pressed to oppose a negotiating approach aimed at eliminating the

growing threat to the United States posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities.

I opened this paper by suggesting that we may be moving back into multilateral denuclearization talks with North Korea. If we are, the talks should chart a credible path towards that goal. Anything less is likely to take us, once again, down the road to disappointment.

Karl Marx once wrote that all things occur twice in history, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” Past negotiations have failed to achieve the complete denuclearization of North Korea. All efforts should be made to ensure that, the next time, such efforts do not end in tragedy—or farce.

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