

Prelude to Crisis

The DPRK is fully ready to cope with whatever stand to be taken by the new U.S. administration towards it. The DPRK appreciates the progress so far made in the bilateral ties through negotiations with U.S. politicians of reason but has no idea of pinning any hope on those forces displeased with this process. If the U.S. brandishes a sword at us, we will counter it with a sword and if it shows good faith, we will reciprocate it.

—*Spokesman, North Korean Foreign Ministry, January 25, 2001*

North Korea's view of the world order underwent a radical revision on January 20, 2001, with the inauguration of George W. Bush as president of the United States. Chances are, however, that Pyongyang would have had a significant shock had any Republican succeeded President Bill Clinton. Understanding the dynamics of political change in a democracy is not the strong suit of the North Koreans, and the changes that occur when one political party replaces another—or in this case, when the Democrats handed over the keys to the White House to the Republicans—fully mystified Pyongyang.

From the point of view of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), it had overcome a rocky start with the Clinton administration—one that included the real possibility of war breaking out on the Korean Peninsula over North Korea's nuclear weapons program in 1993–94—to reach a point at the end of the administration where it appeared possible that Clinton would travel to Pyongyang to meet with North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il. That potential summit between Clinton and Kim had been made possible by a series of high-level meetings held in late 2000. First, South Korea's president, Kim Dae-jung, made a historic trip to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Jong-il. Second, Kim Jong-il sent his number two, Vice Marshal Jo Myong-nok, to Washington to meet with Clinton and to invite Clinton to travel to Pyongyang to meet with Kim and resolve "all U.S. security concerns." And finally, in late October 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright traveled to Pyongyang and met

with Kim Jong-il to assess the merits of a possible Clinton-Kim summit. The North Korean attitude toward the Bush administration, however, is summed up best in a paper written by Li Gun, DPRK director general for American affairs:

During the Clinton administration, as the result of DPRK-US negotiations to resolve the nuclear question, U.S. policy toward North Korea showed signs of moving away from pure hostility to partial engagement. For a time there was even a glimmer of hope for the eventual solution to the nuclear question, in light of the freezing of graphite-moderated reactor facilities and spent fuel rods and the supply of heavy oil and light-water reactors. But with the Bush administration putting an end to bilateral political dialogue, its “axis of evil” pronouncement, and defining North Korea as a target of preemptive nuclear strike, the nuclear question has come back to the starting point.¹

The presidential campaign of 2000 did not focus much on North Korea, but there certainly were indicators that a new Bush administration’s approach to foreign policy would be different—that is to say, it would declare Clinton’s policies a failure and work to distance itself from the underlying principles associated with those policies. An example of that approach is found in an article by Condoleezza Rice, Governor Bush’s foreign policy adviser during the 2000 presidential campaign:

The regime of Kim Jong Il is so opaque that it is difficult to know its motivations, other than that they are malign. But North Korea also lives outside of the international system. Like East Germany, North Korea is the evil twin of a successful regime just across its border. It must fear its eventual demise from the sheer power and pull of South Korea. Pyongyang, too, has little to gain and everything to lose from engagement in the international economy. The development of WMD thus provides the destructive way out for Kim Jong Il.

President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea is attempting to find a peaceful resolution with the north through engagement. Any U.S. policy toward the north should depend heavily on coordination with Seoul and Tokyo. In that context, the 1994 framework agreement that attempted to bribe North Korea into forsaking nuclear weapons cannot easily be set aside. Still, there is a trap inherent in this approach: sooner or later Pyongyang will threaten to test a missile one too many times, and

the United States will not respond with further benefits. Then what will Kim Jong Il do? The possibility for miscalculation is very high.

One thing is clear: the United States must approach regimes like North Korea resolutely and decisively. The Clinton administration has failed here, sometimes threatening to use force and then backing down, as it often has with Iraq. These regimes are living on borrowed time, so there need be no sense of panic about them. Rather, the first line of defense should be a clear and classical statement of deterrence—if they do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration. Second, we should accelerate efforts to defend against these weapons. This is the most important reason to deploy national and theater missile defenses as soon as possible, to focus attention on U.S. homeland defenses against chemical and biological agents, and to expand intelligence capabilities against terrorism of all kinds.²

In an interview after the election in December 2000, Peter Rodman, who would become assistant secretary of defense during the first term of President Bush, said that the Republican position was much more skeptical of North Korea and that the incoming Bush administration had “very different policy views” on North Korea “that ought to inhibit the outgoing administration from dramatic initiatives,” such as embarking on a presidential trip to North Korea.³

When South Korean president Kim Dae-jung visited Washington to meet with President Bush in early March 2001, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced that the administration was prepared to pick up where Clinton had left off in negotiating with North Korea. The following day, Powell retracted his statement (see chapter 5), jokingly saying that he had gotten ahead of his skis and that the administration’s policy would be guided by an ongoing policy review.

What most upset Republicans about the Clinton legacy on North Korea was the Agreed Framework of October 1994, which was designed to freeze North Korea’s nuclear program and allow for monitoring of its facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Eventually the facilities were to be dismantled and thousands of spent fuel rods shipped out of North Korea. In exchange, the United States was to organize an international consortium, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which would build two proliferation-resistant light-water reactors (LWRs) over a period of approximately ten years. The United States also would take responsibility for

providing 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil each year until the first LWR was completed. In addition, the United States and North Korea pledged to reduce trade and investment barriers (U.S. economic sanctions had been imposed on North Korea as a result of the Korean War) and to open liaison offices in each other's capital. Most Republicans believed the agreement rewarded the DPRK's "bad behavior" with a nuclear reactor that could give Pyongyang access to fissile material.

The Clinton administration had gone through its own growing pains in dealing with North Korea and developing a policy that it was comfortable with. By the end of the Clinton administration, U.S. policy toward North Korea was marked by close coordination with Seoul and Tokyo, a continued freeze on Pyongyang's nuclear program accompanied by IAEA monitoring, and direct dialogue with Pyongyang that allowed the United States to pursue its missile concerns as well as potential violations of the Agreed Framework.

The First North Korea Policy Review

On June 6, 2001, the Bush White House announced the conclusions of the administration's North Korea policy review. The original intention was to review them with Han Song-soo, the foreign minister of the Republic of Korea (ROK), when he arrived in Washington on June 6, take his comments into consideration, and produce a final, coordinated version. The symbolism of taking a coordinated position on North Korea was important, especially following the disastrous and, from South Korea's point of view, humiliating summit meeting between President Bush and President Kim Dae-jung in March 2001.

Kim, a Nobel Peace Prize winner recognized by the Nobel committee for his extensive efforts to engage North Korea, had expected to have a meaningful dialogue with Bush to convince him of the wisdom of continuing the engagement effort. However, he had been publicly rebuffed by Bush, a novice with no knowledge of the issues involved. The South Koreans took particular offense at Bush's public reference to Kim as "this man." Rather than cement the bilateral relationship, as Kim sought to do, Bush had questioned the value of South Korea's approach to North Korea.

Unfortunately, someone leaked the results of the administration's policy review to the news media, and rather than wait to consult with Foreign Minister Han Song-soo, the White House scrambled to make the announcement itself, trying to ensure that the appropriate "spin" accompanied the story.

At the time I was special envoy for negotiations with the DPRK and the U.S. representative to KEDO. In an effort to ensure that the South Koreans knew about the results before the story broke, I quickly summoned Yu Myung-hwan, the South Korean deputy chief of mission (the number two at South Korea's embassy in Washington), to the State Department before he went to Andrews Air Force Base to meet the foreign minister, who was at that moment en route from New York. I hurriedly summarized the results of the review and shared the statement that the White House intended to make public shortly. As a result, he was able to brief Foreign Minister Han Song-soo at the airport as the White House announcement was made. A casualty of this rush to get the announcement on the air was, of course, the consultative process that the government normally engages in with a close U.S. ally.

If faced with the prospect of the news media “breaking” a story that is bound to include opposing views and analysis of a process or policy, the White House would inevitably choose to tell the story in its own words first. The White House wanted to minimize any suggestion that the policymaking process had been contentious. Getting its version on the record first allowed it go through a complete news cycle without having to answer questions about someone else's assertion that the administration was split on its policy views on North Korea. In this case, some of the first stories reporting the White House announcement contained suggestions that the hard-liners at the Pentagon and the National Security Council (NSC) were pitted against more moderate officials at the State Department.⁴ And as is the case a lot of the time, the reporters were right.

To make sure that the correct message got out, NSC staff developed the following background points to be used when the press was briefed on the North Korea policy announcement:

—We have conducted a major review of our policy toward North Korea over the past three months. We have taken a comprehensive look at our objectives and our options.

—We have consulted closely with our South Korean and Japanese allies, whose views have played an important role in our policy deliberations. Preserving strong alliances with South Korea and Japan is a top priority for us as we go forward.

—We also have carefully considered the approach of the previous administration. Some of the elements of its approach were useful and important, and we have incorporated them into our thinking.

—We have decided to pursue the following course:

We are ready to enter serious discussions with the DPRK in a straightforward fashion as to how we can address issues of concern to our South Korean and Asian allies and to the United States.

We have in mind a comprehensive approach on which we make progress on all fronts simultaneously. North Korea's steps would involve real progress toward North-South reconciliation and peace on the Korean peninsula. If North Korea responds affirmatively, our steps would involve expanding our efforts to help the North Korean people, easing economic sanctions, and other political steps.

—Our discussions will include such matters as the following:

Improved implementation of the Agreed Framework relating to North Korea's nuclear activities and IAEA compliance;

An effectively verifiable ban on missile exports and constraints on indigenous missile programs; and

Adoption of a less threatening conventional military posture.

—We are serious about changing the nature of our relationship with North Korea. Our goal is to offer Kim Jong-il the opportunity to demonstrate his seriousness about his desire for an improved relationship.

—Let me describe a few of our guiding principles.

First of all, as President Bush has made clear, we strongly support President Kim's reconciliation efforts with North Korea. Ultimately, solving the fundamental security problems on the Peninsula requires North-South rapprochement.

In fact, a key element of our approach will be to encourage North-South reconciliation; we do not want to distract or divert North Korea from making progress with the South.

Secondly, as we have said before, we want to change the basis on which we interact with North Korea. We will not be driven into dialogue with North Korea through threats or provocations, and we will not reward bad behavior. But we will respond positively to positive steps by North Korea.

Thirdly, the Administration is skeptical about the intentions and sincerity of the DPRK regime. That is why any agreements we may pursue must be effectively verifiable.

Finally, our priority is in the curtailing of DPRK activities that threaten us, our allies, and regional stability—in East Asia and other regions.⁵

Many of the same principles were incorporated into proposals made by the United States during the June 2004 third round of six-party talks, which included the United States, the Republic of Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the DPRK.

Seeking Bilateral Discussions with Pyongyang

In the week following the president's June 6 announcement of the policy review conclusions, I transmitted to my North Korean counterpart, Vice Minister Kim Gye-gwan, the administration's interest in meeting for bilateral talks. I arranged to host a lunch in New York on June 13 for Ambassador Li Hyong-chol, North Korea's permanent representative to the United Nations, in order to have Li convey a letter from me to Kim Gye-gwan advising him of the results of the administration's policy review and offering to meet to begin a dialogue. Having already had too many fights with the hard-line elements at the White House, I waited until the last moment before inviting a National Security Council staffer to accompany me. I also waited until we were in a taxi from the airport headed to Manhattan before showing her my letter to Kim; I did not want predictable objections and wordsmithing to delay a simple letter. In the letter I set no preconditions, and I deferred to Vice Minister Kim on selecting a date and venue.⁶ Several people later suggested that I should have proposed a date and location for the initial meeting, forcing Kim to accept the proposal or counter with a specific date of his own. My intention at the time was to convey orally through Li that I understood that Kim was a vice minister, senior in rank and experience to me, and that I would adjust my schedule to fit his.

Kim Gye-gwan did not have an opportunity to assess my offer or to appreciate my deference to his seniority. Once the announcement of the policy review had been prematurely made public, Pyongyang began working on its own public response to the White House announcement before my letter to Kim arrived. On June 17, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the government news agency, carried the Foreign Ministry's reaction:

Even while proposing to resume the negotiations without preconditions, the U.S. side unilaterally decided on the agenda of the negotiations and publicly presented it even before the two sides sit face to face. The agenda concerns our so-called nuclear, missile, and conventional forces, and we cannot construe otherwise than an attempt for the United States to achieve the goal of disarming us through negotiations.

For dialogue between sovereign states to be held on a fair and equal basis is a basic requirement recognized internationally. This is proven by the fact the past DPRK-U.S. dialogue brought about results that were in the interests of the two sides and beneficial to improving the bilateral relations.

In this respect, we cannot but assess that the U.S. administration's recent proposal to resume dialogue, in nature, is unilateral and preconditioned and, in intent, hostile.⁷

What Pyongyang had done in its instant analysis of the conclusions of the president's North Korea policy review was consistent with past North Korean negotiating behavior and should have been seen as nothing more. Pyongyang inevitably sought to devalue U.S. proposals while affecting diplomatic hurt over the perceived slights that it had suffered. That tactic serves to put the "offending" party on the defensive and requires it to come hat in hand, apologizing for the egregious error it has committed, and then to revise its proposal to fit the offended party's expectations. In this case, Pyongyang's gripe with the United States was not on a matter of substance but of procedure, because the administration had publicly announced the results of its policy review without first notifying Pyongyang. Not having a strong hand to play, Pyongyang reverted to the equivalent of a scam artist's claim of a whiplash injury in a minor fender bender—or in political terms, "hostile intent." There is no satisfactory way for a country to prove that it does not have any hostile intent unless Pyongyang declares itself satisfied.

The concern expressed by Pyongyang over U.S. hostile intent is an ongoing issue; it did not originate with the Bush administration. To alleviate those concerns, a U.S.-DPRK joint communiqué was issued during the October 9–12, 2000, visit to Washington of Kim Jong-il's special envoy, Vice Marshal Jo Myong-nok, the first vice chairman of the National Defense Commission and someone who was considered at the time to be the number-two official in the DPRK. The communiqué directly addressed the issue of hostile intent:

Recognizing that improving ties is a natural goal in relations among states and that better relations would benefit both nations in the twenty-first century while helping ensure peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. and the DPRK sides stated that they are prepared to undertake a new direction in their relations. As a crucial first step, the two stated that neither government would have hostile intent toward the other and confirmed the commit-

ment of both governments to make every effort in the future to build a new relationship free of past enmity.”⁸

Communiqués such as this are highly regarded by the North Koreans. They tend to cite them as the rationale for cooperating with the United States, or, if they are displeased by the course of events, they hold them up as evidence of a broken promise. In this particular case, Pyongyang agreed to the communiqué because it prized the implication of an improved relationship with the United States. Later, Pyongyang would refer to it as evidence that the Bush administration was moving away from the positive position that the two governments had once agreed on.

The Role of Rhetoric

Five years into the Bush presidency, Pyongyang continued to express concerns about U.S. hostile policy. In response, Washington was unable to move beyond what the president had articulated in Seoul in February 2002—that the United States did not intend to attack or invade the DPRK. Glenn Kessler of the *Washington Post* wrote an article on the subject in February 2005:

“This year, the president made a clear statement that he had no hostile intent toward North Korea,” Powell said on CBS’s *Face the Nation*. “And he said that in South Korea earlier this year.” On Fox News, Powell quoted Bush as saying, “I have no hostile intent toward the North.”

Actually, Bush had said no such thing. Speaking to reporters in Seoul one month after the “axis of evil” speech, Bush again said that North Korea’s government was evil and that he would not “change my opinion on the man, on Kim Jong Il, until he frees his people.”

But Bush added: “We have no intention of invading North Korea. South Korea has no intention of attacking North Korea, nor does America.”

Experts say this language does not impress the North Koreans, especially after they were labeled part of an “axis of evil.”

Powell’s language on “no hostile intent” was picked up by the State Department spokesman, Richard A. Boucher, when he briefed the news media in the weeks after Powell’s television appearance. But the language disturbed hard-liners in the administration, who believed that North Korea had clearly demonstrated a hostile policy toward the United States—and that the phrase limited the administration’s options in using

economic and other weapons to pressure Pyongyang. They began to press for its elimination from the administration's talking points.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld raised the issue with Rice, who was then national security adviser, an official familiar with the conversation said. Rice agreed that the language should be dropped, and that only Bush's earlier comment about not attacking and invading be used."⁹

On July 26, 2001, in testimony before the Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific of the House of Representatives' Committee on International Relations, I noted that the administration's approach was to seek serious (bilateral) discussions on a broad agenda that included issues related to missiles, nuclear and conventional forces, and humanitarian concerns. I noted that while North Korea had not offered a direct answer to the administration's offer of talks, they had not rejected it either. I told the subcommittee that the North had complained that we were trying to dictate the agenda and that we had left out issues that they deemed important. I emphasized that we were working through what we referred to as the "New York channel."¹⁰

In describing our policy, I told the subcommittee that we did not want to get bogged down in procedural matters; rather, we hoped to discuss issues of mutual concern and to offer North Korea the opportunity to demonstrate the seriousness of its stated desire for improved relations with the United States.¹¹ At the conclusion of the hearing, chairman Jim Leach asked how the United States communicated with North Korea. I repeated that we used a communications channel dubbed the New York channel, which had been used primarily by the State Department's director of Korean affairs and North Korea's deputy permanent representative to its UN mission in New York. The channel was used as necessary to conduct the day-to-day business of coordinating meetings and travel—in short, to handle the logistics associated with interactions between U.S. and North Korean officials. I had not yet gotten the North Koreans to designate the channel an officially sanctioned method of communication between me (as special envoy for negotiations with North Korea) and the DPRK's ambassador to the United Nations. That would come later. Chairman Leach expressed disappointment that the working-level New York channel was the only means of communication, stressing his belief that the issues outstanding between our two countries were too important not to have multiple channels of communication. He was, of course, correct.

I took Leach's admonition seriously and determined to find another, more senior level of communication with North Korea. The departure of North

Korea's permanent UN representative, Ambassador Li Hyong-chol, presented the opportunity that I was looking for. I arranged to host a farewell lunch for him on Friday, November 16, 2001, at Jimmy Sung's Restaurant near the DPRK mission. Over lunch, Ambassador Li and I agreed that it would be useful to establish a regular channel of dialogue at our level, and he promised that he would recommend doing so when he returned to Pyongyang.

Ambassador Li was true to his word. I received information that his replacement, Ambassador Pak Gil-yon, who had served as North Korea's UN ambassador before Li, had been permitted to meet with me periodically. For the awkward first meeting, face and protocol came into play. I initially suggested that I host a lunch for Pak Gil-yon, but his deputy, Li Gun, refused, saying that the first meeting should be on neutral ground. In the past, we often had met our North Korean counterparts either at the U.S. mission across from the UN General Assembly or at a local restaurant. For this first meeting, the North Koreans insisted that we reserve a conference room at the United Nations. While doable, it required us to go through the U.S. mission at the United Nations to make the reservation and to get each of the Washington-based participants a temporary ID card to gain entry into the UN.

The only room available was a conference room in the basement, which was much too large for the number of people involved. It had a series of tables arranged in an open square format that put Ambassador Pak and a couple of his staff on one side, separated by about ten feet from the American delegation. The meeting went well, and after our positive first encounter, it became obvious to both of us that the formality of using a large UN conference room was unnecessary. We established a basis for regular meetings in the future. I had expected Pak, a former vice minister and former UN ambassador, to be somewhat cool toward me because of his seniority and status, but that was not the case. He even said that in the future, meeting for lunch would not be a problem. One interesting point that Pak made at the meeting was that while it was the policy of the DPRK to resolve issues of concern peacefully through negotiations, the provocative statements that Pyongyang had heard coming from Washington had led the North Korean military to believe that the statements demanded a strong reaction and to oppose any response to offers to talk.

For the most part, our future meetings were held at the DPRK's UN mission—an arrangement that was far more practical for conducting the business of the day. While it may have seemed somewhat redundant given the New York channel between the DPRK deputy permanent representative and the State Department's director for Korean affairs, it was in fact a significant development. It elevated the level of the conversation from a discussion of routine,

day-to-day business to a discussion of policy and created an opportunity for relaying senior-level communications from or through the secretary of state without having to go through undue layers of staff.

We spent the next several months attempting to convince Pyongyang to agree to a bilateral meeting with us. It was not an easy task. Pyongyang had not yet come to terms with the change in U.S. administrations and seemingly wanted a blanket commitment from the new Bush administration to pick up where the Clinton administration had left off. It was hard for Pyongyang to realize that it had waited too long before seriously engaging Washington at a sufficiently senior level at the end of the Clinton administration and that it had lost the opportunity for a presidential visit before Bill Clinton left office. During the transition from Clinton to Bush, the incoming administration made public, pejorative references to Kim Jong-il by name—something that officials in Pyongyang were unused to and that left them at a loss as to how to react. Pyongyang, in turn, reacted with an equal amount of rhetoric aimed at the new administration.¹²

In preparing to participate in his first Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Shanghai, President Bush conducted a roundtable interview at the White House with a group of Asian newspaper editors on October 16, 2001. The editors brought up the topic of the stalled talks between North and South Korea and a recently cancelled exchange of Korean families separated during the Korean War, and they asked the president whether he had any message for Kim Jong-il. President Bush replied:

I've got a message to Kim Jong-il: fulfill your end of the bargain; you said you would meet—meet. No one in the United States is stopping him from doing this. This is a decision he made. He can blame it on who he wants, but he ought to fulfill his end of the agreement.¹³

And, secondly, I want to remind your readers that we offered to meet with Kim Jong-il. In June of this year we said we'll be glad to send a representative to meet with you to discuss a variety of issues. And, yet, he chooses not to meet with us, either. He won't meet with you; he won't meet with us—which kind of leads me to believe that perhaps he doesn't want to meet.

So he can blame it on who he wants, but it's up to him to make that decision.

Secondly, I think that he needs to earn the trust of the world. I think he needs to take pressure off of South Korea and off of the DMZ. I think he needs to say—send a signal, clearest message, that he's for peace, not

war. And he can do that very easily by removing conventional forces back. That's very simple to do. I know he needs to stop spreading weapons of mass destruction around the world. And I look forward to—my government looks forward to explaining that to him, in no uncertain terms.

By the way, I fully understand how this issue affects the other nations of the Far East, as well. And so we want to have discussions with Kim Jong-il. We've made the offer to have discussions with Kim Jong-il. But he refuses to talk. And I'm always—which makes me wonder why? Why would he not want to talk? What is it about this man who refuses to—not only to talk with us, but to fulfill an agreement he made with your government?

Later in the same interview, President Bush said:

Listen, I am interested in—again, I repeat something I said before: I want our government to help starving people. On the other hand, I don't want to send aid to a government that doesn't help its people. It's one thing to help the people, it's another thing to send the aid and then the government doesn't help the people.

And so I must tell you that I've been disappointed in Kim Jong-il not rising to the occasion, being so suspicious, so secretive. I believe he must lead his nation into the modern era—starting with making sure his people are fed and well-treated, and working with his neighbor. He ought to assume the responsibility of a good leader, and do that.¹⁴

That interview earned Bush three days of sarcastic responses from Pyongyang. A Foreign Ministry spokesman initially responded by saying:

Shortly ago U.S. President Bush once again indiscreetly pulled up the DPRK. At a news conference held prior to the APEC summit he told the lie that the DPRK does not respond to the DPRK-U.S. dialogue though Washington stands for it. He went the length of speaking ill of its supreme leadership, saying it is too doubtful and shrouded in secrecy and it refuses to keep the promise and he is a person quite not understandable. Ignoring his past behavior, he argued that the DPRK is so suspicious and that it should do what it has committed itself to do. This is as ridiculous as the pot calling the kettle black.

A thaw was brought to the frozen DPRK-U.S. relations with much efforts. But they got refrozen and the bilateral dialogue came to a rupture entirely due to Bush and his administration with deep-rooted

conception of hostility towards the DPRK. In the last period of the Clinton administration, the two countries became brisk in dialogue and published even a joint communiqué that promised an end to the hostile relations between them. However, the new U.S. administration broke all those agreements as soon as it took office. The Bush administration proposed last June to “resume” the suspended dialogue with the DPRK. This proposal, too, is, in essence, a brigandish demand intended to unilaterally disarm the DPRK.

We consider the resumption of the DPRK-U.S. dialogue to be a matter that may be discussed only when the Bush administration takes at least the same position as taken by the Clinton administration in its last period.¹⁵

Three days later, KCNA carried a commentary attributed to the government newspaper *Minju Chosun*:

His remarks prove that he does not know any elementary etiquette and has no common sense as a statesman, not to speak of a head of state. The “resumption” of the bilateral dialogue proposed by the Bush administration in June is, in essence, a product of a sinister purpose to shift the responsibility for the rupture of dialogue onto the DPRK, not for the resumption of dialogue.

The Bush administration should make a sincere apology to the Korean people for Bush’s reckless remarks and adopt at least the same stand as taken by the preceding administration in its last period. Only then will an atmosphere for unbiased DPRK-U.S. dialogue be created.¹⁶

On the same day, KCNA carried a similar story, attributed to the newspaper *Rodong Shinmun*:

Indeed, Bush is an incompetent and rude president who is senseless and ignorant as he does not know even elementary diplomatic etiquette and lacks diplomatic ability. It is natural that things cannot go well in the U.S. as long as such a person administers state politics as its top leader. Bush should have looked back on his unreasonable attitude and dishonest behaviour against the DPRK since he took office and repented of them. Yet, he asserted that the DPRK is doubtful and should implement its commitments.

This is a height of folly.¹⁷

In early November, discussing the visit of a European Union delegation to North Korea that had occurred when the KCNA reports quoted above came out, a senior EU official told me that the North Koreans had “hinted” that they were on the verge of entering into talks with the United States before President Bush’s comments to the Asian editors on October 16. But, according to the North Koreans, it became impossible to do so without losing face. In the EU-DPRK talks, the Europeans also learned that Pyongyang was concerned about the U.S. focus on terrorism. The North Koreans confirmed to them that they would sign another UN convention on terrorism (regarding financing) and would adhere to the other conventions on terrorism not yet signed. In their conversation on terrorism, the North Koreans told the EU that they thought they had had a deal with the Clinton administration regarding cooperation on antiterrorism efforts, and they expressed a certain nostalgia for the Clinton period. As if to answer President Bush’s charge of failing to live up to their agreement for a second summit, the North Koreans quoted Kim Jong-il’s message to Kim Dae-jung of a year earlier, in which he said that a second summit would take place but that the “conditions” were not good.

The issue of loss of face was confirmed to a former American official who was also in Pyongyang around the same time as the European delegation but who had met with different officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The DPRK Foreign Ministry, like its counterparts around the world, is divided among regional and functional categories headed by vice ministers. In the meeting with American affairs specialists, the American official heard the North Koreans suggest that the Foreign Ministry’s statement had been “very carefully” crafted, looking for an opening to save face.

That carefully crafted statement by the Foreign Ministry was not all that well received. Telling the Bush administration—whose early North Korea policy has been described as the “ABC (Anything But Clinton) policy”—that North Korea “consider[ed] the resumption of the DPRK-U.S. dialogue to be a matter that may be discussed only when the Bush administration takes at least the same position as taken by the Clinton administration in its last period” was like waving a red flag in front of an angry bull. Not only did the Bush team resent the suggestion, they were determined not to accede to any demands from Pyongyang if doing so might leave them open to comparison with the Clinton administration.

Five years into the Bush presidency, the administration and Pyongyang continued to trade personalized attacks. In an April 28, 2005, press conference, President Bush seemed to go out of his way to seek an opportunity to attack Kim Jong-il. While his comments did not break any new ground, they were

seen as undermining assistant secretary of state Chris Hill, his newly appointed negotiator in the six-party talks, who was at that moment in Asia on his first official trip as the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs in an effort to gain support for the six-party process. Bush was most likely directing his comments to his domestic U.S. audience rather than making any attempt to send a diplomatic signal to foreign capitals:

Bush: Let me talk about North Korea, if you don't mind. Is that your question?

Question: Go right ahead.

(Laughter)

Bush: I'm surprised you didn't ask it. Look, Kim Jong Il is a dangerous person. He's a man who starves his people. He's got huge concentration camps. And, as David accurately noted, there is concern about his capacity to deliver a nuclear weapon. We don't know if he can or not, but I think it's best, when you're dealing with a tyrant like Kim Jong Il, to assume he can. That's why I've decided that the best way to deal with this diplomatically is to bring more leverage to the situation by including other countries.

It used to be that it was just America dealing with North Korea. And when Kim Jong Il would make a move that would scare people, everybody would say, America, go fix it. I felt it didn't work. In other words, the bilateral approach didn't work. The man said he was going to do something and he didn't do it, for starters.

So I felt a better approach would be to include the people in the neighborhood into a consortium to deal with him. And it's particularly important to have China involved. China's got a lot of influence in North Korea. We went down to Crawford with Jiang Zemin, and it was there that Jiang Zemin and I issued a statement saying that we would work for a nuclear weapons-free Korean Peninsula. And so, when Kim Jong Il announced the other day about his nuclear intentions and weapons, it certainly caught the attention of the Chinese, because they had laid out a policy that was contradicted by Kim Jong Il.¹⁸

Within two weeks Pyongyang responded in the *Rodong Shinmun*, "It is a wise decision for our republic not to expect any settlement of the nuclear issue or any improvement in its relations with the United States during Bush's term of office. Bush is the world's worst fascist dictator, a first-class warmaniac and Hitler, Junior, who is jerking his hands stained with blood of innocent people."¹⁹ In response to a May 12, 2005, CNN interview with Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice in which she indicated that it was Pyongyang that violated the 1994 Agreed Framework, the Korean Central News Agency said, "All the remarks of Rice prove that she is either a woman ignorant of the DPRK-U.S. history or a brazenfaced liar. We cannot but be confused by such incoherent remarks made by the Secretary of State of the superpower. Call a spade a spade."²⁰ Rice was referring to Pyongyang's clandestine highly enriched uranium (HEU) program, which was a violation of both the spirit and letter of the Agreed Framework. Since Pyongyang denied any involvement in HEU, it viewed the U.S. action to halt shipments of heavy fuel oil as a violation of the Agreed Framework that had precipitated the nuclear crisis.

There was an attempt early in the first term of the Bush administration to get beyond the ever-increasing intensity and ugliness of rhetoric coming out of Washington and Pyongyang. In February 2001, while I was still on the staff of the National Security Council, I was invited to a dinner hosted by Young C. Kim, a professor emeritus at George Washington University. Kim had helped arrange a visit to Washington and the World Bank for a North Korean delegation, and the members of the delegation were to attend the dinner. One of the members was Han Song-ryol, who was a senior researcher at the time but who had been the minister-counselor at North Korea's UN mission in New York, in charge of interaction with U.S. government officials. I took the opportunity, with NSC approval, to attend the dinner and have a quiet conversation with Han. My message was simple: Pyongyang needed to understand the democratic process at work in the United States and to realize that the transition from one administration to another of the same political party, let alone of different parties, always resulted in policy reviews and perhaps new methods of carrying out policy objectives. The review of the U.S. policy toward North Korea currently under way was a natural part of the American democratic process. I cautioned Han that the unnecessary and harsh rhetoric coming out of Pyongyang would cast a pall on the U.S. review process, and I recommended that he urge restraint on the part of Pyongyang. Han cited the rhetoric coming out of Washington as the primary reason for Pyongyang's response.

The personalization of attacks and frequency of rhetoric traded between Washington and Pyongyang continued unabated. In his 2002 State of the Union speech, the president spoke directly of the threat posed by North Korea:

Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September 11, but we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime

arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens. . . . States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. . . . We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.²¹

To me, the reaction by North Korea was predictable. In New York, the DPRK deputy permanent representative to the United Nations told me that Pyongyang had come to the conclusion that the United States was not interested in dialogue but instead was preparing for war—that the State of the Union address was tantamount to a declaration of war. Pyongyang had made the decision that there would be no overtures toward the United States. He complained that every time Pyongyang took steps, something would occur “out of the blue” and Pyongyang would be labeled in some pejorative way. He went on to say that it would not matter what the president said during his trip to Seoul; Pyongyang had made up its mind not to respond to our offer to talk. The North Korean news agency carried similar remarks:

U.S. President Bush in a “state of the union address” before the Congress on January 30 cited the DPRK and some other nations as “an axis of evil” and “states threatening the world peace.” And he blustered that the U.S. will not permit them to do so and operations should be carried on as planned. This reveals the U.S. reckless intention to seize the DPRK by force of arms after designating it as the second target of “anti-terrorism war.”

His outburst is little short of a declaration of war against the DPRK, and this may once again bring the military situation on the Korean peninsula to the brink of war. His remarks clearly show that the U.S.-proposed “resumption of dialogue” with the DPRK is intended not for the improvement of the bilateral relations but for the realization of the U.S. aggressive military strategy.²²

The reaction in South Korea was equally unwelcoming. By the time the president arrived in Seoul for his first visit in mid-February, it became neces-

sary to publicly defuse the rising tension that the apparent differences in the ROK and the U.S. policy approaches to North Korea had created. I was not invited to be part of the official delegation, but I did persuade James A. Kelly, then the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, that the physical presence of the president's special envoy for negotiations with the DPRK at the president's public remarks at Mount Dora would send a positive, reinforcing signal to our South Korean allies that the administration was serious in wanting a negotiated rather than a military solution to our mutual concerns regarding North Korea. I traveled separately to Seoul, arriving at Mount Dora in transportation set up for "other" invited guests. Dora Station was the newly built "last" railroad station along the rail line designed to connect the two Koreas through the demilitarized zone (DMZ) dividing them. The South Koreans had completed their portion of the rail project pending work in the DMZ to de-mine the area, prepare the railroad bed, and pave the adjacent road, while little had been accomplished on the North Korean side.

Before traveling to Dora Station, in response to a question about his State of the Union speech, the president had said: "We're peaceful people. We have no intention of invading North Korea. South Korea has no intention of attacking North Korea, nor does America."²³ That appears to have been the first of many times that the president would declare that the United States had no intention of invading North Korea.

Pyongyang's response to the president's attempt to defuse tension came two days later in the form of a statement from the Foreign Ministry:

During his trip to Asia from February 17 to 22, Bush made clearer the U.S. intention to violate the sovereignty of the DPRK, openly interfere in its internal affairs and stifle it by force. Engaging himself in mud slinging at the DPRK, he talked about "change" of its system and, furthermore, outrageously slandered the supreme headquarters during his current trip. The facts prove that his description of the DPRK as a member of "axis of evil" came not from such issues as weapons or "relationship with terrorism" but, in essence, from his personified denial to the supreme headquarters and political system of the DPRK, as estimated by the world public. . . . We are not willing to have contact with his clan which is trying to change by force of arms the system chosen by the Korean people. Useless is such dialogue advocated by the U.S. to find a pretext for invasion, not admitting the DPRK system.²⁴

Getting to Yes

We spent the next several months attempting to convince Pyongyang that the president was sincere in his desire to have direct, serious talks. One of the keys to getting Pyongyang to agree to meet with us to begin the discussions that the president envisioned was getting a White House representative to accompany me when I met periodically with North Korea's ambassador to the UN. Having served on the National Security Council staff for almost five years, I knew from my own experience that the North Koreans viewed a White House presence as an indication of presidential approval of the message. The North Koreans were already assuming that while a message that I delivered might be the official U.S. government position and even one supported by the secretary of state, it did not represent the views of the president. In short, Pyongyang believed that there were two distinct camps within the administration—a moderate one headed by Secretary of State Powell and a more hard-line one composed of virtually everyone else in the administration.

After the president's trip to Seoul and the negative reaction by Pyongyang to the president's message, Secretary Powell wanted me to meet with Ambassador Pak in New York to make sure Pyongyang knew that he was fully engaged in our North Korea policy and to emphasize certain other points that had been part of the president's message at Dora Station but apparently had been misunderstood by Pyongyang. After consulting with Steve Hadley, the deputy national security adviser, Michael Green, who was director for Asian affairs for the NSC, was able to get authorization to accompany me to New York to meet with Ambassador Pak in March 2002. I had originally attempted to have an NSC representative with me at all my meetings with the North Koreans, much as my predecessor, Ambassador Charles Kartman, had done, but early White House aversion to the idea precluded that. It was only in the aftermath of the president's trip to Korea that Mike Green was allowed to go, and, even then, I sensed that it was more to keep an eye on what I might say to the North Koreans. The basic objectives of my message were developed before I went to New York, but no specific talking points or script had been prepared. When Mike Green and I linked up at the U.S. mission to the UN, he was concerned that I did not intend to use specific language. I probably reacted a bit too harshly to his suggestions, telling him that I fully understood the objective points and had no intention of reading prepared language.

One of the most amazing turns of events that occurred during the first term of the Bush administration was the reversal of roles among American diplomats and their Asian counterparts. In the past, even seasoned Asian diplo-

mats had relied heavily on prepared scripts while their American peers took advantage of broad authority and comfortably wove unscripted responses and probed for unforeseen possibilities in exercising American leadership, as they were expected to do. From the beginning of the Bush administration, the lack of trust and consensus on North Korean policy resulted in the practice of scripts being written and scrupulously followed by relatively senior officials. As a result, Asian diplomats abandoned their scripts and, in the face of Americans following such restrictive scripts, picked up the leadership mantle.

The meeting with Pak and Green went well. It was important for Pyongyang to see through the presence of Mike Green the symbolic endorsement by the White House of what I was saying, even if the North Koreans fully understood that I had been delivering the White House message all along. As a result, Ambassador Pak Gil-yon finally indicated in early April 2002 that Pyongyang was ready to meet. When I reported Pak's response, I was told not to reply — that the White House was reconsidering its options. We had been working since June 2001 to get Pyongyang to agree to a meeting and when it finally did, we pulled back. This reversal of course came as a surprise to me, and I assumed that it was also a surprise to Secretary Powell, who had been pushing hard for a meeting “anytime, anyplace, and without preconditions.”

