

Testimony of Donald P. Gregg, chairman of The Korea Society, given before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House International Relations Committee on July 14, 2005

My last Congressional testimony, given before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, took place on February 4, 2003. I concluded that testimony by stating that the two things the Bush administration was willing to say to North Korea; "we are not going to attack you, but we won't negotiate with you; "only left the North Koreans with a stronger incentive to continue working on their nuclear weapons programs. As hard bargainers, they clearly recognized that the more powerful their nuclear programs became, the less likely that a pre-emptive U.S. attack on their scattered facilities would be launched, and the more they could demand in return for eventually closing the programs down.

Until late last week, that was the essential pattern of events that had taken place over the past 30 months, with North Korea, having further developed their nuclear programs, announcing on February 10, 2005, that it had become a nuclear power, and refusing to return to the stalled six-party talks process. Suddenly, on July 9th, the North Koreans announced that they would return to the talks, which are now slated to resume during the week of July 25th.

In my testimony today, I will suggest possible reasons for this sudden agreement to resume talking, sketch the changing political dynamic among the six parties involved in the nuclear talks, and offer some thoughts on the future of the nuclear negotiations.

During an eight-day visit to Seoul in mid June of this year, I was strongly impressed by South Korea's growing confidence in its ability to function influentially among all the countries of the North Asian region, including in particular North Korea. South Korea is clearly emerging as a major hub of that region, in both economic and political terms. (Conversely, in two high level conferences that I attended, I heard more anti-Japanese sentiments expressed by Chinese, Russian and South Korean intellectuals and diplomats than I had heard for a couple of decades in the past.)

The South Koreans were also pleased with the June 10th summit held in Washington between Presidents Roh Moo-hyun and George W. Bush. Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon and a senior Blue House official, who had accompanied President Roh, both told me that increased rapport and confidence had been established between the two heads of state. Minister Ban was particularly pleased with the fact that the importance and efficacy of relations between North and South Korea had been recognized and accepted in Washington.

On June 12th in Seoul, I met and talked with Unification Minister Chung Dong Young, who was to leave the next day for Pyongyang, to celebrate the fifth anniversary to the 2000 summit meeting between Chairman Kim Jong Il and President Kim Dae-jung. Minister Chung said he hoped very much that he would be able to meet with Chairman Kim, but that this had not been clearly scheduled. Minister Chung's main messages for the North were to express hopes for a return North-South summit meeting, to voice clear opposition to Pyongyang's development of nuclear weapons, and to urge North Korea to return to the six-party talks. Chung hinted at

additional matters that he hoped to discuss, but was not specific in talking to me, a person he had just met for the first time.

On June 17, 2005, Chairman Kim did meet with South Korea's Unification Minister Chung in Pyongyang, and stated his willingness to resume talks within the six-party process as long as his country was treated with respect by the United States. Beyond that, Chairman Kim said that he had no reason to think badly of President Bush, and that he remained hopeful that his long-standing goal of a nuclear free Korean Peninsula could be attained. The United States responded adroitly to this demarche, by quickly resuming food aid shipments to North Korea, which is facing a very difficult year in terms of its ability to feed its people. No words were exchanged, but a positive signal had been sent to Pyongyang from Washington.

I believe that a very strained and unproductive period in the U.S.-South Korea alliance, which began with the March 2001 meeting between Presidents Kim Dae-jung and George W. Bush, may now be drawing to an end. The June 10th summit between Presidents Roh and Bush, mentioned above, is evidence that the Bush administration is coming to appreciate the value of Seoul's growing stature and influence in the Northeast Asian region. At least some in the Bush administration appear to have recognized that Seoul's strengthening economic ties with Pyongyang should not be seen as "rewarding bad behavior" on the part of Pyongyang, but should be taken advantage of and used as a powerful inducement for the North to return to the six-party talks and to negotiate away its nuclear weapons programs.

On July 12th, Minister Chung announced that he had offered Chairman Kim a massive inflow of electricity if the North agreed to completely dismantle its nuclear weapons programs. Chairman Kim said that he would "carefully study" the proposed power program, which will be formally and more completely tabled when the six-party talks resume later this month. The amount of power offered (2 million kilowatts annually) would replace the electricity to have been produced by the two light water nuclear reactors being slowly built under KEDO auspices. The Bush administration was dead set against having any nuclear power sources developed in North Korea. This conveniently takes this contentious issue off the table, but seems to sound the final death-knell for the KEDO project.

This is truly creative and dynamic work on the part of Seoul. The confidence that I sensed in Seoul a month ago has been put into play most effectively. South Korea has now become a leading player in negotiating with North Korea, across the full spectrum of issues. On July 12th a report was issued in Seoul documenting agreements reached at the 10th meeting of the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Promotion Committee, held from July 9-12 in South Korea. The agreements cover a wide range of issues, including the provision of raw materials to the North, establishing offices of coordination to promote development of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, the establishment of fishing regulations, pushing the re-connection of North-South rail lines, flood control, and science and technology exchanges.

I take all this as powerful evidence that the U.S.-South Korea alliance is now functioning in a more sophisticated manner. If the United States feels it necessary to maintain its hard-line stance about not offering additional inducements to North Korea to return to the six-party talks, it at least allows others, South Korea and China in particular, to be more flexible. This tough posture

on the part of the U.S. may have the virtue of consistency with previous hard-line statements by the Bush administration, but it is not a blueprint for success once the talks have resumed.

An additional factor that almost certainly contributed to Pyongyang's decision is the influence of China. Beijing deserves strong credit for the role it has played in consistently urging North Korea to return to the talks. The Chinese have made it clear to me that they do not find it particularly easy to deal with the North Koreans, but that they are determined to do all they can to keep North Korea from either imploding economically or exploding militarily. Several weeks after the U.S. presidential election, I had a chance to talk with China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dai Bingguo. Vice Minister Dai said he realized that Chairman Kim Jong Il was not a popular figure with many Americans, but that he is the top decision maker in North Korea, and that Americans need to deal with him in a respectful manner if any progress is to be made in the six-party process. Vice Minister Dai added that the issue of "face" is very important to the North Koreans, and that "a couple of heart-warming statements out of Washington" would do a lot to get the two sides together.

Chairman James Leach spoke eloquently to the issue of rhetoric in a May 17, 2005 speech in Washington dealing with prospects for U.S. policy toward North Korea in the second Bush administration. I quoted extensively from Chairman Leach's remarks in a speech I gave in Seoul on June 12, 2005. His remarks were warmly appreciated by the South Koreans, who fully agreed with his statement that "...the 'axis of evil' description may have been as counterproductive in South Korea as it was in North Korea." Chairman Leach's final point on the issue of rhetoric was powerful and apt. He stated: "Thus, in this as in many other circumstances, hard-nosed realism demands attention to soft-power diplomacy. There is simply no credible alternative to attentive engagement with the North."

I am confident in asserting that had President Bush not been careful to refer recently to Chairman Kim as "Mr. Kim Jong Il," and had Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice not spoken of respecting North Korea's sovereignty, the North would not have decided to return to the talks. The change in U.S. rhetoric was an extremely important factor in bringing North Korea back to the negotiating table.

Resumption of the six-party talks is an event to be welcomed, but in itself is no guarantee of success. The great underlying question is whether North Korea will be willing, in a fully verifiable fashion, to end all of its WMD programs. They say that they will be willing to do so, under the proper conditions. What North Korea construes to be the proper conditions remains to be seen. It is also unclear how much leeway will be given the American negotiator, Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill. Mr. Hill is clearly a positive new factor in the situation. He is energetic and seems determined to establish a real negotiating dialogue with Pyongyang. In the first Bush administration, Jim Kelly, Chris Hill's predecessor, did not fare well in the inter-agency process, in which the Department of State was out-voted and out-weighted by the Pentagon, the Vice President's office and the National Security Council staff, all of which appeared to favor regime change in North Korea over a true negotiating process. It will shortly become clear how much these attitudes may have changed as Mr. Hill's instructions for resuming the six-party process are worked out in the inter-agency process. The fact that North Korea's willingness to return to the six-party talks was conveyed to Mr. Hill by Deputy Minister Kim

Gye Gwan at a dinner in Beijing hosted by the Chinese speaks volumes about China's continuing helpful role, Mr. Hill's activism and perhaps an additional degree of flexibility on the part of the United States.

Secretary Rice's current Asian trip, including visits to Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo with discussions of nuclear-related issues as a central agenda item, is also a positive indication of the Bush administration's increased focus on solving the North Korean nuclear puzzle.

When the six-party talks resume, the participants will be seated at a large, hexagonal table, and will exchange views across its highly polished surface. In fact the American and North Korean delegates will be staring at each other across a veritable Grand Canyon of suspicion and mistrust. The Americans think that the North Koreans cannot be trusted, believing that they cheated on the 1994 Agreed Framework by starting a highly enriched uranium nuclear weapons program with equipment secretly procured from Pakistan. The North Koreans deny that they have an HEU program, and accuse the Americans of failing to live up to their obligations under the Agreed Framework. The American have recently learned, through documents made available from the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Hungarian State Archive, that North Korea has sought nuclear weapons for decades, and has doggedly pursued this goal despite strong opposition from China and the former Soviet Union. It has also been learned, through translation of these documents, that North Korea's longstanding motivation to acquire nuclear weapons grew out of fear of the United States, and a deep mistrust of its former allies in Moscow and Beijing. (Note: Dr. Kathryn Weathersby, senior associate at the Wilson Center, has been in charge of the translation of these documents and is a long-standing authority on the history of the Cold War. She discusses the implications of these documents in an interview with Murray Hiebert of the Wall Street Journal appearing on page A 13 of the May 18, 2005 issue.)

I made my third visit to Pyongyang in August 2004, and got a direct taste of the depths of North Korea's mistrust of the United States at that time. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Gye Gwan, was, as usual, my host. I had the temerity to raise the Libyan example, where, after months of talk, Col. Qaddafi had agreed to give up his nuclear weapons program. I urged North Korea to follow this example. Minister Kim told me to "stop dreaming about Libya." He said that that success had been attained after months of prolonged bilateral negotiations, and that the American refusal to negotiate directly with North Korea ruled out any chance of a Libyan-type success.

Early this year I attended a conference in the United Kingdom where I met one of the British officials who had led the prolonged talks with Libya's leader. This official said that the talks had been long and difficult, that he initially had found Col. Qaddafi hard to fathom, but at the end of the talks he had developed "a lot of respect" for Qaddafi. I cite this case as a hopeful model for the up-coming six-party talks. Patience and determination will be required, and North Korea can be expected to be a very difficult negotiating antagonist. I believe that only as some basis of mutual trust has been established, that the talks will have a chance of achieving significant success. This will clearly take time, and the full support of our chief negotiating partners, South Korea, China and Russia. I do not mention Japan in this connection, as its insistence on raising the question of the fate of a dozen Japanese abducted by the North Koreans is not at all helpful to

achieving a solution of the central issue being dealt with by the six-party process—the nuclear weapons question.

In March of this year, a group of over 50 leading foreign policy specialists and government officials, all with responsibility for North Korean issues, met in Shanghai to discuss development of procedures and mechanisms for implementing a denuclearization agreement with North Korea. These people came from the United States, South Korea, Russia, China, Japan and Australia. They were enthusiastic about the value of institutionalizing the six-party process to enable it to monitor North Korea's compliance with denuclearization agreements, as well as to provide North Korea with effective multilateral security assurances. This is a very hopeful study, which I recommend to all those interested in establishing a stable and nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. (See "Building Multi-Party Capacity for a WMD-Free Korea," an IFPA Workshop Report put out by the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 675 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02139.)

I was interested to note that during the conference, the participants were polled on a number of key issues relating to the future of the Korean Peninsula. When the conferees were asked if a surgical strike against suspected WMD facilities and storage facilities would evoke a military response from North Korea, 100% of the participants replied that it would. This underlines the great need for the six-party process to succeed, as there is no viable military option open to us and our key allies in Seoul and Beijing are strongly opposed to the imposition of economic sanctions.