

Statement of Representative James A. Leach
Chairman, House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing on “North Korean Nuclear Negotiations:
Strategies and Prospects for Success”
July 14, 2005

On behalf of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to welcome our panel of distinguished experts to our hearing this morning. We appreciate your participation and look forward to a thoughtful exchange of views.

We meet this morning to consider strategies and prospects for success in negotiations to end North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs. Since this hearing was announced last week, there have been significant developments that bear directly on the questions at hand.

First and foremost, after a boycott of more than a year, North Korea has agreed to return to the Six-Party Talks. The next session will take place in China during the week of July 25th. While we welcome this development, it remains self evident that talks are seldom an end in themselves. The value of the upcoming session will depend on whether denuclearization progress is made.

In other developments, South Korea has publicly disclosed aspects of the “important proposal” presented to Mr. Kim Jong Il last month by the South Korean Minister of Unification. Although key details remain unclear, South Korea apparently has proposed providing North Korea with approximately 2,000 megawatts per year of electrical power if North Korea agrees to end its nuclear programs. South Korea also announced that it will provide the 500,000 tons of rice recently requested by North Korea. Secretary Rice publicly endorsed these decisions during her East Asia travel over the past week.

In this circumstance, the following questions merit review:

- Is the U.S. proposal tabled in June 2004 sufficiently specific to serve as a basis for ending North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs?
- Are there supplemental approaches that the United States should be considering in addition to its participation in the Six-Party talks, or would other venues undercut that multilateral process?
- How would a nuclear agreement, if successfully negotiated, be verified? What lessons does North Korea’s past behavior hold for future verification efforts?
- Should the U.S. be willing to divide and prioritize its approach to the nuclear threat, such as by focusing first on securing the reversal of North Korea’s plutonium-based program? Or would a “piecemeal” approach simply cause increased friction between the parties?

- Finally, and most profoundly: Whose side is time on – North Korea's or ours?

As we contemplate these issues, it bears continuous reflection that the party that threatens stability in Northeast Asia is North Korea. In the weeks ahead, the other five parties to the Six-Party process must take care not to fault each other for the dilemmas caused by Pyongyang's singular intransigence.

But we also must emphasize the positive flip-side of that reality, even if we deem it unlikely: Pyongyang has the option to effect historic changes that would dramatically benefit North Korea's stature in the world and the welfare of its people. A credible change in strategic direction away from isolation, repression, and nuclearization would put the DPRK's international footing on a basis of amity and cooperation with the world community, putting prosperity for its people in close reach. One of our many tasks in the days ahead is to make this previously unthinkable possibility easier for the North Korean leadership to imagine.