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The Land of Counterpane

ALMOST eight years to the day after the signing of the 1994 Agreed Framework, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs James Kelly landed in Pyongyang. Soon he would face the North Koreans across the negotiating table, the first senior U.S. official to do so since the inauguration of President George W. Bush in January 2001. Kelly carried a brief containing a serious indictment: American intelligence had discovered a secret program to produce highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons, quite apart from the plutonium production program that the Agreed Framework had frozen. Kelly's visit triggered a cascade of events resulting in the collapse of the accord and a new crisis over North Korea's nuclear program.

What transformed the hope of October 1994 into the disappointment of October 2002? The Agreed Framework did not end the ups and downs characteristic of North-South relations since the 1953 armistice. Cold war–like flare-ups continued—such as the intrusion of a South Korean spy submarine in South Korean waters in 1996 and the sinking of a North Korean naval vessel in a short, sharp exchange in 2002. At the same time, President Kim Dae Jung initiated a “Sunshine Policy” promising a historic opening to the North and became the first South Korean leader to visit North Korea. Each development—good or bad—can be viewed prismatically, broken into wavelengths that shed different colors depending on the angle of observation. For example, the same Sunshine Policy that refracted into the inspiring image of Kim Dae Jung traveling to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, upon further

refraction generated the sordid image of a summit facilitated through hundreds of millions of dollars passed secretly to the Kim Jong Il regime.¹

The same could be said for implementation of the Geneva accord. Through most of the 1990s, heavy fuel oil flowed and the new reactor project moved forward. But funding shortages sometimes slowed the movement of oil to an ooze. The reactor project also fell behind schedule, a victim of slowdowns caused by North Korea's continued hostility toward Seoul, South Korea's frosty relationship with Pyongyang before the election of Kim Dae Jung, and other impediments that sprung up with regularity.

Despite the problems—missile tests, famine in the North, incidents at sea—on balance the Agreed Framework contributed to stability in Korea and in Asia throughout that period. The Yongbyon facilities remained frozen under seals and under continuous surveillance by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency. No more plutonium was being generated or separated in North Korea. The eventual dismantlement of these facilities remained a plausible if distant prospect.

As is now known, North Korea was actually playing a far different game, one utterly incompatible with the Agreed Framework and all it represented. It began (perhaps only Kim Jong Il knows the precise moment) when the regime ramped up its secret program to produce highly enriched uranium. Though less urgent—since Pyongyang's plutonium production program was much more advanced—an enriched-uranium weapon program was more *dangerous*, in that the technology required to assemble a working uranium bomb was far easier to master than that required to build a plutonium bomb.²

The decade following the signing of the 1994 accord traced a complete arc—from crisis to concord and back again to crisis. Although this book has concentrated on the first North Korean nuclear crisis, it would be incomplete if it failed to draw lessons from that experience and from the benefits of hindsight in order to shed light on current events. This requires a brief review of events since 1994, followed by some reflections on the past and how they may apply to the future.

A Bumpy Road

The Clinton administration's policy toward North Korea after the signing of the Agreed Framework could be characterized as a cold peace. While the administration continued to implement the accord, from the outset its efforts were hamstrung by problems in Washington and Seoul as well as with North Korea. Hence it was impossible to put the framework on a firm and lasting political footing.

In the United States, congressional skepticism toward the Framework translated into a chronic battle by the administration to secure the few tens of millions of dollars needed to support the heavy fuel oil shipments owed by KEDO to North Korea. (Critics of the Agreed Framework might fairly be said to have adopted the posture of a picador, not matador—wounding but never going in for the kill.) At the same time, once the 1994 crisis had passed the international mood quickly shifted from galvanized anxiety to lethargic apathy, leaving the administration struggling in vain to raise significant funding for KEDO from countries beyond South Korea and Japan.

Until the 1998 presidential elections in South Korea, the government there adopted a relatively aggressive posture toward North Korea—and Washington. President Kim Young Sam appeared to nurse a continuing grudge over the belief that he had been slighted during the Geneva negotiations, despite the central role Seoul was to play in the reactor project. Pyongyang, still nursing a grudge about Kim's failure to issue condolences after the Great Leader's death, irritated the South Korean leader even further by its seeming indifference to restarting North-South talks. This slight led Seoul to oppose increased U.S.–North Korean engagement without some improvement in inter-Korean relations. Recognizing that its ally's sensibilities had been wounded, Washington showed substantial deference to Seoul, an inclination that was reinforced by a return to State's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs as the U.S. bureaucratic focus for implementing North Korea policy. Only when the new regime of President Kim Dae Jung took office in 1998 did the Clinton administration find a more cooperative South Korean partner.

Of course, North Korea did much to aggravate the situation. Its public pledges to support the Agreed Framework seemed but a mask over the old cold war attitudes. While the freeze on the plutonium production program held fast under international monitoring, other North Korean moves provoked serious concern, particularly the trail of ballistic missile–related exports to South Asia and the Middle East. Closer to home, in September 1996, the South Korean Navy captured a North Korean spy submarine in South Korean waters, only stiffening President Kim Young Sam's tough approach toward Pyongyang and setting back implementation several months just when momentum was starting to build.³ As the decade continued, North Korea was struck by famine—the fatal consequence of bad weather piled on top of disastrous agricultural policies—which perhaps distracted it from pursuing any broader strategic agenda of economic reform or engagement with the outside world.

Even without the problems with Congress, Pyongyang, and Seoul, it would have been immensely challenging to carry out a complex, multibillion-dollar

construction project in a country as lacking in resources and infrastructure as North Korea. Anticipating the inevitable difficulties in completing the reactors by 2003, the U.S. negotiators had insisted on characterizing that year as a “target” not a deadline. That caution quickly proved to be justified, as a six-month delay in negotiating the new reactor supply arrangements delayed inking the governing contract until December 1995. Haggling among the KEDO executive board members—the United States, South Korea, Japan, and the European Union—on issues such as determining the overall cost and financing of the project and rules for the procurement of reactor equipment—also took its toll. It soon became clear that even coming close to the 2003 target would be difficult.

Viewing these myriad difficulties, some have speculated that the United States never really intended to implement the Agreed Framework or to build the new reactors. Since American officials expected North Korea to collapse under the weight of its bankrupt economy and political system, so the argument goes, the United States would want to move forward slowly in anticipation of the inevitable demise of the North Korean regime. KEDO would then be relieved of the need to build the new reactors.⁴ The possibility that regime change might spare KEDO the need to complete the reactors probably occurred to some officials in Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo. But that consideration never received backing as U.S. policy during the extensive senior-level meetings that formulated negotiating positions leading to the Agreed Framework. The better explanation for the delays in implementation is mundane rather than Machiavellian: the United States and its partners faced too many practical difficulties, while the Agreed Framework suffered from chronically unsteady political support.

In the summer of 1998, the uneasy truce threatened to break down altogether. A front-page *New York Times* story reported that the U.S. intelligence community had discovered a secret underground reactor and reprocessing plant at a place called Kumchang-ri near the North’s border with China. If true, the installation would have violated the 1994 agreement.⁵ As the validity of the report and its potential consequences were being analyzed, bad news struck again. North Korea shocked Japan, the United States, and the international community by launching a three-stage “space-launch vehicle.” Ostensibly dedicated to lofting a satellite into orbit, it looked to all the world like a prototype of a possible delivery vehicle for a nuclear weapon that could eventually bring the United States into range. The Japanese reacted intensely to the discovery that the North had sent the rocket hurtling over their country, exposing their helplessness in the face of Pyongyang’s ballistic missile threat.⁶

Perry Redux

Scrambling to avoid the imminent collapse of U.S. political support for engagement with the North, in November 1998 President Clinton—under congressional mandate—appointed former Secretary of Defense William Perry as coordinator for U.S. policy toward North Korea.⁷ Aside from giving renewed high-level focus to engagement, Secretary Perry's job was to undertake a comprehensive policy review. As part of that process, he not only consulted with Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing, but also visited Pyongyang in May 1999.⁸ Just before Perry arrived, a team of U.S. experts inspected Kumchang-ri and found no evidence of a covert nuclear facility. Knowing that the Americans would find nothing probably gave the North Koreans adequate incentive to allow the visit in the first place, but Pyongyang's actions were at least consistent with the theory that the North Koreans wished to avoid undermining the future of the Agreed Framework by allowing the Kumchang-ri issue to fester. In September, North Korea announced a moratorium on long-range missile tests for the duration of the U.S.–North Korean talks.⁹

Secretary Perry's October 1999 report to the president proposed a two-path strategy. The first path presented “a new, comprehensive and integrated approach” that called for negotiating “the complete and verifiable cessation” of North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons programs. The second path proposed that Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo act jointly to contain the threat presented by North Korea, should negotiations prove unsuccessful.¹⁰ Reaffirming the essence of the administration's approach to engaging North Korea, the Perry exercise restored the semblance of domestic and international support that had been established in the wake of the 1994 agreement. The value of the exercise derived in part from the high degree of bipartisan support Secretary Perry enjoyed in the national security community, as well as from the process of consultation he engaged in with the U.S. Congress and with the key countries involved in dealing with North Korea.

The Clinton administration followed Perry's advice and spent much of the next year trying to resolve its concerns over North Korea's ballistic missile development and exports, the most visible manifestation of continued problems with Pyongyang. But administration officials also became concerned about reports of North Korean interest in technology related to the production of highly enriched uranium, which, like plutonium, could be used to build nuclear weapons. Troubling evidence also surfaced that North Korea might have conducted more conventional explosive testing related to the development of a nuclear weapon design.

The administration developed two initiatives to “smoke out” suspicious

nuclear activities. First, it proposed “nuclear transparency talks,” designed to install a bilateral inspection regime that would build on the positive experience of the Kumchang-ri visit; this led to preliminary talks with the North Koreans in 2000. In a second, more far-reaching initiative, the administration proposed revising the 1994 Agreed Framework by substituting conventional power plants for one of the two planned nuclear reactors. Since conventional stations could be built quicker, the *quid pro quo* for North Korea’s earlier receipt of fresh electricity supplies would be accelerating Pyongyang’s acceptance of full compliance with its IAEA safeguards obligations. Meeting those obligations would require inspections that would help get to the bottom of Pyongyang’s suspicious nuclear activities dating back to 1989. This initiative ran into a brick wall in Seoul, which wished to avoid rocking the boat with Pyongyang at a time when President Kim Dae Jung was struggling to get the Sunshine Policy off the ground.

At the same time, Washington was considering an even more far-reaching initiative to transform the U.S.–North Korean relationship. The theory held that as Pyongyang became more invested in better relations with Washington, the administration would be able to secure much more progress in addressing persistent U.S. concerns. This approach gathered momentum during the second half of 2000, when Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok, director general of the General Political Bureau of the Korean People’s Army and one of Kim Jong Il’s closest advisers, visited Washington for talks with President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The visit produced a joint communiqué that put U.S.–North Korean relations on a positive footing.¹¹ In turn, Secretary of State Madeline Albright and Ambassador Wendy Sherman visited Pyongyang and met with Kim Jong Il.¹² Against the background of thawing political relations, U.S. and North Korean officials began to make progress on an agreement that would have committed Pyongyang to terminate its missile exports and drastically constrain its indigenous deployments of these dangerous weapons.

The last piece of this puzzle—first raised by the North Koreans during Vice Marshal Jo’s trip to Washington—was the possibility of a visit by President Clinton to North Korea. The prospect of a presidential summit might have clinched a verifiable deal on ballistic missiles, provided momentum for dealing with U.S. nuclear concerns, and opened new paths for bilateral cooperation. The idea of a summit had arisen as early as 1994, though at that time such a meeting was inconceivable in light of North Korea’s confrontation over the nuclear issue. By 2000 the conditions had begun to ripen. But President Clinton never made it to Pyongyang. Last-minute North Korean foot-dragging over the terms of a possible missile deal cast doubt over whether an agreement could be reached in time for a summit. Moreover, President Clinton decided

to focus on peacemaking in the Middle East during the waning months of his administration. Finally, the enervating effects of the national preoccupation with the vote count for president in Florida put an end to any hopes for a summit. As Secretary Albright later reported, the United States extended an invitation to Kim Jong Il to visit the United States, but he declined.¹³

“You Don’t Know What You’ve Got ’Til It’s Gone”

The inauguration of George W. Bush ended any early prospect that the president of the United States might visit Pyongyang. Bush harbored deep hostility toward Kim Jong Il and was skeptical about dealing with the North Korean regime. The new administration quickly divided into factions, pitting hardliners (opposed to the Agreed Framework and eager to transform America’s role in the world) against moderates (skeptical about North Korea, yet viewing engagement as the least bad option in dealing with Pyongyang). The tension quickly burst its traces when, the day before President Kim Dae Jung’s March 2001 visit to meet President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell suggested that Korea policy would continue broadly to follow that of the Clinton administration. The White House quickly slapped him down, and a chastened Powell admitted that he had leaned “too far forward in his skis.”¹⁴

Compounding bureaucratic rivalry were new tensions arising in the bilateral relationship with Seoul stemming from White House uncertainties about the Agreed Framework and hostility toward Kim Jong Il, which in turn threatened the foundations of South Korea’s Sunshine Policy. The stage was set for the two presidents to have an unhappy meeting, and they did. The bilateral relationship between Seoul and Washington remained frosty throughout Kim Dae Jung’s remaining time in office.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration conducted an internal review of U.S. policy toward North Korea. The results, announced in a statement by the president on June 6, 2001, represented a bureaucratic compromise. Rather than scrap the Agreed Framework, the president called for its “improved implementation,” while directing his national security team “to undertake serious discussions with North Korea on a broad agenda to include: improved implementation of the Agreed Framework relating to North Korea’s nuclear activities; verifiable constraints on North Korea’s missile programs and a ban on its missile exports; and a less threatening conventional military posture.” The president talked of “a comprehensive approach to North Korea which will seek to encourage progress toward North-South reconciliation, peace on the Korean peninsula, a constructive relationship with the United States, and greater stability in the region.” The statement hinted that positive North Korean actions

would be met by expanded U.S. efforts “to help the North Korean people, ease sanctions, and take other political steps.”¹⁵ The administration suggested that it was charting a tougher course than its predecessor, but the formal elements of the new policy were consistent with the objectives of the Clinton administration. State Department spokesmen publicly emphasized a willingness to meet “anywhere, anytime,” without preconditions, but for reasons that remain obscure, Pyongyang never responded formally to the U.S. offer.

The prospects for successful bilateral diplomacy between Washington and Pyongyang worsened that autumn, as skepticism about the North Korean regime deepened following the September 11 terrorist attack in the United States. Pyongyang attempted some positive moves following the tragedy. On September 12, North Korea issued a public statement of regret and voiced opposition to all forms of terrorism. Subsequently, it passed a private message through Swedish diplomats stationed in Pyongyang expressing condolences, taken by some as a sign of its willingness to cooperate in fighting terrorism and its interest in renewed contacts.¹⁶ The North also signed several international protocols dealing with terrorism.¹⁷ Still, the prospect for resumed U.S.–North Korean talks failed to materialize.

The negative trend in U.S.–North Korean relations took a still sharper turn for the worse in January 2002, when President Bush identified North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as members of an “axis of evil.” The president asserted the right to take preemptive military action rather than sit and wait for an adversary to attack the United States or its allies with weapons of mass destruction.¹⁸ Subsequently, newspapers reported that the possible use of nuclear weapons was contemplated in a major Korean contingency outlined in a secret Pentagon review of the American nuclear force posture.¹⁹ By the summer of that year, however, the hot rhetoric from the State of the Union address had been milled through the interagency review process. The result appeared to be a less confrontational approach, one that concluded that engagement with North Korea would be worthwhile, but only *after* Pyongyang had met all of Washington’s concerns.

This “bold approach” would offer Pyongyang the prospect of transforming its relations with Washington and the world from isolation and hostility to cooperation and engagement, provided that North Korea definitively resolved the proliferation and other major concerns about its conduct. Assistant Secretary James Kelly was slated to visit North Korea to present that approach in July 2002, when the naval clash in South Korean waters led to a postponement of the American diplomat’s visit.

Even as the tensions on the peninsula gradually eased and Secretary Kelly’s visit to Pyongyang was rescheduled, evidence was accumulating that North

Korea was engaged in major clandestine uranium-enrichment activities. As mentioned earlier, disturbing signs of such activity began to appear toward the end of the Clinton administration, evidence that was certainly well known to Bush administration officials when they took office. The administration decided to take action in October 2002 because of the scale of equipment procurement the North Koreans had reached in their activities. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, in 2001 North Korea purchased large quantities of materials needed to build a facility for the production of highly enriched uranium, although U.S. intelligence estimates seemed to be uncertain as to its status and location.²⁰ The administration's bottom line, however, was clear: until the North Korean enrichment facilities had been verifiably dismantled, Washington would not proceed with its bold approach.

Secretary Kelly carried that message to Pyongyang in October 2002. Whatever happened there—U.S. officials claim that the North Koreans admitted to having the secret program while the latter deny any such admission—the session triggered a chain of events leading to the collapse of the 1994 agreement. In November, the United States persuaded its KEDO partners to suspend heavy fuel oil deliveries to North Korea, on the grounds that the secret enrichment effort violated Pyongyang's obligations under the Agreed Framework. True, the Framework did not explicitly refer to uranium enrichment, much less prohibit it. It did, however, explicitly reaffirm North Korea's commitment to the North-South Denuclearization Declaration (which did ban uranium enrichment on the Korean Peninsula) and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (which banned the development of nuclear weapons, the clear aim of a clandestine uranium-enrichment program). Thus the program was clearly inconsistent with North Korea's commitments under the Agreed Framework.

Having lost its supply of heavy fuel oil and its access to direct discussions with Washington, in late December 2002 North Korea began a series of provocative steps to rearrange the diplomatic chessboard just as it had done so many times in the earlier crisis. It expelled IAEA inspectors monitoring the nuclear freeze, reloaded and restarted the 5-megawatt reactor, formally withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and probably began to reprocess the spent fuel that had been re-canned and stored under IAEA monitoring ever since the Agreed Framework.

The political foundations underpinning the 1994 agreement in *both* the United States and North Korea disintegrated. As 2003 opened, with the Agreed Framework moribund, Washington embarked on a course of multilateral diplomacy with South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia, aiming to bring enough diplomatic pressure to bear that Pyongyang would abandon its nuclear weapons efforts. Departing from its 1994 approach, the United States

refused to engage North Korea directly in bilateral talks and prompted China to play an unusually active diplomatic role. Stepping into the fray, Beijing attempted to jump-start talks between the United States and North Korea by hosting a first round of trilateral talks in April. The discussions took place against the backdrop of continued North Korean theatrics; Pyongyang's representative at the first round was reported to have threatened to export nuclear materials and to conduct a nuclear test. All the while, Pyongyang repeatedly asserted that it had separated the plutonium from the 8,000 spent fuel rods stored at Yongbyon.

China hosted an inconclusive round of six-party talks in August 2003, this time also including representatives from South Korea, Japan, and Russia. At the time of this writing, another round was expected in early 2004. Where the road will lead is unclear. The good news is that various among the six players have suggested most if not all of the elements of a potential deal: the freeze and dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program under international monitoring; the institution of a bilateral or multilateral inspection regime to increase the transparency of the North Korean nuclear program; the containment, accounting, and control over fissile materials the North Koreans possess; the provision of some form of security assurance to Pyongyang; the resumption of assistance in the form of providing "replacement energy"; and perhaps other benefits. Further good news is that the protagonists have all expressed a continued willingness to find a diplomatic solution. The less encouraging news is that the parties—either individually or multilaterally—do not necessarily share the same interest in concluding a deal, nor do they seem to have succeeded in designing, much less agreeing on, a "road map" to take them from the current situation to the desired end state. This may be the challenge for the future.

Premises, Premises: The Case for Engagement

That challenge cannot be faced squarely without taking into account the lessons of previous American efforts to combat Pyongyang's quest for nuclear weapons. The first step is to establish a degree of consensus on the "lessons learned." At the level of objectives, for example, it is a universal belief that the Korean Peninsula should remain stable, secure, and free of nuclear weapons. To that end, broad international consensus supports the position that North Korea should adhere fully to applicable nonproliferation norms: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, IAEA safeguards, and the North-South Denuclearization Declaration. At the same time, all agree that North Korea is

armed, desperate, and dangerous, and that a war in Korea would likely result in massive destruction and loss of life that would not only devastate the peninsula but also destabilize the entire Asian region.

Consensus also exists as to the character of the Pyongyang regime. Kim Jong Il is a totalitarian dictator. His regime has failed miserably at meeting even the minimum physical needs of its people, much less their dreams and aspirations. Worse than having failed, it has not even tried. The hunger and inhuman conditions this despot inflicts on his people are an abomination. Regrettably, it is also clear that the regime has proved itself extremely durable, utilizing the traditional Stalinist tactics of propaganda, intimidation, and brute force to perpetuate itself for half a century despite its miserable record.

When it comes to assessing North Korea's relations with the outside world, few would dispute that North Koreans lie and cheat when it suits their purposes. (The same was true of the Soviet Union.) Pyongyang's admission in 2002 that it had lied for years in denying the abduction of Japanese citizens provided a striking example of that long tradition of mendacity. The only novelty was that the lie was confessed.

Consensus starts to break down, however, when it comes to assessing North Korea's plans and objectives. What does the regime want, and what price is it willing to pay to get it? Some believe that the North Korean leaders are absolutely determined to obtain nuclear weapons as quickly as possible, no matter what. Others believe that Pyongyang views its nuclear program as a bargaining chip, to be used to extract maximum advantage from the outside world, but then (at least potentially) to be curtailed, or perhaps even abandoned, if the price is right. Still others believe that Pyongyang may not have irrevocably decided whether or not to trade away its nuclear option. Perhaps the North Koreans intend to keep advancing their nuclear efforts on the theory that over time they will gain *both* military advantage and bargaining strength, so that they end up either holding a nuclear arsenal, or driving up the price of a deal to give it up.

Consensus also breaks down when it comes to deciding how to respond to the North Korean threat in a manner that optimizes these shared objectives and mitigates the risks of both nuclear weapons and conventional war. In medicine, agreement on the diagnosis of a condition is useful but not always sufficient for forging consensus on the appropriate prescription for its treatment. In policy, however, agreement on the diagnosis of the Pyongyang regime (an evil tyranny) has failed to produce consensus over the appropriate U.S. policy prescription.

This should not come as a surprise. American foreign policy has venerable yet conflicting traditions of value-based idealism (exemplified by Woodrow

Wilson's dogged and ultimately self-defeating quest in support of U.S. membership in the League of Nations) and interest-based realism (exemplified by Nixon's opening to China and arms control agreements with the Soviet Union). Idealists recoil at the notion of engaging directly with North Korea and believe that any agreement is useless anyway since the North Koreans are inveterate cheaters. Realists proceed stoically while probing whether some agreement with North Korea can advance U.S. interests, recognizing that no such agreement can succeed if based on Pyongyang's word; the provisions of any accord must be reliably, independently, and continuously verified.

If the same *diagnosis* produces such radically different responses, the divisions over the *prognosis* of the North Korean nuclear program compound the disagreement over the appropriate policy prescription. If North Korea is hell-bent on developing nuclear weapons, negotiations will be of no avail. They will simply buy Pyongyang time to complete its crash nuclear effort. Under this view, the better course would be confrontation *now*, because delay only benefits Pyongyang. Those who believe that Pyongyang can be persuaded to relinquish—or at least defer—its nuclear weapons program favor diplomatic efforts to solve the problem, especially in light of the likely consequences of war in Korea. Those who believe North Korea's leaders may be playing for time while they preserve both options favor dealing with the nuclear question as a matter of intrinsic urgency. They advocate positions that present North Korea with a stark choice between the consequences of defying, versus complying with, nuclear nonproliferation norms.

Can these different premises be reconciled in one coherent policy? The Clinton administration saw the North Korean regime as a failure and a menace to its neighbors and its own people. It remained agnostic regarding the ultimate objectives of the nuclear program in North Korea. This agnosticism was justified by the facts or, rather, by the lack of facts regarding North Korea: the information was so poor that it was simply impossible to know Pyongyang's bottom line with certainty. For starters, North Korean decisionmakers may themselves not yet know their bottom line, or are keeping options open, or may change their strategic aims. Moreover, although totalitarian, the Pyongyang regime is not an immutable monolith. The North Korean elite holds competing views regarding objectives, strategies, and tactics, all of which may vary over time. North Korean statements may reflect a papered-over difference, a trial balloon, or internal advocacy. They cannot be taken at face value, if one can discern their face value behind the propaganda and stilted rhetoric. Similarly, North Korean actions also give rise to different interpretations, even among longtime watchers of their behavior.

Given the obscurity of the North Korean decisionmaking process, it is

unwise to base U.S. policy on a particular assumption about what the Pyongyang leadership “really” wants. Washington needs to hedge against each possible objective. The only sensible policy, if attainable, would be one that would succeed regardless of whether Pyongyang is going all out for the bomb, haggling over the price, or preserving more than one option.

In short, American policy should be geared to *U.S.* objectives not *North Korean* objectives. There, all ambiguity disappears, as the U.S. objective is clear: to avoid having nuclear weapons in the hands of North Koreans. Given the tremendous devastation and loss of American and Korean lives that would accompany war in Korea, U.S. and allied interests would best be served if that goal could be attained through diplomacy, as every U.S. president has agreed.

Given the horrendous consequences of a North Korea uncontested in its quest for nuclear weapons, the Clinton administration believed that *if there were a chance* Pyongyang could be induced to abandon or defer its program, then U.S. interests *demand*ed that it test that proposition. However loathsome the Pyongyang regime, that proposition could not fairly be tested absent direct negotiations with the North Koreans. No other nation—not allies like South Korea and Japan nor other powers such as China—had either precisely the same interests or ability to shape outcomes as the United States.

Looking Ahead by Looking Back

What is to be done? Broadly speaking, four kinds of options are available to address the North Korean nuclear program: military action, containment, negotiation, or regime change. In 1994 the military option on the table was an attack on the Yongbyon facilities. A direct hit on the spent-fuel pond would have had a good chance of eliminating the five bombs’ worth of plutonium as a proliferation threat. It is virtually inconceivable, however, that the North Koreans would have kept the one to two bombs’ worth of plutonium they might already have separated in the same place, vulnerable to the same attack. American military leaders thought North Korea would probably respond violently to a U.S. strike, raising the serious prospect of a general war on the peninsula that would have cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

Containment as a policy option has a venerable history from the cold war, when it described the effort by the United States and its allies to deter and, if necessary, defend against Soviet expansion through a combination of conventional military alliances and a robust nuclear threat. The limitation on containment is that it does not seek to deny an adversary the possession of nuclear weapons. In that sense containment is a weaker or perhaps a fallback position, once denial of access to the weapons is no longer an option. During

the cold war the United States used its nuclear arsenal to deter a Soviet *attack* and worked with its allies to impose multilateral export controls that contained Soviet access to advanced military technology. But the U.S. policy of containment never sought to block the Soviet Union from *building* or *possessing* its own nuclear arsenal. It was too late for that.

In 1994, however, it was not too late to try to deny North Korea access to significant quantities of plutonium beyond the one to two bombs' worth that might have been separated in 1989. So containment held little appeal to U.S. policymakers and was not considered as a serious option; it would have seemed needlessly defeatist. If the United States had a shot at *preventing* Pyongyang's acquisition of nuclear weapons, why settle for merely containing it, which would imply at least tacit acquiescence to North Korea's continuing nuclear activities without taking the initiative to stop them? Indeed, the authors of this book do not recall anyone in the policy community, either in or out of government, ever advocating such a course.

The third option, negotiation, has in one sense been the most attractive. It offers the possibility of achieving more than containment (in that North Korea would be precluded from obtaining any additional quantities of separated plutonium) *without* running the risks inherent in the military option. In another sense, it has been the least attractive option. Unlike containment and military attack, negotiation requires the active participation and, ultimately, cooperation of the North Koreans. Given the difficulties of negotiating any agreement with Pyongyang, this seems a tall order.

In considering whether to seek a negotiated settlement of the nuclear question, no one has harbored any illusions about the nature of the North Korean regime. No one would have relied on trust to hold the North Koreans to their promises. The question has been whether the immorality of the Pyongyang regime and its untrustworthy character should dissuade the Americans from seeking a negotiated settlement with such a regime. Constitutionally, the president is invested with the duty and authority to carry out the foreign policy of the United States in the service of the preambular goal to "provide for the common defense" of the American people. Historically, presidents have repeatedly concluded that they need at times to negotiate with despots—including some who are friendly to the United States—in order to fulfill that constitutional duty.

The president does not have the luxury of dealing only with honorable interlocutors. North Korea had a rampant plutonium production program. Ignoring it was unacceptable to our national security interests. Attacking it militarily presented huge risks. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, negotiation was the worst option, except all the alternatives.

Of course, the United States is not forced to make simple either-or choices among attack, contain, or negotiate. In practice these approaches invariably are mixed or sequenced in a variety of ways. The Clinton administration chose to attempt negotiations in the first instance, to offer the North Koreans an opportunity to comply voluntarily with international nonproliferation norms. *At the same time*, the United States maintained and, indeed, strengthened its military posture on the Korean Peninsula and in the region to deter any North Korean military assault, and to signal that more coercive measures would be taken if Pyongyang refused the offer of a negotiated settlement. That message was reinforced by the continuing threat to seek UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea if it crossed any of the red lines set forth by the U.S. government.

Resort to UN Security Council sanctions, however, was not an *independent* option. Although the possibility of sanctions was central to U.S. policy, no one thought that exercising that option would have induced North Korea to surrender its nuclear program. Rather, the sanctions were intended *either* to bring sufficient pressure to bear to induce North Korea to freeze its nuclear activities and return to the negotiating table or to serve as a justification for tougher coercive actions—including military measures—down the road, should North Korea choose to defy the UN Security Council. Thus the sanctions track was a potential element of the military and negotiating tracks, not an end in itself.

At the same time that the existence of a military option strengthened America's diplomatic hand, the vigorous pursuit of a diplomatic solution was a critical prerequisite to resorting to arms. Indeed, perhaps the only way the military option could have been executed without serious damage to American relations with its regional allies and the international community would have been by first making a good faith effort to resolve the crisis through negotiation. Similarly, if negotiations failed, containment would still have been an available option. Since containment seemed tantamount to surrender to North Korean possession of nuclear weapons, and military attack risked general war as well as the destruction of the U.S.-ROK alliance, negotiation seemed the least bad *first* option.

One option that holds some attraction today but was *not* seriously contemplated in 1993 and 1994 was regime change *by military force*. A decade ago military enhancements were carried out, and major deployments considered, in order *to deter* North Korea from the use of force. But the only direct use of force considered by the United States at that time was confined to a possible attack against the Yongbyon nuclear facilities. Regime change through less ambitious means—ranging from simple containment and isolation of the

North Korean regime to the application of economic pressure through imposition of UN Security Council sanctions—also received no serious consideration in 1994.

At that time, some U.S. officials did speculate that the Kim Jong Il regime would never last long enough to see the light-water reactors through to completion. But embracing a policy of “collapse”—essentially waiting for political and economic rot to remove Kim Jong Il and his nuclear ambitions from the scene—suffered from several significant flaws. First, no one could guarantee that the regime would collapse soon enough to prevent acquisition, use, or sale of nuclear weapons (a prudent view, in light of its continued survival despite harrowing devastation in the intervening decade). Second, if there were anything more dangerous than a nuclear-armed North Korea, it would have been one on the brink of collapse, when its leaders might take desperate measures with their plutonium in order to avert imminent demise. Third, had Washington sought the removal of the North Korean regime, it would have lost the support of key Security Council members, particularly China, which in all likelihood would have stepped in to provide enough food and oil to keep Pyongyang afloat. The arguments against regime change as a U.S. policy to respond to the North Korean nuclear threat remain equally valid today.

Could the United States have *facilitated* a negotiated solution, perhaps letting others deal directly with Pyongyang while it planned and coordinated the diplomatic efforts behind the scenes? After all, the North Korean nuclear problem seriously affected the interests of its neighbors and the world. Why could other key players not take center stage diplomatically? For such a strategy to succeed, two conditions need to be met. First, Washington’s proxy would need to have interests so closely aligned to its own that the U.S. government could entrust that party with a diplomatic mission on which the safety and security of all Americans depended. It is hard to imagine any administration assigning the protection of millions of American lives to *any* third party, however closely aligned diplomatically. The protection of core U.S. national security interests must be considered a non-delegable responsibility of the president. Specifically, the high priority the United States assigns to nonproliferation appears to many South Koreans as a merely theoretical concern, compared to what they view as the far greater risk that an aggressive policy to thwart Pyongyang’s nuclear ambitions could destabilize South Korea.

The second condition for what might be considered “diplomacy by proxy” is that the proxy must have persuasive power over Pyongyang in order to succeed. Given North Korea’s peculiar isolation, the countries with the interests most closely aligned to the United States—for example, South Korea or even Japan might be considered—are unlikely to meet this test. Part of the reason is that much of Washington’s ability to persuade Pyongyang flows from

uniquely American assets, such as the stature uniquely conferred by negotiating an agreement or some form of security assurance with the world's only remaining superpower.

No country other than the United States has been able to meet both conditions. Among the major diplomatic players, Japan is the one whose interests have been most closely aligned with those of the United States, though they are not identical. Nor could Japan reliably satisfy the second condition, as Pyongyang would clearly not accept Tokyo's representations as sufficiently binding upon Washington and Seoul. Among the interested governments, outside of the United States only China has seemed likely to persuade Pyongyang to reverse course. But clearly the United States could not rely on China to carry a purely American agenda undiluted by its own philosophy and preferences.

There is also a risk of allowing specific diplomatic forms—and forums—to dominate substance. In other words, while it is essential to have all relevant players—North and South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States—invested in any diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear issues, they do not all have to meet in the same place and the same time on every occasion in the effort to negotiate such a solution. First, as any veteran of multilateral diplomacy knows, the tough issues at the core of any major disagreement never get resolved in a plenary session of governments with widely divergent interests and complex relations among one another. Rather, as the preceding chapters suggest, diplomatic solutions are a product of complex, overlapping actions and negotiations carried out unilaterally, bilaterally, tri-laterally, and multilaterally. The *real* deal gets cut in the back rooms and corridors, not in the chandeliered salons of diplomacy.

Second, ignoring that diplomatic reality and rigidly insisting on a specific format as a precondition to talks with North Korea gives Pyongyang the upper hand in controlling the pacing and escalation of the crisis it has created. If North Korea is threatening or taking actions inimical to U.S. national security, why should Washington allow Pyongyang to keep at it as long as the North eschews multilateral talks? It is not a gift or reward to North Korea, but rather an exercise of sovereignty in the service of U.S. national security, to ensure that senior American officials have a forum in which to convey their positions firmly and clearly to the North Korean leadership.

The Agreed Framework: A Balance Sheet

The discovery of the North Korean uranium-enrichment program and subsequent unraveling of the Agreed Framework inevitably leads one to ask whether it was a mistake from the beginning. Although some have taken that view, even President George W. Bush—despite his skepticism about the accord

and the Kim Jong Il regime—has (however grudgingly) supported the Agreed Framework. Early in his administration, the president “reaffirmed” the U.S. commitment to the Agreed Framework in the joint statement issued with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung on March 7, 2001.²¹ Three months later he approved a policy review that concluded that the United States should not abandon the Agreed Framework.²² Subsequent statements by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage have been more forceful in their support, while others like Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld predictably have been more skeptical.²³ In the summer of 2003, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice remarked that the Agreed Framework “in 1994 was probably exactly the right thing to do,” though she properly concluded that the accord had been “badly frayed” to the point where it was unclear whether it could survive.²⁴

In order to judge the Agreed Framework, two questions must be answered. First, did the Geneva accord advance U.S. national security interests at an acceptable price? Second, did North Korean cheating on the Agreed Framework defeat the security benefits expected by the United States?

To answer the first question—whether the Agreed Framework advanced American security interests at an acceptable price—one must analyze its costs and benefits fairly, without “double-counting.” Obligations North Korea had already incurred—such as its agreement to safeguard its nuclear facilities pursuant to its NPT obligations and its agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency—cannot “count” when tallying security benefits to the United States that are *attributable to the Agreed Framework*. If the accord provided *new* benefits to North Korea simply for complying with *old* (broken) promises, that would *not* be an acceptable price.

From that baseline, the Agreed Framework *did* impose fresh obligations upon North Korea, well beyond those entailed in the NPT and its IAEA safeguards agreement. Specifically, under its preexisting obligations, North Korea could argue that its existing nuclear production facilities—well suited to churning out bomb-worthy plutonium as well as reprocessing—were legal under the terms of the NPT provided they were safeguarded by the IAEA. The Agreed Framework, by contrast, required North Korea to shut down and dismantle its entire gas-graphite program: which meant the 5-, 50- and 200-megawatt nuclear reactors along with both reprocessing lines. It also allowed the United States to recan 8,000 spent fuel rods so that they could be stored indefinitely without risking radioactive leakage or requiring separation of the plutonium they contained. Eventually those facilities would have been dismantled and that spent fuel would be shipped out of North Korea. All of these measures would have been monitored by the IAEA.

The security benefits of the freeze were substantial and grew with each passing year that Pyongyang refrained from producing and separating more plutonium. (From Pyongyang's perspective, the opportunity cost of its continued adherence to the Agreed Framework kept rising each year.) U.S. projections of an unfettered North Korean plutonium production program showed that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, North Korea could have had hundreds of kilograms of plutonium and dozens or more nuclear weapons. Estimates also showed that if Pyongyang's ballistic missile program continued, it might be able to deliver those weapons to targets at increasingly greater ranges, including eventually the United States. The combined threat posed by North Korean nuclear and missile programs to the security of the United States, its close allies—South Korea and Japan—as well as its forces in Northeast Asia was clear.

Kim Jong Il may have viewed the North Korean nuclear program as the ultimate guarantee of his regime's survival, by providing access to a weapon that could deter any hostile force from attacking his regime. That is why stopping the North's plutonium production program was significant, requiring a major concession by North Korea.

Another way to assess the security benefits of the Agreed Framework is to consider how events might have unfolded in its absence. The odds favor a far more dangerous future, as an untrammelled North Korean nuclear program could provoke profoundly destabilizing events. Pressures to pursue nuclear weapons programs could emerge in Japan and South Korea, threaten their alliance with the United States, and jeopardize stability and prosperity throughout the region. Broad sectors of the Japanese and South Korean publics and ruling elites would likely oppose indigenous nuclear weapons programs. Yet when Japan's cabinet secretary Yasuo Fukuda remarked in 2002 that Tokyo might revisit its nonnuclear principles, despite uncorking a brief burst of criticism, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi easily brushed off calls for his adviser's resignation.²⁵

If Seoul and Tokyo retained confidence in the reliability of the U.S. security guarantee against any possible North Korean nuclear aggression, nuclear ambitions among our Asian allies would likely be contained. But the risk of a regional arms race would be real and, even if contained, the internal debates over nuclear weapons could produce significant disruptions within Japan and South Korea as well as between those nations and other regional powers. If such a nuclear arms race were to begin, it might have a cascading effect. Taiwan, which had a rudimentary nuclear weapons program in the 1970s, could not be relied upon to stand idly by, and if it did not, China would certainly respond.

The danger of North Korea exporting nuclear weapons, material, or related technology to other countries or terrorists like Osama Bin Laden could compound the threat exponentially. A North Korea awash in bomb-making material would certainly be more tempted to earn hard currency from external sources. That temptation could grow if Pyongyang became desperate because of international isolation. The consequences could be devastating and virtually impossible to block, given the small size of a critical mass of plutonium and the porousness of international borders. This scenario is as stealthy as it is worrisome, as no one could have any confidence that the shipment of a critical mass of fissile material would even be detected by the intelligence community, either before or after it occurred. A detonation somewhere might well be the first evidence of such a transfer. The United States could not expect to prevent, deter, or defend against such an act.

Finally, the Geneva accord created an opportunity for North Korea to break out of its growing isolation. The political, economic, and security environment in Northeast Asia evolved rapidly during the early 1990s, as relationships frozen in place by fifty years of cold war confrontation began to thaw. The normalization of relations between South Korea and Russia, then China, promised greater contact and commerce among those nations. At the same time, the political changes as China evolved from a revolutionary to a status quo power, and as the Soviet Union disintegrated, deprived an increasingly desperate Pyongyang of a significant measure of outside support. As a lonely outpost of communist totalitarianism, North Korea continued to pose a nagging threat of confrontation and subversion. If the Agreed Framework could help smooth North Korea's transition from confrontation to cooperation with the international community, the world would have become safer and the North Koreans could regain some of the ground they had lost in their relations with their traditional patrons.

While this book has concentrated on the nuclear issues addressed by the Agreed Framework, the accord contained other provisions aimed at promoting just that transition—indicating, for example, the path toward normalization of relations with the United States and improvement in North-South relations. In theory, movement toward normal relations between North Korea and KEDO's charter members—the United States, South Korea, and Japan—could spawn increasing bonds of communication and commerce. Those bonds could sway North Korea away from its dangerous old ways, including its weapons of mass destruction programs. They could also help open the door for efforts to build peace and stability.

The 1994 Agreed Framework provided the political basis and context in

subsequent years for North Korea's initial, halting steps toward rapprochement with Seoul and the wider international community. While subsequent events threw that rapprochement off course, its premise—that North Korea would pose less of a threat to its neighbors and the world if integrated into the international community than if left a persistent pariah—remains as valid today as when it was attempted a decade ago.

Did the United States pay an acceptable price to obtain the benefits it derived from the Agreed Framework? Over eight years, KEDO shipped North Korea roughly 4 million metric tons of heavy fuel oil, worth \$500 million. That may have contributed up to 2 percent of North Korea's total energy supply and 8 percent of its electricity demand.²⁶ As for the light-water reactor project itself, an aerial tour of the site would reveal substantial preparations for construction, representing a significant financial commitment by South Korea and Japan. But aside from that infrastructure and support provided to some number of North Korean workers, the actual benefits remain unrealized.

Under the Agreed Framework, in 1999 the United States relaxed certain economic sanctions against North Korea, allowing modest trade expansion. Over the past five years, total U.S.–North Korean trade has amounted to \$14 million, including \$175,000 worth of imports from the North.²⁷ Compared with the defense expenditures required even to deter a North Korean plutonium threat, much less remove it, the U.S.-origin benefits to North Korea were quite modest. While the United States has provided large amounts of food assistance as a humanitarian response to North Korea's deadly famine, that is unrelated to the Agreed Framework. As President Reagan said, "A hungry child knows no politics."

The bottom line is that North Korea is no better off today than it was in 1994, before the accord was completed. Indeed, a strong case can be made that—a decade later—North Korea is in worse shape. Its economy is in tatters. In spite of KEDO heavy fuel oil shipments, energy shortages continue to stifle economic growth. The food situation is still precarious, with Pyongyang teetering on the brink of more significant shortages. North Korea's conventional military forces continue to pose a formidable threat by dint of sheer numbers of men and artillery pieces, but looking past the crude number discloses aging weapons and equipment, inadequate training, and under-supplied troops.

While the benefits to North Korea from the Agreed Framework may not have appreciably improved its situation, some might argue that they prevented the collapse of an undesirable regime. This seems unlikely, given the role of China. North Korea may exasperate China's leaders, but the evidence

suggests that Beijing simply would not tolerate the collapse of the Pyongyang regime. The reason is simple: an imploding North Korea could promote political, economic, and social chaos on China's borders. It is no surprise, then, that substantial Chinese assistance mitigated the impact of North Korea's severe food shortages and economic decline over the past decade. For example, food shipments may have totaled twice as much as those sent by the World Food Program and three times the amount of American assistance. Other sources estimate Chinese assistance may have reached 1 million tons annually during the late 1990s.²⁸ Chinese energy assistance accounts for some 80 percent of North Korea's needs.²⁹ In short, the benefits under the Agreed Framework have been dwarfed by the food and oil assistance provided to North Korea by China.

But They Cheated . . .

The next question to consider is whether North Korean cheating alters an otherwise positive assessment of the Framework. American negotiators considered the prospect of North Korean cheating from the outset, harboring no more illusions about North Korean veracity than their predecessors did about the Soviet Union. That American assumption informed the U.S. design for the Agreed Framework, which linked every step by the United States and KEDO to a step by North Korea. Throughout the interagency discussions on the sequencing of the actions contemplated under the Geneva accord, U.S. officials explicitly sought to ensure that if, at any time, North Korea violated its commitments, then KEDO could terminate its performance and still leave its member states better off for having implemented the accord until that point. Most important, under the Agreed Framework North Korea would not be entitled to significant nuclear components needed to build the light-water reactors until it had returned to full compliance with its IAEA obligations including, if necessary, through special inspections.

So Washington knew it had to watch for cheating. From the time of signing the Agreed Framework, the United States kept close tabs on North Korean implementation of its obligations under the accord, while scouring for evidence on Pyongyang's nuclear activities. The initial news was positive, as North Korea proceeded to freeze, seal, and accept IAEA inspectors at its known nuclear facilities. Soon, however, the United States obtained evidence that North Korea may have diverted heavy fuel oil from allowed facilities. It quickly challenged the North Koreans on this point, and Pyongyang accepted monitoring of its power plants to deal with the problem. Later, when the United States obtained evidence that the North Koreans may have built a

clandestine underground nuclear facility at Kumchang-ri, it pressed Pyongyang and secured inspections of the site.

By the late 1990s, the U.S. government observed the North Korean pursuit of a significant uranium-enrichment program and, as noted earlier, was moving to deal with this and other issues (such as ballistic missiles) when time ran out on the Clinton administration. The Bush administration seems to have challenged the North on its uranium-enrichment efforts well before that program had matured to the point of producing weapon-usable material. As North Korea had yet to comply fully with its IAEA obligations at that time, KEDO had not yet provided the North with any significant nuclear components for the light-water reactors.

The existence of the clandestine uranium-enrichment program, while unacceptable and appropriate grounds for the U.S. suspension of benefits under the Agreed Framework, cannot erase the security benefits from the eight-year freeze on plutonium separation that the 1994 negotiations produced. But it is fair to ask whether the existence of the Agreed Framework lulled the United States and others into an ill-advised complacency, which would facilitate Pyongyang's breakout into a highly enriched, uranium-based nuclear weapons program. The historical record suggests that this did not occur. Both the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government continued their close scrutiny of North Korean actions, in part through an annual appropriations process that required presidential certifications and reports to Congress as a condition of continued U.S. funding for KEDO.³⁰

Concluding that the Agreed Framework was not a mistake, and that it succeeded in advancing U.S. national interests, does not imply either that it was a perfect instrument or that it "solved" the North Korean nuclear threat. For example, the Agreed Framework would have better served American interests if some of the North Korean commitments could have been accelerated. It would have been better if Pyongyang had agreed to accept special inspections right away, or to ship the 8,000 spent fuel rods out of North Korea immediately, or both. It would have been cheaper to secure the freeze in exchange for one light reactor rather than two, or in exchange for coal-fired plants rather than nuclear plants. Coal-fired plants would also have avoided the additional proliferation risks endemic to any light-water reactor project, especially the production of additional plutonium.

In fact, American negotiators pressed all of these points with the North Koreans and encountered fierce resistance. It was hard to imagine prevailing on all points outside of *The Land of Counterpane*, a poetic invention of Robert Louis Stevenson. The poem tells the story of a boy in his sickbed who marched his tin soldiers about and sent "ships in fleets/All up and down among the

sheets” and over his counterpane, or bedspread. It is much easier to prevail if you get to move the soldiers on both sides of a conflict:

I was the giant great and still,
That sits upon the pillow hill,
And sees before him, dale and plane,
The pleasant land of counterpane.

But Geneva was not the Land of Counterpane. The North Koreans were not passive tin soldiers in a children’s game, but rather shrewd adversaries playing, as one participant observed, as well as possible with a deuce-high hand. Moreover, in the land of counterpane the giant need not worry about the constraints that the American negotiators faced in maintaining congressional support, a common negotiating front with close allies and the IAEA, and the acceptance of the rest of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. All of this had to be done against an adversary that sought every opportunity to drive wedges between the United States and the other key players.

By September 1994, staunch North Korean resistance on a number of issues put American negotiators on the horns of a dilemma. They could have ignored North Korean threats to restart the 5-megawatt reactor and to separate plutonium from the Yongbyon spent-fuel rods, dug in their heels, and waited until the North Koreans capitulated on all points. If they had done so, they would have risked a North Korean breakout from the fragile nuclear freeze on the operation of the 5-megawatt reactor and on separating the five bombs’ worth of plutonium from the spent fuel rods at Yongbyon. Alternatively, the Americans could have concluded a deal promptly with North Korea in order to lock in the plutonium freeze, at the expense of deferring realization of some U.S. negotiating objectives until later in the implementation of the Agreed Framework.

In this instance, when the president, vice president, and principals considered the matter, they decided that they would attach the highest priority to *stopping North Korea from obtaining any additional plutonium*. All agreed, in essence, that it was more *urgent* to protect the present and the future than to unravel the past, by pinning down how much plutonium North Korea had indeed separated in its earlier reprocessing campaign. They were led to choosing the horn of the dilemma locking in the plutonium freeze, and deferring (but *not* abandoning) other objectives. In this, they were swayed by the concern that, despite its citizens’ grinding poverty, the Pyongyang regime seemed more likely to unshackle its nuclear program long before—even if subjected to UN sanctions—it capitulated to every U.S. preference.

Once the president decided that the time had come to strike a deal, despite continued North Korean resistance to certain U.S. objectives, the question became one of choosing those objectives that were critical to stopping *future* North Korean access to separated plutonium. By definition, full satisfaction of IAEA safeguards concerns regarding resolution of questions surrounding *past* North Korean nuclear activities did not meet that test. The suspect waste sites were not going anywhere, and the agreement to wait some years to analyze those sites, provided that no significant nuclear equipment was shipped to North Korea in the meantime, seemed a worthwhile trade to secure the freeze. It would have been strange, indeed, to praise an agreement that solved the mystery of whether North Korea had produced a few kilograms of plutonium at the expense of missing the opportunity to stop the eventual production of hundreds of kilograms.

The harder issue related to the plutonium contained in North Korea's spent fuel. That *was* a plutonium issue, but no amount of negotiation proved capable of persuading the North Koreans to give up the rods for the precise reason the Americans wanted to take them away: the rods constituted North Korea's ultimate leverage. Once those rods left North Korea, that leverage would evaporate. In a relationship lacking mutual trust, such self-abnegation would have appeared to Pyongyang to be tantamount to unconditional surrender, well beyond the pale of negotiation. Ultimately, the Americans did gain a North Korean commitment to ship all the spent fuel out of country—but the shipments would start only when key components were delivered to the first new reactor, and finish by the time of completion of the second. In the subsequent contract for the supply of the light-water reactors, KEDO officials also succeeded in securing North Korea's commitment to ship the spent fuel produced by the new facilities out of North Korea.

When faced by a long-established, operational, and expanding plutonium production program, the Agreed Framework halted that program under international monitoring and secured agreement of its ultimate dismantlement. It could not "cure" the patient of its nuclear weapons ambitions or even its capabilities, as the U.S. government could not sway the hearts and minds of the North Korean regime and did not know (beyond Yongbyon) what additional nuclear capabilities and facilities existed, much less how to quash them. It did not preclude North Korean activities *outside* of the view of the inspectors and cameras at Yongbyon. It did not reduce the ballistic missile or the conventional military threats posed by Pyongyang. And it did not address North Korea's other aberrant activities, from its own human rights abuses and support for terrorism to its misguided political and economic system.

The decision to give the nuclear issue top priority was rooted in grim reality. Serious concerns about missiles, conventional arms, human rights, or even North Korea's past nuclear cheating (with the possible production of enough plutonium for one or two nuclear bombs) paled in comparison with the dangers the United States would face if North Korea's continuing plutonium program ran unchecked. And if the nuclear question were *tied* to the other issues, so that the nuclear question could not be settled absent progress on other issues, the likely effect would have been to overload the negotiations so that *none* would have been resolved. Once the Agreed Framework was signed, the United States did turn to other North Korean problems, beginning (once again) with the most urgent threat to U.S. and allied interests: North Korea's ballistic missile program.

Lessons Learned: The Road Ahead

What lessons do the crises of 1993 and 1994 hold for the impasse of today? Now, as then, the critical issue is North Korean access to bomb material, this time highly enriched uranium as well as plutonium. Now, as then, the consequences of failure would be grave: an untethered North Korea would be able to churn out bomb-making material each year for use in threatening its neighbors—or for export to terrorists or others. (The fastest route to al Qaeda would seem to run through Pakistan, North Korea's active trading partner in illicit arms and the likely source of the technology North Korea used to enrich uranium.) Now, as then, a difficult relationship with a newly elected South Korean president further complicates an already daunting diplomatic mission. Now, as then, the other regional powers—South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia—have important roles to play in resolving the crisis.

Mark Twain once observed that by sitting on a hot stove, his cat learned not to sit on a hot stove again. But the cat also learned not to sit on a cold stove. Even if one considered the Agreed Framework a hot stove, the question is whether the government could design a cold stove that could support a lasting and effective diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear challenge. To do so, it would have to consider *what kind* of agreement would advance U.S. interests and *how* the United States should go about negotiating such an arrangement. The 1994 crisis has relevance for today on both counts.

Lesson 1. Set strategic priorities; then stick to them. It may seem too obvious to dwell on this lesson, but setting and maintaining priorities is easier said than done. During the first North Korean crisis, the Clinton administration placed the highest strategic priority on blocking North Korean access to additional stocks of separated plutonium. Clarity on that point enabled decision-

makers to resist pressures inside the administration to press other (admittedly important) objectives—curbing Pyongyang’s ballistic missile program and its threatening conventional force posture—to the point where they would jeopardize the resolution of the nuclear crisis.

Setting priorities and sticking to them has a number of advantages. First, it provides for discipline within one’s own government and signals clarity of purpose to friendly and hostile nations alike. Second, a government that remains focused on its strategic priorities is less likely to waste precious time and bargaining leverage on objectives of little if any intrinsic importance (such as the timing of the exchange of North-South envoys). Third, setting priorities allows a modular approach to resolving a series of outstanding issues, picking them off in order of urgency. By contrast, the comprehensive approach in which all issues are linked to one another is prone to bog down and leave all issues, including the most important ones, unresolved.

Failure to set priorities quickly leads to stalemate. For example, the George W. Bush administration proposed a comprehensive approach in dealing with North Korea, a “bold initiative” that would offer energy and other carrots if North Korea verifiably dismantled its nuclear program and satisfied other U.S. security concerns.³¹ Such an approach runs the risk of failure because it seeks full North Korean performance on all U.S. demands before offering significant U.S. performance on any North Korean demands. There was never any chance North Korea would accede to such a position, especially since time played in Pyongyang’s favor as each passing day it enhanced its own nuclear capabilities. Since the president has made clear that the United States seeks a diplomatic resolution to the current crisis, some parallelism in performance will need to be negotiated if the parties are to achieve agreement on the core issues.

Failure to choose the right priorities can be equally damaging. For example, in 2003 the administration emphasized rejection of bilateral talks more than containment of North Korean plutonium, appearing to betray at least an initial preoccupation with form over substance. True, multilateral engagement will be indispensable in resolving the current North Korean nuclear crisis, as it was the last time, particularly in adding pressure on the North to abide by a settlement enforced by several governments. In particular, American success in promoting an active Chinese diplomatic role should be commended. But inflexibility on a matter of pure form may easily derail the broader strategy and lose sight of the strategic priority: stopping North Korea from having access to nuclear weapon material. The *strategic* point here is that any successful settlement must command multilateral support (see Lesson 3), but that is far different from insisting on who sits at which table in a specific negotiating session.

Lesson 2. Integrate carrots and sticks into a strategy of coercive diplomacy. If offered only carrots, the North Koreans will conclude that the other side is more desperate for a deal than they are and will likely continue on a path of defiance and increasing negotiating demands. Offering only sticks will tell the North Koreans that there is no benefit from complying with international demands, except avoidance of pain. They might as well continue down a dangerous path of defiance until their acts become so threatening that the international community will *have* to respond, by which time Pyongyang may have substantially strengthened its bargaining leverage. That is essentially what occurred after Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly challenged the North Koreans in October 2002 regarding their secret enrichment program.

The Clinton administration relied on both carrots *and* sticks to try to resolve the 1994 crisis, integrating them into a negotiating position that presented a clear choice.³² If Pyongyang returned to full compliance with non-proliferation norms, then the international community would respond favorably, reassuring North Korea that compliance would enhance its national security, and even prosperity. It was easier to define the acceptable end state than to define a viable diplomatic path to reach it. Once the North Koreans were prepared to back down and comply with their nonproliferation obligations, they still sought a face-saving way to do so. This was the “escape valve” that President Clinton kept prodding his advisers to embed into the U.S. negotiating position and, *deus ex machina*, finally appeared in the form of Jimmy Carter.

At the same time, Pyongyang had to know that if it passed up the face-saving exit and continued to defy the international community, it would experience increasing isolation and hardship. In 1994 this coercive side of diplomacy came to the fore through a gradual military buildup on the peninsula and efforts to seek global support for economic sanctions. Ominous signals from Beijing at the time must have undermined the North Koreans’ confidence that China would intervene to insulate Pyongyang from the effect of UN Security Council sanctions. These efforts put pressure on North Korea to back down when the crisis crested in June 1994. Arriving in Pyongyang at the critical moment, former President Jimmy Carter gave the North Koreans a face-saving way out. They took it.

Some have criticized Washington for taking too long to unfurl its diplomatic strategy during the first North Korean nuclear crisis. In particular, the United States has been blamed for not demonstrating more quickly to North Korea the benefits of a negotiated solution by meeting Pyongyang’s demand in the summer of 1993 for light-water reactors. Looking back, one can indeed

find evidence to support the view that the elements of the Agreed Framework could be discerned long before the October 1994 signing.

Practically speaking, however, it is unlikely that the United States could have short-circuited the tortuous road to the Geneva signing ceremony of the Agreed Framework.³³ First, given the half-century enmity between the United States and North Korea, it was understandable—indeed, inevitable—that U.S. officials responded skeptically to such an unprecedented request from Pyongyang. Indeed, U.S. officials remained unconvinced well after the July 1993 round of bilateral talks that Pyongyang was serious about its proposal to give up its gas-graphite nuclear program in exchange for light-water reactors. Second, the project presented enormous challenges—political, legal, and financial—that took time to resolve. Third, regardless of whether Washington wanted to move forward on the new reactor project or not, it needed multi-lateral support—particularly from South Korea and Japan—that needed to be painstakingly secured.

In the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy turned out to have had the power all along to return to Kansas just by clicking the heels of her ruby slippers; *but first* she needed to go through the Emerald Forest to appreciate why she even wanted to return to Kansas. Similarly, the Agreed Framework could not have been achieved on day one of the crisis; the parties first had to traverse the Emerald Forest of exhaustive negotiations, threats of UN Security Council sanctions, military buildups, and mounting global pressure in order to lay the groundwork for closing the deal.

Lesson 3. Use multilateral institutions and forums to reinforce U.S. diplomacy. Each of North Korea's neighbors has unique equities and assets that must be brought into the settlement. South Korea is the most directly affected, sharing the peninsula and innumerable ties of blood, culture, and history. The United States—a neighbor by virtue of the 37,000 American troops deployed across the Demilitarized Zone—has an unshakable security commitment to South Korea and broader political and economic interests in the region. Japan shares a complex history with Korea—including its occupation of the peninsula ending with Tokyo's defeat in World War II, the painful issues of Japanese abducted by the North Korean regime, and ties between ethnic Koreans living in Japan and their relatives in the North. It also has the economic resources likely to be an essential part of any settlement with North Korea.

China—traditionally as close to North Korea as “lips and teeth”—has loosened its ties but remains more closely involved with Pyongyang than any other regional player. It also retains the most leverage of any outsider, as the provider of the majority of North Korea's fuel and food, without which

Pyongyang's economy could not survive. While Russia does not approximate that degree of influence, it is bound to the North by treaty and historical ties dating back to Josef Stalin. It can still contribute significantly to a diplomatic settlement of North Korea's differences with the world.

The Clinton administration worked closely with all of the other regional players in the quest for a solution to the nuclear crisis. It also made full use of all available multilateral institutions to bring pressure to bear upon North Korea in the effort to persuade it to comply with international nonproliferation norms. Toward that end, at the United Nations, Washington secured passage of UN Security Council Resolution 825, several presidential statements, and even a resolution from the unwieldy General Assembly. The IAEA Board of Governors was almost continuously engaged throughout 1993 and 1994, both in discussing the North Korean nuclear problem and in issuing multilateral pronouncements.

When the Clinton administration engaged in bilateral discussions with North Korea, it did so with multilateral backing—encouraged initially by South Korea and China, authorized by the UN Security Council. These bilateral talks in no way detracted from the administration effort to secure broad multilateral support for a negotiated solution if possible, and for the use of coercive measures if necessary. To the contrary, the showing of its good-faith bilateral efforts helped the United States make its case in multilateral forums.

Indeed, Washington sometimes might have put *too* much emphasis on multilateralism, by being too deferential to Seoul and Vienna. A case in point was the collapse of Super Tuesday over Seoul's insistence that the proposed North-South exchange of special envoys had to precede U.S.–North Korean negotiations. Washington's concerns over allied solidarity led it to accept that particular sequencing as a negotiating objective, even though it did not relate to the ticking clock on possible plutonium separation, or to U.S. security, or indeed to anything else beyond a matter of political pride. Little surprise, then, that Super Tuesday unraveled; it was held together by political expedience, not national security imperatives.

As for the International Atomic Energy Agency, at times "safeguards theology" created practical problems in blocking plutonium separation. In late 1993, during the implementation of the "tugboat strategy" of pulling Seoul and the IAEA toward Pyongyang, the agency kept shifting the goalposts by adding new conditions for "continuity of safeguards" inspections, making it difficult for the United States and North Korea to return to the negotiating table. Some U.S. officials felt the IAEA was piling on, that ensuring no diversion of North Korean nuclear material required fewer activities than it was demanding. But Washington had to be careful not to appear to muscle the

nonproliferation watchdog, lest it inadvertently undermine the agency's international credibility and reputation for impartiality. Fortunately, IAEA excesses were often kept in check through the skillful leadership of Director General Hans Blix who, in spite of North Korean intransigence, successfully walked the fine line between upholding IAEA standards and applying them flexibly enough to address real-world safeguards problems. His support would prove pivotal after the 1994 agreement was signed.

Lesson 4. Use bilateral talks to probe diplomatic alternatives. While multilateral diplomacy is indispensable, involving more governments—with varying motives, interests, and objectives—at best complicates and at worst dilutes or even undermines U.S. efforts. The United States should therefore use multilateral diplomacy but not be locked into it exclusively. As a sovereign nation, the United States must be free to use any mechanism—including bilateral talks—to advance its unique interests and objectives. In that sense, bilateral talks are not merely a “gift” to be conferred on other governments, but a vector to convey U.S. perspectives unalloyed and undiluted by multilateral involvement.

Thus, after Super Tuesday collapsed, the administration to some degree eased its lockstep approach with other governments and allowed itself greater latitude to explore diplomatic solutions through bilateral discussions with North Korea. Nor did the United States allow the continuing friction between the IAEA, North Korea, and South Korea in the summer of 1994 to derail the Gallucci-Kang talks.

The use of the bilateral channel did not alter U.S. objectives; it just provided another policy instrument in a pretty empty toolbox. Use of the bilateral channel allowed the Americans more leeway in exploring possible solutions informally with the North. It also provided an opportunity for the United States to focus especially on unique American concerns in a venue uncluttered by other considerations. At the end of the day, the bilateral channel provided a mechanism to promote solutions that the U.S. government considered to be in its own interests as well as those of its multilateral partners and the rest of the international community. American negotiators sometimes envisaged outcomes that would satisfy its multilateral partners' needs, even if the partners were unwilling or unable (because of their negotiating constraints or domestic political factors) to approve certain negotiating positions in advance. Of course, the trade-off is that although reducing the number of parties in direct negotiations can facilitate reaching a deal, it can complicate implementation to the degree that the arrangement does not adequately address the concerns of the governments whose cooperation is essential to success.

Today the Bush administration faces the same dilemma. It has relied almost entirely on multilateral talks, rejecting any but fleeting bilateral contacts with Pyongyang. This approach may give the key governments a greater stake in ensuring that an agreement is fully implemented, create greater pressure on Pyongyang by presenting a unified front, and provide an avenue for others to bring carrots or sticks to bear in the service of the collective diplomatic effort. The disadvantages include an inevitable muffling of U.S. positions in relation to Pyongyang, while also subjecting Washington to greater pressure to modify its own approach.

Most important, placing so much weight on the multilateral format of the discussions with North Korea allows Pyongyang to dictate the pace of the crisis. Pyongyang already makes the decisions on its own nuclear activities. Letting it off the hook of “confronting its accusers” also gives it the upper hand in deciding the tempo of the diplomatic effort. Rigid insistence on specific formats or conditions (as opposed to an “anytime, anywhere” offer for talks) permits the North Koreans—now liberated from the cameras, seals, and inspectors of the IAEA that they ejected in 2002—to continue their pursuit of nuclear weapons while sidestepping international pressure. (Of course, the United States could force the issue through such measures as IAEA Board of Governors’ statements and UN Security Council actions, but the absence of actual negotiations with the North Koreans weakens U.S. efforts to show that diplomacy has been exhausted and that stronger measures are therefore required.) Since time is on North Korea’s side, the United States and its allies should seek to force the issue by reasserting control over the pacing of the crisis.

In the Civil War, it was not enough for Abraham Lincoln to refuse to recognize the Confederate States of America. He had to take affirmative action to *interfere with* the Confederacy, which would have realized its strategic aims simply by carrying on its activities independently from—and unmolested by—the Union. Similarly, North Korea can realize its strategic objectives simply by continuing its current path until someone stops it. The longer real negotiations are delayed, the greater the nuclear capability—and bargaining leverage—the North will have accumulated. So whether a particular round of talks with North Korea is bilateral or multilateral is less important than that they occur sooner rather than later. (This is where setting priorities correctly comes into play.)

Lesson 5. South Korean support is crucial to any lasting solution of the North Korean nuclear problem. The role of South Korea is as complex as it is central to resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis. Seoul’s support is critical, since any action or solution, whatever form it takes, will be on its peninsula. To that

end, in 1993 and 1994 the United States and South Korea spent enormous amounts of time and energy working together to forge a common strategy. Contrary to popular belief in South Korea, time after time Washington deferred to Seoul or explicitly took its views into account. The record shows that South Korea had a remarkable degree of influence, even though its positions frequently changed.

Two notable exceptions to the rule merit separate mention. The first occurred when Seoul resisted the October 1994 decision to delay implementation of special inspections, in order to get a deal that would address the real and continuing threat of plutonium production by the North. The other exception occurred in 1995 when the United States cut a deal that finessed the name of the reactors to be built in North Korea. The theory was that this issue was far too trivial to justify destroying the Agreed Framework and far too obscure to ensure support for sanctions in the UN Security Council. In both cases, the United States parted company with the South Koreans only because its supreme national interest in blocking North Korean access to plutonium was on the line.

Some South Koreans have complained about being harnessed to an ally ready to sacrifice their interests on the altar of nuclear nonproliferation. The most notable example is President Kim's recent claim that he stopped President Clinton from starting a second Korean War.³⁴ In fact, the record discloses no eleventh-hour phone calls to the White House. President Kim was solidly behind the American drive for sanctions, and his government was well informed about the gradual military buildup on the peninsula as well as the more extensive deployments that were about to be considered. Seoul did not know about American consideration of a preemptive strike against Yongbyon, but it is clear from the record of the Principals Committee meetings that Washington would never have authorized an attack without prior consultation with Seoul. That consultation never became necessary after the June breakthrough that returned the nuclear issue to the negotiating table.

In important respects, the challenge of maintaining U.S.-South Korean solidarity is more difficult today than it was a decade ago. Then the majority of South Koreans, and their government leaders, had personal memories of the Korean War and its aftermath as well as serious doubts about Pyongyang's intentions. Now a younger generation has taken the reins of power, after years of a Sunshine Policy that has left many South Koreans feeling greater sympathy toward their brethren in the North and greater concern that their peace is more likely to be disturbed by Americans than North Koreans. For Americans, the deference once accorded to Seoul as facing the more imminent threat from the North has since September 11 been displaced by its own sense

of vulnerability to the export of nuclear technology to adversaries and, to some, the prospect of North Korean ballistic missiles ranging the continental United States.

Unfortunately, the myth that the United States was willing to sacrifice the interests of its close ally in 1994 is widely accepted in South Korea and has colored Seoul's dealings with the current Bush administration. It reflects a long-standing Korean fear of abandonment dating back to the Taft-Katsura treaty of 1905, which essentially handed Korea over to Japan. When combined with the demographic changes just discussed, it is easy to see why the North Korean nuclear crisis can stress the U.S.-South Korean alliance. It will be important for U.S. and South Korean decisionmakers to recognize this reality as they chart a course for the alliance through the shoals of the current crisis.

Lesson 6. Take full advantage of China's continuing sway over North Korea. As the driving force behind the six-party talks in 2003, China assumed a much higher profile as a diplomatic player on the world stage. Its importance in addressing the North Korean nuclear crisis was already apparent in 1994. The first crisis broke during China's transition from unalloyed dedication to its alliance with Pyongyang to a more even-handed relationship between the two Koreas. That timing left China open to work cooperatively with Seoul, while giving Pyongyang greater reason to fear abandonment by its prime benefactor. Beijing understood both its own leverage as well as the grave consequences of a North Korean nuclear program and repeatedly, but quietly, nudged Pyongyang toward compliance with its nonproliferation commitments. Beijing's most important effort unfolded in the spring of 1994, when it tried its hand at mediation after North Korea's unloading of the fuel rods from the 5-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon and appeared to signal that Pyongyang could not count on China blocking the imposition of UN sanctions against North Korea.

Although Chinese officials have traditionally sought to downplay their influence in Pyongyang, they clearly retain greater leverage over the Kim Jong Il regime than any other player. Fortunately, China and the United States agree on two key objectives: (1) the Korean Peninsula should remain stable and secure, and (2) it should be free of nuclear weapons.

But this convergence of views between Washington and Beijing has limits. Specifically, China has a strong interest in avoiding political disruption in North Korea, which argues in favor of seeking a negotiated solution to the nuclear challenge and against taking steps that could induce regime change in North Korea. By 2003, however, some U.S. officials had apparently concluded that the North Koreans were inveterate cheaters with whom no agreement could be reached that would protect American interests. Under this view,

agreements should therefore be eschewed in favor of the only practical way to head off North Korean possession of a growing nuclear weapon stockpile: regime change. Whether this would occur by force or by inducing a social collapse through encouraging massive refugee flows out of the North, the bottom line is that pursuit of this objective would drive a wedge between China and the United States.

China would not only object to steps intended to induce regime change in North Korea, it would actively oppose such efforts and likely step in to prevent the collapse of the Kim Jong Il regime. Thus sharing the same broad strategic aims regarding nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula does not necessarily translate into shared approaches. When those approaches differ, the U.S. efforts to encourage China to take the diplomatic lead in dealing with North Korea becomes a double-edged sword, increasing U.S. exposure to Chinese pressure at the same time that it increases Beijing's influence over the broader direction of the multilateral approach to North Korea. Since, as this book has concluded (for different reasons), forcing regime change is a losing nonproliferation strategy, the United States should continue to work with China in curbing North Korea's nuclear activities on the basis of the two objectives Washington and Beijing do share.

Lesson 7. Negotiated arrangements can advance U.S. interests even if the other party engages in cheating. Of course, it is possible to construct a deal that would leave the United States in a worse position if the other side cheated. An example would be an agreement that left the other side well positioned to break out of a treaty in a manner that would put the United States at an instant military disadvantage. Nazi Germany's rearmament in violation of the Versailles Treaty, combined with Europe's failure to respond, comes to mind. But it is also possible to construct a treaty that leaves the United States better off every day that the other party is compliant, and not significantly disadvantaged if the other party cheats.

Certainly, it would be a mistake to base a deal on trust. But as every American president concluded throughout the cold war, it is possible to construct a deal whose provisions, including those creating transparency, benefit the United States no matter what an aggressive and untrustworthy adversary does in the course of implementation. It is also possible to do so without submitting to "blackmail," if that term is meant to refer to a government's insistence on (1) being "paid" not to do harm, and (2) being "paid" more than once in order to keep commitments made through earlier agreements. That lesson is no less true today with respect to North Korea.

U.S. negotiators will always need to make hard choices. It would be desirable if any new deal includes comprehensive limits on North Korea's nuclear

program, extending beyond known plutonium production facilities to encompass not only uranium-enrichment activities but also any nuclear weapons Pyongyang may have already built or obtained, as well as its research and development efforts. Such a commitment would be difficult to verify with confidence, even with “anytime, anywhere” inspections in North Korea. It is just too easy to cheat.

Should U.S. negotiators pass up stronger commitments if they cannot be confidently verified? What if a new deal imposes greater restrictions on Pyongyang with more extensive inspections than the 1994 accord but still leaves uncertainties? Would such a deal serve U.S. interests? Similar questions confronted the United States in 1994, when the president had to decide whether to seek more immediate limits on North Korea’s threatening plutonium production program in lieu of immediate special inspections.

Reaching a deal is not always the best option. As noted earlier, the alternatives to engagement—military action or containment—were unattractive for most of the previous crises and may be unattractive today. But in June 1994 U.S. decisionmakers were on the verge of seriously considering a preemptive strike against the Yongbyon nuclear facilities, even in view of potentially dire consequences, out of concern that the North might be about to begin producing bomb-making material. Today, what would happen if North Korea ceremoniously unveiled a nuclear-tipped missile that was clearly threatening to its neighbors, the United States, and the world? Under certain circumstances, *no* deal may be the best option, leaving only acquiescence (masquerading as deterrence and containment) at one extreme and confrontation (possibly including military action) at the other. Extreme circumstances may leave only extreme options.

Lesson 8. Consider setting red lines. One way to try to avoid falling into a situation in which the president faces only extreme options is to set “red lines” for North Korea. Initially, the Bush administration seemed leery to do that on the assumption that “if you draw it, they will cross it.” There is always a danger that Pyongyang will do just that, either deliberately or through miscalculation. In the spring of 1994, North Korea did cross a red line by unloading the 5-megawatt reactor and destroying important historical information contained in the spent fuel rods, triggering the march toward confrontation. The United States responded as it had warned that it would, by breaking off negotiations and returning to the UN Security Council to seek sanctions. But one month later, Pyongyang did not expel the IAEA inspectors monitoring the Yongbyon facility—nor did it reprocess the spent fuel—perhaps in part because of Jimmy Carter’s trip but also because it knew that could trigger an American preemptive attack. In short, picking a clear boundary for acceptable

behavior can prove a successful deterrent, but only if it is backed by the credible threat to escalate, including to the use of force. The United States should not be bluffing, and it must be clear that it is not.

For four decades, the greatest threat of nuclear conflict emerged from the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The fall of the Berlin Wall set events in train that ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The first major nuclear proliferation threat—of seeing four nuclear weapon states emerge full-blown at the end of the cold war—was averted when U.S. negotiators persuaded the newly formed nations of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus to relinquish all of their nuclear weapons to Russia. The second threat—that Russia would become a source of nuclear weapons proliferation from the diversion of weapon scientists and fissile materials to hostile forces—spawned a series of U.S. initiatives under the seminal Nunn-Lugar legislation aimed at promoting the safe and secure dismantlement of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal.

North Korea posed the third great nuclear threat. Addressing that threat as a matter of national urgency led to the concerted effort described in these pages. The urgency was dictated not only by the dire consequences that unbounded North Korean plutonium production could have produced but also by the impending review and extension conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the cornerstone of global efforts to combat the spread of nuclear weapons. Had the United States failed to contain the North Korean threat in time, it would have torn a hole in the regime just at the moment when the nations of the world were gathering in New York to decide whether to extend the treaty indefinitely, or to let it lapse.

The Agreed Framework permitted the NPT conference to proceed with a North Korea that had reaffirmed its commitment to the treaty, accepted IAEA monitoring to ensure the continuation of the nuclear freeze, and promised ultimate North Korean acceptance of inspections to clarify remaining questions about its past nuclear activities and dismantlement of its existing program. The accord earned the support of the IAEA, and the NPT was successfully extended indefinitely and without condition, by consensus, in May 1995.³⁵

The response of the United States to the North Korean nuclear challenge was pragmatic, guided by the overarching objective to stop Pyongyang's access to more separated plutonium. It was principled, gaining support of the world community through the UN Security Council, the IAEA, and other forums to support U.S. efforts to persuade Pyongyang to curtail and accept international limits on its nuclear activities. It was complex, involving constant scrutiny of U.S. interests and the effects of shifting events, continual consultations with

friends and allies, and a difficult and protracted negotiation with the North Koreans.

Above all, the U.S. response was guided by a determination to prevent the nightmare of nuclear destruction threatened by the North Korean program. The U.S. officials involved in negotiating the Agreed Framework shared a fundamental commitment to advancing the nation's security. None would have advocated support for any accord that did not meet a simple test: would Americans be safer with the Agreed Framework than without it? As public servants, a decade ago we answered that question in favor of the Agreed Framework. As authors today, we reach the same conclusion.

That same question—will Americans be safer or not?—should guide the evaluation of any proposed U.S. response to the renewed nuclear threat in Korea. If grounded in a policy that forces North Korea to choose between a path of compliance with—or defiance of—the global norm against nuclear weapons proliferation, that question can bring the world to a safer future. North Korea will only be forced to make that choice if the path of defiance inexorably brings pressure that threatens the continued viability of the Kim Jong Il regime, while the path of compliance offers the regime the security assurances and improved relations with the international community that it seeks. We wish those entrusted with our national security well as they make the fateful choices that will shape the outcome of the current crisis. The stakes could not be higher.