



Lancaster Eagle Gazette
<http://www.lancastereaglegazette.com>
POSTED: July 7, 2008
By Xiaoxiong Yi

Working toward nuclear-free Korea

WITH world television networks broadcasting from the scene, North Korea demolished one of the most visible symbols of its nuclear program, the 60-foot cooling tower at the Yongbyon nuclear power plant June 27, in a signal demonstrating its commitment to discontinue making plutonium for weapons.

Advertisement

A day before North Korea blew up the cooling tower at the Yongbyon reactor complex, Pyongyang took a step toward reintegration into the world community by handing Chinese officials a much-anticipated, long-overdue declaration of its nuclear program. The 60-page declaration consisted of three parts: the nuclear-related facilities list, the extracted plutonium amount and the total stockpile of uranium. It excluded the number of nuclear weapons.

In return, "action for action" now becomes the catch phrase in the Bush administration's North Korea policy. In a swift, quid pro quo response, the Bush administration announced it was preparing to remove the country it once described as part of the "axis of evil" from the U.S. State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism.

It issued a proclamation lifting a number of sanctions against the North under the Trading with the Enemy Act, which essentially will end the 58-year sanction and allow the U.S. companies to trade and invest in North Korea. "Today we have taken a step toward a nuclear-free Korean peninsula," the president declared.

If North Korea does follow through on its June 27 destruction of the cooling tower and fully dismantles its weapons program and gives up its handful of bombs, some of its neighbors, including South Korea and Japan, will reconsider their nuclear options. Moreover, today, there are more than 40 countries are "near-nuclear" states, with technology and infrastructure ready for building bombs. By putting the North Korean nuclear genie back in the bottle, it could result in some of these "near-nuclear" nations abandoning their weapons programs as well.

North Korea's declaration of its nuclear activities is a triumph of the Bush Administration's new engagement policy and likely the last significant diplomatic breakthrough of the Bush presidency. As Stephen Hadley, president's national security adviser, puts it, "We think we have constructed a better framework that has been more effective, and that is what we will hand over to the next administration, and hopefully they will be in a position to continue this."

There is merit in engaging North Korea. However, Pyongyang's declaration about its nuclear program and its compliance with the U.S. demand are merely first steps of many to come. As the London-based Financial Times points out correctly, "Unlike Libya (which has abandoned its

nuclear weapons programs), North Korea has actually detonated a nuclear weapon. We are still a long way from the outcome of disclosing and disabling all North Korea's nuclear facilities."

Complex issues remain on the North Korea nuclear program. "It took years of talks to prod North Korea to step back from its decades-long effort to make atomic weapons," wrote Burt Herman of the Associated Press, "but that was the easy part. Past experience suggests North Korea will seek more rewards before it moves further to disarm. If Pyongyang actually hands over the nuclear bombs believed to be in its arsenal-the country's most valuable bargaining chips-the communist leadership would only do so after a long wish list of demands is granted."

Consequently, the next step toward a nuclear-free Korean peninsula - the North to completely abandon and dismantle its nuclear weapons - will be a far more difficult one. So far, no party involved in the process, including China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the U.S., has said that they are ready to give more to the North in exchange for doing so.

The destruction of the Yongbyon reactor tower shows how far the U.S. and North Korea have come. But denuclearization remains a demanding task for all parties involved. The upcoming third phase of the Six-Party Talks must be the phase of dismantlement and abandonment - "denuclearization" means not only giving up nuclear programs and facilities, but nuclear weapons.

The U.S. and its allies must not allow Pyongyang to choose to make a distinction between the two and try to keep any actual weapons. In the meantime, to reverse North Korea's nuclear program revolves around applying the right balance of coercion and incentives. Anything less will prove unsuccessful.

Dr. Xiaoxiong Yi is a professor at Marietta College and Director of the China Institute.