

Pyongyang Report

News and views on DPRK - North Korea

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***Pyongyang Report* enters tenth year**

Pyongyang Report enters its tenth year in 2008. Our first issue came out 29 January 1999. At that time, although we published simultaneously on the web, we were thinking primarily in terms of a printed version. Our main aim was to bring together extract from international media stories that would stimulate the New Zealand media to approach DPRK more critically and discerningly. There is a world beyond cliché and propaganda was the message. Since we were aiming at the media we needed to produce something which was up-to-date (the media hates stale stories), and so had to come out fairly frequently. We decided four pages would be the limit. Short and frequent was the model.

Time passed. We were spectacularly ineffective with the media. NZ media coverage is no more informed or thoughtful than it was then. We also found it increasingly difficult to come out frequently. Pressure of other commitments, and foreign travel, meant that the gaps between editions was lengthened, as was the size as we moved into double editions in an attempt to catch up. Other things were happening. More people were reading it electronically, and our email notification list grew substantially, becoming quite international. In recent years Tim Beal's commentary has been republished elsewhere, most notably in the prestigious *Japan Focus* (as is this one). That in turn often led to reproduction in other websites. Publication in journals such as *Japan Focus* required a longer and more academic treatment of complex issues, and references. All this took us away from the original structure and format.

This latest edition does away with the two columns of the past, and goes for a simpler layout. We are no longer so concerned about length. We give only the opening paragraph of the commentary, to a link for the rest. The eclectic collection of snippets from the media is the same as before. Readers of the web version get a link to the original article.

Pyongyang Report is compiled by Tim Beal and Don Borrie, assisted by Stephen Epstein, as a contribution towards greater knowledge and understanding of North Korea. Signed commentaries are the opinion of the specific author and not necessarily those of the editorial team. Further information may be obtained from the editors (see final page), and from the website at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~caplabfb/dprk/>

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We hope our readers find the new *Pyongyang Report* an improvement on the old, or certainly no worse. We do not know how long we will be able to keep this up; getting to the twentieth year seems unlikely. As always, we welcome any support, financial or otherwise, that will help us keep producing the newsletter. In particular, we are on the lookout for successors, so if you are younger than us, which isn't difficult, and would like to get involved, please let us know.

Finally a thanks to Stephen Epstein whose critical scrutiny has not only engaged us in productive debate, but saved us from many a typo over the years.

Tim Beal and Don Borrie

Commentary

On the brink

Prospects for US-DPRK settlement dim, yet again

Tim Beal

Every time it looks as if US-DPRK negotiations are on the verge of a breakthrough someone in Washington throws a spanner in the works. This is what happened in 2005 as the Chinese were forcing through the Joint Statement of 19 September which seemed to put the negotiations, under the aegis of the Six Party Talks, on a course for a successful resolution. The US Treasury designated the Macau bank used by North Korean entities (and British companies and joint ventures in DPRK), Banco Delta Asia, as a "Primary Money Laundering Concern under USA PATRIOT Act". Although the allegations were subsequently discredited, partly through the investigative reporting of the US chain McClatchy Newspapers, the action put the Six Party Talks in limbo for over a year, as well as having a serious impact on DPRK foreign trade, and hence on the economy itself, which reportedly shrank 1.1% in 2006. Negotiations between US Under Secretary of State Christopher Hill and DPRK Vice Minister Kim Kye-gwan resulted in a couple of agreements in 2007, one in February the other in October, which seemed to offer a way forward. These hopes have been dashed and prospects at the moment look dim.

Full version of this commentary available at *Japan Focus*

< <http://japanfocus.org/products/topdf/2745>>

If you do not have access to the web, and live in New Zealand, a printout can be obtained from Rev Don Borrie, 7 Thornley St., Titahi Bay, Porirua, NZ
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News reports

US-DPRK negotiations and the curious Syrian affair DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Issue of Implementation of October 3 Agreement

Pyongyang, January 4 (KCNA) -- A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK released the following statement Friday as regards the delay in the implementation of the October 3 agreement made at the six-party talks:

It is beyond Dec. 31, 2007, the deadline set in the Oct. 3 agreement.

It is regrettable that points agreed there remain unimplemented except the disablement of the DPRK's nuclear facilities.

The disablement started early in November last year and all the operations were completed within the "technologically possible scope" as of Dec. 31.

At present, the unloading of spent fuel rods scheduled to be completed in about 100 days is underway as the last process.

However, the delivery of heavy fuel oil and energy-related equipment and materials to the DPRK, commitments of other participating nations, has not been done even 50 per cent.

The schedule for the monthly delivery of heavy fuel oil as well as the delivery of energy-related equipment and materials and relevant technical processes are being steadily delayed.

The U.S. has not honored its commitments to cross the DPRK off the list of "sponsors of terrorism" and stop applying the "Trading with the Enemy Act" against it.

Looking back on what has been done, one may say that the DPRK is going ahead of others in fulfilling its commitment.

As far as the nuclear declaration on which wrong opinion is being built up by some quarters is concerned, the DPRK has done what it should do. .../..

Source: KCNA, Pyongyang, 4 January 2008

<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2008/200801/news01/05.htm#1>

U.S. Sees Stalling by North Korea on Nuclear Pact

By HELENE COOPER

Published: January 19, 2008

WASHINGTON — A debate is under way within the Bush administration over how long it can exercise patience with North Korea without jeopardizing the fulfillment of a nuclear agreement that President Bush has claimed as a foreign policy victory.

With North Korea sending signals that it may be trying to wait out Mr. Bush's time in office before making any more concessions, administration officials are grappling with how the United States should react.

The debate has fractured along familiar lines, with a handful of national security hawks in Vice President Dick Cheney's office and at the State Department arguing for a more confrontational approach with Pyongyang.

On the other side, Mr. Bush's lead North Korea nuclear negotiator, Christopher R. Hill, has argued that the United States should continue a more restrained approach, one that is widely credited with bringing about an agreement last year that is intended eventually to lead to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

While the restrained stance still appears to have support from Mr. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, it is coming under fire from conservative critics, both in and out of the administration.

In a public departure from administration policy, Jay Lefkowitz, a conservative lawyer who is Mr. Bush's envoy on North Korean human rights, said this week the North would likely "remain in its present nuclear status" when the next president took over in January 2009.

"North Korea is not serious about disarming in a timely manner," Mr. Lefkowitz told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. "We should consider a new approach to North Korea."...//..

Source: New York Times, 19 January 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/19/washington/19korea.html?ex=1358485200&en=58c9338e2f30a1b4&ei=5124&partner=permalink&expod=permalink>

Rice Rebukes Bush Envoy Who Criticized Policy on North Korea

By HELENE COOPER

Published: January 23, 2008

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in a rare public rebuke, has upbraided a White House envoy who criticized United States diplomacy toward North Korea that is aimed at coaxing the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons.

Ms. Rice said the official, Jay Lefkowitz, President Bush's special envoy on North Korean human rights, was not speaking for the administration when he told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute last week that the United States "should consider a new approach to North Korea" because the current approach was unlikely to resolve the issue before the end of Mr. Bush's term in a year.

Speaking to reporters aboard her flight to Berlin on Monday, Ms. Rice sharply disagreed, and said Mr. Lefkowitz should stick to human rights and leave the talks over the North's nuclear policy to her, Mr. Bush and the other nations involved: Russia, China, Japan and South Korea.

"He's the human rights envoy," Ms. Rice said. "That's what he knows. That's what he does. He doesn't work on the six-party talks. He doesn't know what's going on in the six-party talks and he certainly has no say in what American policy will be in the six-party talks."...//..

Source: New York Times, 23 January 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/23/washington/23korea.html?ex=1358830800&en=aee8aa91cc671ca1&ei=5124&partner=permalink&expod=permalink>

Slowly, but Surely, Pyongyang Is Moving

By David Albright and Jacqueline Shire

Thursday, January 24, 2008; Page A19

The optimism with which the October agreement with North Korea was welcomed has faded amid accusations that the North again is not keeping its commitments. First came word that "disablement" of nuclear facilities was slowing. Then there was the missed Dec. 31 deadline for North Korea to declare the full scope of its nuclear program, including its plutonium stockpile and uranium enrichment activities. And earlier in the fall, North Korea was accused of helping Syria construct a nuclear facility in its desert, reportedly a reactor.

The finger-wagging, told-you-so naysayers in and out of the Bush administration should take a deep breath. There is no indication that North Korea is backing away from its commitments to disable key nuclear facilities and every reason to expect this process to unfold slowly, with North Korea taking small, incremental steps in return for corresponding steps from the United States and others in the six-party discussions.

Disablement of the five-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon slowed in part because the United States decided that unloading the irradiated fuel rods as fast as North Korea proposed could needlessly risk exposing the North Korean workers to excessive radiation. North Korea is unloading the rods and making steady progress on the other aspects of disablement at the Yongbyon site. Could it be happening faster? Probably, and North Korea would point out that promised shipments of heavy fuel oil are also slow in coming.

North Korea's nuclear declaration was to be received by Dec. 31. On Jan. 2, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said the United States was still "waiting to hear" from the North. Pyongyang responded that the United States had its declaration. After some tail-chasing, it emerged that North Korea had quietly shared an initial declaration with the United States in November. According to media reports, this declaration stated that North Korea had a separated plutonium stockpile of 30 kilograms and denied that it had a uranium enrichment program. ...//..

Does this quantity of separated plutonium make sense? Yes. ...//..

What about any enriched uranium? ...//.. But we should not lose sight of an uncomfortable fact -- that U.S. policymakers misread (at best) or hyped information that North Korea had a large-scale uranium enrichment program. There is ample evidence that North Korea acquired components for a centrifuge-enrichment program, but few now believe the North produced highly enriched uranium or developed its enrichment capabilities in the manner once claimed by the United States.

The success or failure of this latest agreement with North Korea must not hinge on the uranium issue. This is an interesting and relevant part of its nuclear program, but it is still a footnote in the context of its plutonium production. ...//..

North Korea is looking to the United States to keep its promises on delisting it as a terrorist state. Unfortunately, given the climate in Washington and the perception that North Korea is slow-rolling the declaration process, this is unlikely over the near term. Pyongyang should be realistic in its expectations. ...//..

David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector, is president of the Institute for Science and International Security. Jacqueline Shire is a senior analyst at ISIS and a former State Department foreign affairs officer.

Source: Washington Post, 24 January, 2008

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/23/AR2008012303282.html?hpid=opinionsbox1>

What A.Q. Khan Knows

How Pakistan's Proliferator Could Help in Pyongyang

By Selig S. Harrison

Thursday, January 31, 2008; Page A21

Either Kim Jong Il or Pervez Musharraf is lying about whether Pakistan's Dr. Strangelove, Abdul Qadeer Khan, gave centrifuges to North Korea for uranium enrichment. Unless the truth can be established, the hitherto-promising denuclearization negotiations with Pyongyang are likely to collapse.

Khan has been shielded from foreign interrogators since his arrest three years ago for running a global nuclear Wal-Mart. Musharraf wrote in his memoir, "In the Line of Fire," that the former czar of Pakistan's nuclear program provided "nearly two dozen" prototype centrifuges suitable for uranium enrichment experiments to North Korea -- a charge flatly denied by Pyongyang.

"Why don't you invite A.Q. Khan to join the negotiations?" North Korea's U.N. representative, Kim Myong Gil, asked with a broad smile over lunch recently. "Where is the invoice? Give us the evidence." ...//..

Why is Musharraf determined to keep Khan under wraps?

The official answer in Islamabad is that Pakistan's sovereignty would be affronted by letting U.S. intelligence agents cross-examine him. Khan is regarded as a national hero, and the United States is widely hated in Pakistan for invading Iraq and Afghanistan and for its insensitivity to civilian casualties. ...//..

Many Pakistanis say Musharraf is stonewalling because he and some of his army generals collaborated with Khan and fear exposure. Another possible explanation is that the documentary evidence does not exist. Still another is that Musharraf changed his position on the centrifuges and invented the "facts" in his memoir to curry favor with the Bush administration; by strengthening its case against North Korea, in this view, he hoped to offset dissatisfaction in Washington with his ineffectual performance in combating al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

This explanation cannot be dismissed, since in a February 2004 New York Times interview Musharraf "emphatically denied" U.S. reports of Pakistani nuclear technology transfers to Pyongyang. ...//..

Selig S. Harrison, director of the Asia program at the Center for International Policy, has visited North Korea 10 times and is the author of "Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement." He has covered Pakistan since 1951, including for The Post.

Source: Washington Post, 31 January 2008

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/30/AR2008013003214.html>

US envoy suggests split over N Korea

By Daniel Dombey in Washington

Published: February 6 2008 22:06

The US administration is divided over whether its attempt to convince North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons is paying off, Christopher Hill, the US official responsible for negotiations with Pyongyang, suggested on Wednesday.

But in testimony before the Senate, Mr Hill issued a stout defence of the six party talks that seek to convince North Korea to denuclearise, despite missed deadlines in recent weeks.

The Bush administration had hoped for a breakthrough on North Korea to cap its foreign policy record in its final year in office but the pace of progress has become a hot topic in Washington. North Korea has failed to provide a complete declaration of its nuclear activities to the US's satisfaction, despite a December 31 deadline, and has also slowed down work "disabling" its Yongbyon reactor, which has produced plutonium for its nuclear bombs.

While acknowledging the other major parts of disablement had been completed, Mr Hill said shifts at Yongbyon to remove spent fuel rods had come down from three a day to one. He linked this to a dispute over fuel oil, noting the US and other countries have so far delivered only a fifth of the 1m tons promised...//..

Source: Financial Times, London, 6 February 2008

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/98fb0ea6-d4fe-11dc-9af1-0000779fd2ac,dwp_uuid=319b98a6-0c1a-11db-86c7-0000779e2340.html

North Korea Says Aid Holds Up Disarmament Deal

By REUTERS

Published: February 16, 2008

BEIJING (Reuters) - North Korea appears committed to a nuclear disarmament deal but remains unwilling to complete two big steps until complaints over aid and U.S. concessions are solved, U.S. experts just back from North Korea said on Saturday.

Under disarmament terms announced in October last year, North Korea was offered 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil or equivalent aid, and the United States agreed to move to take the North from a sanctions list aimed at sponsors of terrorism.

In return, North Korea agreed to "disable" its Yongbyon nuclear facility and fully declare all nuclear activities by the end of 2007.

But those two steps have stalled after North Korean complaints that the energy aid and U.S. concessions were not coming soon enough.

North Korean officials appeared willing to proceed with disarmament steps, but only after their own demands were met, said Siegfried Hecker, a Stanford University researcher who went to the North with two other U.S. experts on a non-government trip...//..

But he and Joel Wit, a former U.S. State Department official who has long dealt with the isolated communist state, said they were struck by North Korea's candor and cooperation with U.S. disarmament technicians at Yongbyon.

"The level of cooperation was extremely good, better than I've ever seen in the ten years that I have been visiting that facility," Wit said. ...//..

Source: New York Times, 16 February 2008
<http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/world/international-korea-north-nuclear.html?scp=2&sq=north+korea&st=nyt>

North rejects U.S. offer as hopes for talks fade

By Kang Chan-ho
March 21, 2008

WASHINGTON North Korea continued to insist during talks in Geneva last week that it doesn't have any highly enriched uranium and that it didn't export any nuclear materials to Syria, according to several sources in Washington who declined to be named.

Christopher Hill, Washington's special envoy to the nuclear talks, suggested to his North Korean counterpart, Kim Gye-gwan, that North Korea confidentially declare its highly enriched uranium program, the sources said, while openly declaring less controversial issues such as its level of plutonium.

But Kim refused to do so, the sources said.

"We did not have, we don't have and we will not have [them]," Kim told reporters in Geneva last week, referring to the alleged secret uranium enrichment program and connections to a nuclear program in Syria. ...//..

Source: JoongAng Ilbo, Seoul, 21 March 2008
<http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2887687>

DPRK Foreign Ministry's Spokesman Blasts U.S. Delaying Tactics in Solution of Nuclear Issue

Pyongyang, March 28 (KCNA) -- A spokesman for the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the following statement Friday blaming the U.S. for the deadlocked implementation of the October 3 agreement of the six-party talks:

The implementation of the October 3 agreement of the six-party talks is at a deadlock due to the behavior of the U.S.

The U.S. has not fulfilled its commitments as regards the lifting of the sanctions within the agreed period but insisted on its unreasonable demands concerning the nuclear declaration, thus throwing hurdles in the way of settling the issue.

As clarified in the statement issued by the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 4, the DPRK worked out a report on the nuclear declaration and informed the U.S. side of this in November last year. And when the U.S. proposed to have a further discussion on the content of the report with the DPRK, the latter has shown so far such magnanimity as responding to such negotiations.

Simple is the reason why the DPRK responded to the negotiations on the issue of the nuclear declaration.

The Bush administration was so absurd as to raise the issue of "suspected uranium enrichment" in 2002, scuttling the DPRK-U.S. dialogue and straining the situation to an extreme pitch of tension. This pushed the DPRK to its access to nuclear weapons in the end.

The DPRK rendered necessary sincere help in clarifying the issue raised by the U.S. side, taking into consideration the face of the Bush administration which was to blame for the former's access to nuclear weapons.

When the U.S. side claimed that the issue of "suspected uranium enrichment" can be solved if the DPRK tells about whereabouts of the imported aluminum tubes, the DPRK took such a measure as an exception as allowing U.S. experts to see even sensitive military objects and providing them with samples. ...//..

Explicitly speaking, the DPRK has never enriched uranium nor rendered nuclear cooperation to any other country. It has never dreamed of such things.

Such things will not happen in the future, too.

Should the U.S. delay the settlement of the nuclear issue, persistently trying to cook up fictions, it will seriously affect the disabling of nuclear facilities which has been under way so far with a great deal of effort.

Source: KCNA, Pyongyang, 28 March 2008

<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2008/200803/news03/29.htm#1>

Interview With the Associated Press

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Jakarta, Indonesia

April 4, 2008...//..

QUESTION: Talk to us more generally. The United States also has nuclear weapons. Has that been ever brought up in your talks? Does it make it hard for you to argue that North Korea and Iran can't have nuclear weapons while the United States has so many?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I mean -- Frankly, you cannot begin to talk about the differences in the history and the country. So, no, in answer to you, it does not come up. What does come up from time as the North Koreans say, "Well, country X has nuclear weapons, why can't we?" Well, the fact is, if you look at you look at Northeast Asia, if you look at the Korean Peninsula, you can pretty quickly -- I think within a few seconds, frankly -- understand why it's very dangerous, very destabilizing for North Korea to be holding on the nuclear weapons. So, what of the thinking that country X or country Y or country Z has nuclear weapons, and why can't they? The fact of the matter is, it's very destabilizing, and frankly it is hurting North Korea profoundly. And I hope that they will come to understand that and give this thing up and get on with life.

QUESTION: But the United States would never give up theirs. Why is that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I think it's a broad question. But the whole issue of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the role of a nuclear states under Article VI to begin a process of reducing arsenals, this is something we actually worked on with the Soviet Union and then with the Russians. So, you know, there has been some build-down in arsenals, and I am sure in the future as we continue to work with other nuclear states, there'll also be build-down.

But I would really caution you in thinking this is somehow related to the fact that we have a country, North Korea, that has a myriad of problems and yet here they are trying to develop nuclear weapons

QUESTION: Let's talk about rising rice prices here in East Asia. ...//..

Source: State Department, Washington, 4 April 2008
<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2008/04/102967.htm>

Progress Cited in Korea Nuclear Talks Impasse

By Choe Sang-Hun

April 9, 2008

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea and the United States made significant progress on Tuesday toward ending an impasse in talks aimed at revealing the full scale of the North's nuclear weapons programs and dismantling them, top negotiators from both countries said. ...//..

Under a February 2007 agreement, North Korea agreed to give a complete accounting of its nuclear activities by the end of last year. It has said that it fulfilled its commitment last November. But Washington insists that North Korea failed to clarify whether it had pursued a secret uranium-enrichment program in addition to its known weapons program based on plutonium and whether it has provided nuclear technology to countries like Syria.

North Korea has repeatedly denied having a uranium-enrichment program or providing nuclear expertise or materials to Syria. But Mr. Hill has been trying to get North Korea to at least acknowledge such the validity of such suspicions, according to officials in Seoul, who spoke on the condition of anonymity given the delicacy of the talks.

Source: New York Times, 9 April 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/09/world/asia/09korea.html?ex=136548000&en=9f7cd36c7f7ef5cd&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>

U.S., N.Korea 'Agree' on Nuke Declaration

The U.S. and North Korea on Tuesday reached tentative agreement on the declaration of the North's nuclear programs, an issue that has been shelved for more than three months. The top nuclear negotiators of the two countries were meeting in Singapore. ...//..

In their meeting, the two sides reportedly agreed on wording in the declaration, which will not be released to the public, regarding suspicions about the North's uranium enrichment program and transfer of nuclear technology to Syria. A diplomatic source said, "The wording in the declaration will probably persuade the U.S. Congress." ...//..

Source: Chosun Ilbo, Seoul, 9 April 2008

<http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200804/200804090003.html>

Republicans hit at US deal with N Korea

By Demetri Sevastopulo and Daniel Dombey in Washington

Tuesday Apr 15 2008 19:40

Senior Republicans on Tuesday criticised a tentative US deal with North Korea that would allow Pyongyang to avoid revealing the full extent of its nuclear -programmes as part of a broader agreement towards denuclearising the Korean peninsula.

Christopher Hill, the senior US envoy on North Korea, last week briefed the House on a deal that would see North Korea "acknowledge", in a secret document, US allegations about nuclear proliferation to Syria and a possible rudimentary uranium-enrichment programme.

Under the deal, still being finalised, North Korea would provide a full declaration of only its plutonium programme, which produced the nuclear weapon it tested in 2006.

Critics have accused the administration of backtracking on previous assurances that Pyongyang would have to reveal the full extent of its past nuclear activities to complete the second stage of the six-party agreement that would also result in the lifting of US sanctions...//..

Gordon Flake, a Korean expert and executive director of the Mansfield Foundation, said that while the original framework for the deal was "solid", the latest arrangement "turns

the whole idea of a declaration on its head" because instead of providing a full declaration, North Korea would simply "acknowledge" US allegations.

One congressional aide who supports negotiations with North Korea said House members were "underwhelmed" by the briefing they had received from Mr Hill.

He said the agreement reached with Pyongyang "appeared to allow the North Koreans to evade the obligation to provide the complete and accurate declaration".

He added that Congress was likely to become more involved in the debate as the next stage of the so-called six-party process would require congressional action, including providing a waiver to the Glenn amendment, which would prohibit the US from providing assistance to North Korea because it had tested a nuclear bomb two years ago

Source: Financial Times, 15 April 2008

http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news_id=fto041520082049339021

IAEA to probe Syria atomic plant report

Mark Heinrich , Reuters

Published: Friday, April 25, 2008

VIENNA - The U.N. nuclear watchdog pledged on Friday to investigate whether Syria secretly built an atomic reactor with North Korean help but criticised the United States for delaying the release of intelligence.

The United States revealed its intelligence material on Thursday about the suspected Syrian atomic plant, saying it was "nearing operational capability" a month before Israeli warplanes bombed it on Sept. 6.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, lambasted Israel for the air strike, saying his inspectors should have been able to verify beforehand whether undeclared nuclear activity had been going on.

In light of (this, I) view the unilateral use of force by Israel as undermining the due process of verification that is at the heart of the non-proliferation regime," he said. ...//..

A diplomat close to the Vienna-based agency expressed anger at the delay. "There is a lot of annoyance here about the lateness in the day that the IAEA got this information. Had this been given to the IAEA before this damn bombing, then the world might know the true story," the diplomat said.

"Even right after the bombing, before the place was totally cleaned up, it would have been easier." ...//..

The diplomat and analysts said the U.S. disclosure did not amount to proof of an illicit nuclear arms programme since there was no sign of a reprocessing plant needed to convert spent fuel from the plant into bomb-grade plutonium.

"The absence of such facilities gives little confidence that the reactor was part of an active nuclear weapons programme," David Albright and Paul Brannan of the Institute for Science and International Security said in an email commentary. .../..

Syria likens the U.S. allegations to those made against Iraq about weapons of mass destruction that were never found. It accused the United States of colluding in Israel's air strike.

"The U.S. administration was apparently party to the execution" of the air raid, a Syrian government statement said, without giving details. A U.S. official said Washington did not give Israel any "green light" to strike the area. .../..

Source: Reuters in Canada.com, 25 April 2008
<http://www.canada.com/topics/news/world/story.html?id=019bbf14-96b0-42ed-aeffb-d5d2e073db9b&k=13268>

FAQ: What did Israel bomb?

The Guardian, Friday April 25 2008

Do the new US pictures prove Syria was building a nuclear reactor?

Not definitively. The new pictures do strengthen the impression that a reactor was being built before the Israeli air raid last September, but there remain questions about the provenance of the pictures and the timing of their publication, with the experience of Iraq in mind. Analysts at the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear watchdog, question why there is no sign of security measures around the site, and say the building does not seem high enough for a reactor.../..

Is there anything significant about the timing of the release of the new pictures?

Yes, it comes at a very sensitive moment in negotiations over the North Korean nuclear programme, which could take Pyongyang off the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. Some analysts have suggested the release of the pictures could be an attempt by Washington hawks led by Dick Cheney to derail that deal.

Source: The Guardian, London, 25 April 2008
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/25/israelandthepalestinians.usa>

Skepticism toward Bush claims about Syria and North Korea

Many media accounts simply repeat uncritically the rather dubious accusations of the administration.

Glenn Greenwald

Apr. 25, 2008

There are multiple reasons why substantial skepticism is warranted concerning the Bush administration's claims that the structure which Israeli jets destroyed inside Syria last September was a nuclear reactor Syria was developing with the aid of North Korea. Such skepticism, however, is difficult to find in most (though not all) American press accounts, which do little other than repeat Government claims without challenge. ...//..

Beyond the lack of evidence supporting the Israeli and American claims that "Syria was close to completing the physical reactor," there are multiple other reasons for skepticism. This article by David Sanger in The New York Times references several of them, including the fact that "senior intelligence officials acknowledged that the evidence had left them with no more than 'low confidence' that Syria was preparing to build a nuclear weapon" and some of the photographs in the video presentation 'seemed to go back to before 2002.'"

There are all sorts of reasons beyond those for extreme skepticism here. After flamboyantly announcing that they had actual video of North Korean nuclear scientists inside the Syrian building, it turned out that the "video" was merely a compilation of rather unrevealing still photographs patched together, in Colin-Powell-at-the-UN fashion, with ominous narration making accusations with a level of certainty completely unmatched by the "evidence" itself. The one "smoking gun" photograph from the video -- the alleged North Korean head of that country's reactor fuel plant standing in Syria (in a sweat suit) posing next to the head of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission -- seems to raise more questions than it resolves:

If two countries are engaged in a highly covert and nefarious program to build nuclear weapons, are their leading nuclear officials really going to pose together outdoors for a smiling, casual, tourist-like photograph? At the very least, that photograph -- touted as the most direct evidence -- hardly constitutes compelling or even minimally convincing evidence of the administration's accusations. To the contrary, the whole episode reminds one of Howard Dean's prescient reaction to the Colin Powell U.N. slideshow, which Dean delivered in a speech on February 17, 2003 at Drake University:

Secretary Powell's recent presentation at the UN showed the extent to which we have Iraq under an audio and visual microscope. Given that, I was impressed not by the vastness of evidence presented by the Secretary, but rather by its sketchiness...//..

Source: Salon.com, 25 April 2008

<http://archive.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2008/04/25/syria/print.html>

The curious Syrian nuclear affair Financial Times editorial

Just over five years ago, a US secretary of state, Colin Powell, made more than two dozen claims to the United Nations Security Council about Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. In the build-up to war, many found it a compelling performance. But

all Mr Powell's assertions were subsequently shown to be without foundation. He might as well have shown the world a video game.

Not long after that, Israel started hawking "evidence" uncovered by its spies that Saddam Hussein had moved his WMD to Syria. It got some takers – but nothing more has been heard of this chimera.

Thursday's Central Intelligence Agency presentation to the US Congress – making the case that North Korea supplied Syria with a nuclear reactor able to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons – was also compelling. It would also appear to justify retroactively the Israeli air strike on the site in Syria's eastern desert last September. But given the US and Israel's recent record in these matters, it could also be just another dog and pony show.

Taken purely on its own terms, the US claim raises many questions. Where was Damascus going to get the fissile fuel for this alleged reactor? Where was the plutonium separator, or reprocessing facility for spent fuel? Where is the evidence for a weaponisation programme? Why, moreover, did the US (and Israeli air force) bypass the IAEA, the UN's nuclear watchdog?..//..

This affair is very odd. The CIA's decision to go public now backs Pyongyang into a corner at a critical moment in the six-power talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament – leading some to detect the hand of Bush administration hawks such as Dick Cheney...//..

Source: Financial Times, London, 25 April 2008

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/731b1f0e-1307-11dd-8d91-0000779fd2ac.html?nclick_check=1

North Korea and the Chimera in the Syrian Desert

Gavan McCormack

Did the month of April bring us nearer to the so-much desired grand bargain settlement on North Korea? The Singapore agreement between the US and North Korea on 8 April seemed to do so, resolving the key plutonium issue so that North Korea would disable its Yongbyon reactor and seal its plutonium wastes in preparation to handing them over, and establishing broad agreement on the size of those stocks (for North Korea, 30 kgs, which it has expressed readiness to prove by opening its records, and for the US, "between 30 and 40 kgs"). On the other issues - uranium enrichment and proliferation - North Korea would admit nothing, but the US would state its "concerns" and North Korea acknowledge them. This "declaration" process would complete the second phase of the Beijing agreement and open the path to the third and final stage - the grand peninsula settlement. The State Department mission to Pyongyang that followed was assumed to be working on the fine detail, bringing the two countries to the brink of reconciliation, and therefore offering the prospect of relief for the poor and hungry citizens of the North.

Suddenly on 24 April, however, the White House intervened to pour cold water on such hopes, accusing North Korea of nuclear proliferation by aiding Syria to construct a graphite-moderated nuclear reactor with a probable weapons purpose. ...//..

For the Syrian proliferation issue to have been raised as it was late in April, just as other issues were resolved and with North Korea on the brink of coming in from the cold, was to repeat the common pattern of the Bush administration: that the bar be raised whenever a solution seemed imminent. South Korea's president, Lee Myung Bak, hosted by President Bush at Camp David just on the eve of this latest policy switch, must be presumed to have known of the US shift, whether or not he actively encouraged it.

The beleaguered Bush administration seemed to be either reverting to earlier "regime change" policies or possibly seeking a face-saving, diplomatic cover to allow it to claim a diplomatic triumph in East Asia to make up for the disasters elsewhere. After years of futile attempts to pin responsibility on North Korea for multiple crimes and breaches, the proliferation card, strongly urged by Israel, may have seemed the best card left. ...//..

Gavan McCormack is an emeritus professor of Australian National University, a coordinator of *Japan Focus*, and author of the just published *Client State: Japan in the American Embrace*

Source: Kyunghyang Shinmun, Seoul, 6 May 2008

http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=200805051800035&code=990309

Other news

The N.Y. Philharmonic in North Korea: Symbology and the Music

By Anne Midgette
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, February 26, 2008; Page C04

Today, the New York Philharmonic is playing a concert in Pyongyang, North Korea. This is an unprecedented event, and the media are making sure that the world knows it. In the weeks since the impending concert was announced in December, we have been treated to the spectacle of music pundits enjoying a chance to sound off on politics, with indignant authority, strong opinions and very little actual knowledge.

On one side of the debate are those who aver that the New York Philharmonic should not be dignifying the Kim Jong Il administration with its presence. The other side maintains that this North Korea performance, which will be broadcast nationally on North Korean television and in this country by PBS, is an act of cultural diplomacy, proving that music is a universal language with the ability to spread peace and harmony (think Leonard Bernstein going to Moscow with the Philharmonic in 1959).

The problem with this argument is that it partakes of the idea that we, the noble West, are going to bring the good things of classical music to the benighted North Koreans. This attitude is all too familiar in classical music in general: It is the same well-meaning approach that gives so many outreach programs their tinge of benevolent didacticism, the tone of a conductor speaking cheerfully on a podium to educate his or her audience.

And another problem with this argument is that, like many opinions, it is not informed by facts. For there is evidence that North Korea does actually have a considerable music life.

"In the State Symphony of North Korea, they do Tchaikovsky from memory," says Suzannah Clarke, a British opera singer who has performed frequently in North Korea. She adds, "The Philharmonic could probably learn a thing or two." ..//..

Asia is a hotbed of Western classical music. This passion has evidently not bypassed North Korea. Much of the West harbors images of North Koreans as either wealthy soldiers or starving peasants. But in Vienna, Austria, there is another image of them: as conducting students. The elite conducting class at the University of Music and Performing Arts there has trained no fewer than 17 North Korean students in the past decade. ..//..

"The next batch," Stringer said, "knew what to expect. They were so prepared they could nail every single bit of our ferociously difficult entrance exam."

The students also do not fulfill anyone's expectations of politically guarded wards of the state. "They have a completely normal experience," Stringer says. "Once they're in the walls of the school, politics disappear. There is no breathing down our necks from the North Korean officials." He describes the students as generally more open, easygoing and funny than their South Korean counterparts.

"Were they to be allowed to stay in the West," he says, "a number of the ones I've seen would have a serious chance of a prominent international career. It's phenomenal what they come to Vienna knowing how to do."

This is not a picture of North Korea that anybody in the United States, even the music press, tends to espouse. Nor would many pundits imagine the scene Stringer describes when North and South Korean students presented a joint concert of their music in December 2006, and both ambassadors were invited. Prepared for tension and hostility, the organizers were shocked when the ambassadors chatted happily together, walked companionably to the reception with their wives, and continued their lively conversation over glasses of beer. ..//..

Source: Washington Post, 26 February 2008

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/25/AR2008022502621.html>

'34 Percent of Army Cadets Regard US as Main Enemy'

By Kim Yon-se

Staff Reporter

A poll shows that 34 percent of first-year army cadets called the United States the main enemy of South Korea, a former superintendent of the Korea Military Academy (KMA) said.

Kim Choong-bae, president of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, disclosed a past survey of 250 KMA entrants to single out "the country's main enemy" while serving as the military academy's superintendent in 2004.

Kim was quoted by a newspaper as saying, "While the majority ? or 34 percent ? picked the U.S., 33 percent said they regarded North Korea as the main enemy."

He said the result was unbelievable, stressing the respondents were those who were supposed to be military officers. The KMA did not make the result public during the Roh Moo-hyun administration, which ended last February...//..

Kim hinted that he had been forced not to notify the public of the result, expressing uneasiness about contents of some high and middle schools textbooks.

Citing his meeting with the 250 cadet freshmen, the military expert argued that the hostile sentiment against the "ally" is due to "inappropriate" education in schools.

In addition, according to a survey of a group of conscripted soldiers conducted by the Ministry of Defense, about 75 percent of them said they have anti-U.S. sentiment.

Various polls on college students or elementary school students have shown that major enemies of South Korea include North Korea, Japan and the U.S.

Meanwhile, North Korea had been found to label the U.S. and Japan as its main enemies. There has been no document or official commentaries from Pyongyang which describe South Korea as the main enemy of the North.

North Korea had reportedly defined the U.S. a "mortal enemy" and Japan a "longstanding enemy," some military officials said.

Source: Korea Times, Seoul, 6 April 2008

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/04/116_22029.html

Nosotek: First European software firm based in DPRK

“Nosotek is the first European-invested software development & research company in the DPRK, with the head office in Pyongyang.” - Interview with Mr. Ju Jong Chol (Vice-President of Nosotek)

Klaus-Martin Meyer: Mr. Ju, you are the Vice President of a very interesting company named Nosotek (www.nosotek.com). Could you please tell us something about this venture?

Ju Jong Chol: Nosotek is the first European-invested software development & research company in the DPRK, with the head office in Pyongyang.

It is founded by the General Federation of Science and Technology (GFST) of DPRK and experienced European IT-entrepreneurs. Felix Abt, the president of the European Business Association (www.eba-pyongyang.org) is one of Nosotek’s directors.

Nosotek is jointly run by European IT engineers together with their Korean counterparts. We have presently 50 engineers and a strong production line. We expect rapid growth thanks to our qualified, experienced and committed staff.

Klaus-Martin Meyer: What are Nosotek’s main products?

Ju Jong Chol: As we specialize on offshore IT outsourcing services we already have produced a large range of software products. Among our finished products, you find scientific software, video games, web applications, embedded software and 3D virtualization tools.

In case our customer needs a field of service where we don’t have experienced engineers in our own staff, the GFST will help us finding good people among the scientists of the universities. We can rely on sustainable DPRK and European engineering and business resources.

Klaus-Martin Meyer: The DPRK is not the Silicon Valley or Bangalore. What are the customer’s benefits to do Business with Nosotek?

Ju Jong Chol: Of course, we’re not Silicon Valley or Bangalore. But we take the challenge to compete with these locations. The DPRK government took the strategic decision to give strong support to our IT industry which now bears fruits.

In the DPRK, software engineers have an average academic math level superior to their western or Indian counterparts.

Computer science education involves understanding of deep low level processes: when was the last time you hired a PHP programmer to realize he was quite at ease in assembler?

Klaus-Martin Meyer: Outsourcing to Asia is often identified with a risk of IP leak. Many western companies are complaining that after outsourcing their partners start copying their technology.

Ju Jong Chol: Then they are all invited to do their outsourcing projects in the DPRK! Our country is well known to have strong laws to protect secrets and we respect the value of IPs. And unlike what is common in other countries like China, there is only very little fluctuation of the workforce. Like in Japanese companies, our employees usually enter the company after university and stay their entire business life with the high personal motivation. This does not only help to keep trade secrets, it also helps to keep the experienced persons, who are needed for long-term partnership...//..

Source: North Korea Economy Watch 20 April 2008, reposted from <http://www.interview-blog.de>
<http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2008/04/20/nosotek-first-european-software-firm-based-in-dprk/>

News from New Zealand

NZ teacher returns to Pyongyang

Christchurch based primary school teacher, Tim Kearns, is spending May in Pyongyang teaching in local schools and offering teacher training using NZ methodology.

This is the second time Tim has been invited to share his expertise with Korean colleagues. While in Pyongyang Tim will be discussing further possibilities for NZ teachers to spend professional time in the DPRK.

DPRK scholars to study in NZ?

A DPRK senior scholars study programme based with the Waikato Institute of Technology,(WINTEC) Hamilton, NZ, is currently under consideration by authorities both in the DPRK and NZ.

In late June a WINTEC officer, Richard Lawrence, presently in China, is expected in Pyongyang, to advise on protocols and future progress.

While in Pyongyang it is hoped that Richard will also meet and discuss with the Korean Christian Federation the consolidation of friendly relations with the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ.

Joint study of migratory birds

Migratory birds whose international flights include NZ , the DPRK and Alaska will be the subject of a Joint DPRK NZ ornithological study during the coming year. It is hoped that a joint research group will be on site in the DPRK, May, 2009 for the observation of transitory birds landing and departing on their epic flight.

Colloquium on DPRK-NZ relations

The NZ DPRK Society is presently negotiating with NZ Government authorities, and university based strategic policy groups with the intention of convening in 2009 a Track Two Colloquium on current and future policy and relationships between the DPRK and NZ. It is hoped that special attention will be given to agriculture, education, economic joint ventures and technology including IT.

NZ-DPRK Society urges emergency aid

The NZ DPRK Society is currently asking the NZ Government to make further emergency food grants to NGOs ,including WFP, in response to the food crisis in the DPRK.

Contributions invited

Persons wishing to contribute in kind or cash to the work of the Society, its projects, including this newsletter, are invited to contact the Project Officer, Rev Stuart Vogel, 74 Parau St., Mt. Roskill, Auckland 1041. s.vogel@xtra.co.nz

Further information may be obtained from: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~caplabtb/dprk/>

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