

His Excellency

Roh Moo-Hyun

President of the Republic
of Korea

The U.S.-Republic of Korea Alliance and the Situation on the Korean Peninsula

I would naturally assume that your primary interest lies in the North Korean nuclear weapons issue as well as the bi-lateral relationship between Korea and the United States. With regard to the U.S.-Korean alliance relationship issue it is fair to say with certainty that things in that area have been unfolding very smoothly and I therefore feel that there's no need for me to allow special time for speaking on that issue at length. However, I would like to take this opportunity today to share my honest thoughts with you with regard to the North Korean nuclear issue. Our commitment to a denuclearized Korean peninsula is [clear,] and it is our position that a North Korean nuclear capability should by no means be tolerated. This issue must be resolved peacefully through the six-party policy.

The success of the six-party talks is premised on the first decision on the part of North Korea. That is an issue that we have together been advocating and making a case for, for quite some time. But, of course, it is always true that there are certain aspects on which we must work, there are certain areas on which we must focus, in order to induce North Korea to make that firm decision. It is true that even among the countries party to the six-party talks, as well as within Korea and within the United States, there admittedly exist certain doubts and differences regarding how we should resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, and these differences complicate a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue to a considerable extent. It is true that certain questions have been raised over time: will North Korea in fact abandon its development of nuclear weapons? Is North Korea worthy of being regarded as an acceptable counterpart in a dialogue setting? Is it possible that it will in fact be regarded as such? And finally, will North Korea make good on its promises?

I wish to share with you my honest views on my position as well as the position of the Korean government on these questions. The assistance of the members of the six-party talks, and the rest of the world for that matter, are absolutely essential for North Korea to develop its own economy. In particular, in the absence of help from China, Russia and Korea, North Korea would become extremely hard pressed to maintain even its current level of existence.

The fact of the matter is that all these countries are vehemently opposed to the idea of the nuclear weapons that North Korea has. Notwithstanding various efforts to the contrary, if North Korea refuses to relinquish its nuclear weapons it will find that it can no longer expect assistance from Korea, China and Russia, let alone the United States and the Western world. To me, it would appear that this possibility would, in and of itself, suffice to compel North Korea to forego its nuclear weapons.

My answer to the question of whether North Korea is truly intent on reforming and opening itself is yes

My answer to the question of whether North Korea is truly intent on reforming and opening itself is yes. Multiple indications are suggested by the strong commitment to that effect. It is evidently the case that North Korea has already embraced a large measure of the market economy and has reached a point from which there is no turning back. In fact, it is also quite evident that North Korea is vigorously committed to the goal of furthering and enhancing exchange and cooperation between the two Koreas. Yet, since reform and opening can be internally disquieting, unsettling, and even perilous for the regime if too swift, North Korea has reason to be leery of threats emanating from the outside. A more reasonable analysis would view North Korea's fastidious conditions and intransigence as deriving more from a purposeful attempt to solicit assurances for the security of its regime from potential risks that might

arise in the force of accommodating change, rather than as a message that nuclear weapons will not be renounced.

What could North Korea possibly wish to accomplish with nuclear weapons? North Korea is most likely abundantly aware that nuclear weapons could not be seen or viewed

North Korea professes that nuclear capabilities are a deterrent for defending itself from external aggression. In many cases, it is true that North Korea's claims and allegations are quite hard to believe and to give credit to. However, in this particular case it is true and undeniable

that there is a considerable element of rationality in North Korea's claims.

I recall having used a different expression in this particular paragraph; however, I feel that my staff and my secretaries thought that was a far too sensitive and delicate an issue, and so they provided me with a

sensitive to the fact that the American people are very resistant or less receptive to the expression "rationality" as being used [with regard to] North Korea. That is why Korea finds itself in a position where it must eschew use of the expression "rationality" while at the same time seeking to convey the very same message. Excuse me for having digressed a bit from the original subject. What I wish to say is that North Korea's nuclear weapon pursuits should not be viewed as an instrument to be used in the service of attacking someone else or to be used in assisting terrorist groups. Sure enough, we can always assume the worst; that is to say, no one can predict with certainty the course of action with which North Korea would seek recourse if it was subject to armed attack or if it deems its system is being driven to crisis by outside influence leaving it no other means by which to defend itself. On the contrary, it will abandon its nuclear weapons if it can discover that its security will in fact be assured and that its reforms and opening will succeed.

In the end, the North Korean nuclear issue hinges on a strategic decision as to whether or not North



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as progressive action of any kind. Moreover, it probably fully recognizes the fact that it not only has absolutely nothing to gain from nuclear weapons, but that possession of them would only be to their own ruin. There are ample reasons to suspect that North Korea has already developed nuclear weapons or that it is in pursuit of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the exports of missiles and the technologies for producing them might give rise for concern from many countries. Yet, North Korea has neither perpetrated acts of terror nor engaged in assisting in them since 1987. In fact, we are unable to find even today any evidence of their links to terrorist organizations.

revised text. If I recall correctly, the original term that I employed was not "rationality." I feel rationality is not an expression that would be considered appropriate in this case, but I'll try to discover the original expression that I used and get back to you.

My staff members are pondering very hard this issue in view of the fact that it is extremely delicate and sensitive. If my memory serves me right, I feel that part of my original message was that, in view of the various circumstances surrounding the situation, North Korea's claim does make sense to a certain extent. The situation that complicates the position of Korea is that Korea needs to be very

North Korea is most likely abundantly aware that nuclear weapons could not be seen or viewed as progressive action of any kind

Korea should be offered security assurances as well as a chance to ride out the existing predicament through reform and opening. All the other

myriad items on the table are mere technical issues.

This leads me to my next point concerning whether North Korea should be regarded as an acceptable counterpart for dialogue. This is something that is ultimately intertwined with the earlier question of whether North Korea genuinely seeks to reform and open itself. I see no reason for us to reject dialogue in the event that North Korea is prompted by an evolving market economy and an improvement in the human rights situation to embark on the same path as China and Vietnam. One would do well to recall that the United States and China engaged in détente despite the adversarial ambiance of the Cold War in the 1970s, eventually establishing diplomatic ties.

Finally, this brings us to the question of whether North Korea will in fact abide by its word. Such mistrust is entirely warranted in the face of suspicion that it possesses a uranium enrichment program. But the question of whether or not North Korea will live up to its pledge is essentially a matter of trust, and in this regard there is a need for mutual effort aimed at preventing misunderstandings. Since the sense of distrust was nurtured over decades of antipathy, removing it will necessarily take immense time, patience and bona fide efforts. Promises will be kept once trust is built through dialogue and when they feel sanguine about the prospects for the viability of their regime and a better life. Irrespective of my assurances, ladies and gentlemen, I suspect it is difficult

for you to readily develop faith in North Korea, but without trust there can be no dialogue, and one must ask oneself in a coolheaded manner whether any practical alternative to dialogue actually exists when it comes to resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.

As the nation that has built the Korea of today from the ashes of yesterday, we should not be asked to risk the trauma of war again

Before the six-party talks, the idea of applying force against North Korea had been broached in certain circles. The Korean people are reminded of war when they hear talk of exercising the force of arms. For the Korean people and the Korean citizenry it pertains to a question of surviving. The collective anxiety felt by Korea, having experienced the principle of war, can be rather different from the sentiment of the American people. The affliction of the Korean War half a century ago continues to rankle to this day and has yet to be overcome. As the nation that has built the Korea of today from the ashes of yesterday, we should not be asked to risk the trauma of war again. This is precisely why the utility of

force as a negotiating leverage is inevitably circumscribed. I trust that the United States will respect the hard reality confronting us Koreans. The notion of a containment policy could, admittedly, be entertained, but this is by no means an advisable course, for it will merely prolong the precarious and menacing state of affairs. Apparently there are some who wish to see a collapse, but this too will reap tremendous havoc on the Korean people. There simply is no guarantee that North Korea will not resort to a perilous option.

In the final analysis, there are no alternatives to dialogue and the United States has already entered the path to dialogue. For its part, North Korea, despite initial resistance, has been taking part in the six-party talks and has made out a proposal that represents a significant step forward. We must, without question, ensure the success of the six-party talks. The North Korean nuclear issue must be brought expeditiously to a settlement. I hope that the will of the American government and the American people can be brought together in unison to assure this outcome. This is the strong hope of the Korean people that it wishes to communicate to the citizens of its one and only ally, the United States. It will also be the single most critical factor in promoting an even closer relationship between Korea and the United States.

Let me renew my appreciation to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council for organizing this meaningful event and close by asking for your support.

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