

# U.S.-North Korea Nuclear Crisis Intensifies

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The nuclear standoff between North Korea and the U.S. has intensified in recent weeks as the war on Iraq has begun to wind down. Talks in April involving the U.S., North Korea and China ended abruptly amid stern warnings from both sides.

Pyongyang says it is still willing to end its nuclear program, if the U.S. agrees to a long-term peace treaty.

Washington insists that it too seeks a diplomatic solution. However, the New York Times revealed that a classified memo by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld calls for "regime change" in North Korea. An Australian newspaper reported that the Pentagon has drawn up detailed plans for bombing North Korea's nuclear plant in Yongbyon.

The Bush administration is apparently divided over whether to use diplomacy or military action to resolve its differences with North Korea. But its actions have undermined efforts for permanent peace on the Korean peninsula, and have made the possibility of nuclear conflict frighteningly real.

## BUSH REJECTS PEACE

While North Korea recently violated its non-proliferation commitments and the 1994 Agreed Framework, U.S. vio-

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*North Korea has been seeking negotiations and a non-aggression pact with the U.S. since last fall.*

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lations are also at the core of the current crisis. In 1994, the U.S. agreed to "provide formal assurances" to North Korea "against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the U.S."



Antiwar protest in South Korea. Chung Sung-jun/Getty Images

The Clinton administration never gave that assurance. The Bush administration then labeled North Korea as part of the "axis of evil," identified it as a target for pre-emptive military strike, and revealed plans to develop new nuclear weapons to strike North Korean targets.

North Korea has been seeking negotiations with the U.S. since the conflict first erupted last fall. However, Bush's long-time refusal to negotiate and the terrifying precedent set by its unilateral attack against Iraq have only emboldened North Korean hardliners. They are now convinced that only a significant military deterrent will prevent an attack by the U.S.

## NO EVIDENCE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

There is disagreement in the international community over North Korea's

current nuclear capabilities. North Korea has been vague on the matter. Washington suggests that the country could already possess several nuclear weapons and missiles that could strike California. But in April 2003 South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun said that there was "no clear evidence they have nuclear weapons," --echoing the general consensus among many experts. The Federation of American Scientists describes North Korea's missile launching capabilities as "primitive."

However, many fear that even if North Korea does not possess nuclear weapons now, the administration's foreign policy approach, based on the doctrine of pre-emptive strike, is driving countries like North Korea to build them. This dangerous game of nuclear brinkmanship endangers the lives of millions of people.

## U.S. EMPIRE AND EAST ASIA

Why has the administration targeted North Korea?

As with Iraq, there is a bigger goal lurking behind the rhetoric of weapons of mass destruction, evil leaders and links to terrorism: building U.S. global power. Just as the invasion of Iraq is about controlling oil, demonizing North Korea is important to maintaining and extending U.S. global dominance in the world's most populous region.

The escalating tension with North Korea has strengthened the U.S.'s political justification for maintaining military bases and 100,000 troops in South Korea and Japan. This is especially important because the people of both countries increasingly have questioned the U.S. presence.

Furthermore, China is the main potential economic and military challenger to U.S. dominance in Asia. "Raising U.S. military strength in East Asia

is key to coping with the rise of China to great-power status," reports the Project for a New American Century, whose

defense." Deployment could trigger a new arms race with China and Russia, and is a boon to military contractors.

## POSSIBILITIES FOR PEACE

For decades after the armistice ended the Korean War in 1953, U.S.-Korea rela-



tions were frozen in Cold War enmity and distrust. The Demilitarized Zone that divided Korea into North and South became one of the most militarized and dangerous places in the world, and a painful reminder to the millions of families separated by the division. Without a permanent peace treaty, North and South Korea

are technically still at war with each other. In the aftermath of the Cold War, there was significant progress toward peace. North Korea welcomed South Korea's "Sunshine Policy," initiated under the former President Kim Dae Jung. The policy led to an unprecedented engagement between the divided Korean people, including the historic and emotionally charged June 2000 North-South Summit. Many began to talk openly about reunification in the near future.

North Korea also reached out to the international community. In negotiations with the Clinton administration, North Korea was willing to give up its nuclear and ballistic missile program—in exchange for financial aid and a pledge by the U.S. to end hostilities. In 2002, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il even met with the prime minister of Japan and confronted the painful legacy of Japanese colonization and deep-seated mutual animosity. This was a promising beginning of a new era.

Last December, Koreans reaffirmed their desire for peaceful reunification when they elected a liberal candidate, Roh Moo Hyun, president of South Korea. Roh's winning platform favored open and positive relations with the North, and echoed the intense anti-U.S. sentiment sweeping the South. In December, tens of thousands of Koreans demonstrated in Seoul opposing U.S. military presence.

But the Bush administration has been critical of the North-South engagement and has taken a hostile stance toward the North Korean government. Facing Washington's policy of threats, North Korea turned to exploring the development of nuclear weapons as a deterrent to U.S. designs on its sovereignty and survival.

There is a clear, peaceful solution to the current standoff with North Korea. Pyongyang is still willing to halt its nuclear weapons development program and satisfy U.S. security concerns — if the U.S. agrees to sign a peace treaty. Such a solution is in the best interest of not only the U.S. and North Korea, but of the entire planet.

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## *The conflict with North Korea is important to maintaining and extending U.S. global dominance in Asia.*

members include senior Bush administration officials.

The Bush administration also wants to consolidate its military advantage over China by developing a national missile defense system. The head of the Arms Control Association explains that Bush's actions toward North Korea are "intended to preserve, and even enhance, the North Korea ballistic missile threat so that it can serve as the rationale for early deployment of a national missile

This information sheet is produced by **War Times**, a free national newspaper opposed to Bush's wars at home and abroad.

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Leaflet design by Andrew Siegal