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Pyongyang's Pressure

North Korea (DPRK) has been an inadvertent catalyst and the primary ostensible threat cited by Clinton administration officials as motivating the accelerated U.S. drive for an NMD program.[1] Despite limited progress in addressing nuclear issues through the U.S.-DPRK Geneva Agreed Framework of 1994, deep mistrust between the United States and North Korea has driven repeated cycles of tension followed by protracted negotiation. In the United States, the primary concerns continue to be about North Korean nuclear and missile development programs. North Korea's leadership expresses concern about the continued U.S.-led drive (along with increasingly sophisticated South Korean forces) for military modernization, including U.S. development of sophisticated missile defense systems, as an attempt to "dominate the world."[2]

North Korea's missile development and export efforts, when seen from Pyongyang's perspective, have been a primary source of hard-won foreign currency through exports to Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Libya. For North Korea, unconventional weapons development is also a relatively inexpensive means of maintaining deterrence by enhancing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) delivery capabilities against perceived enemies including the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The overt North Korean response to U.S. NMD development efforts has come primarily in the form of vitriolic media attacks against U.S. characterizations of North Korea's own missile development efforts as the primary driver for pursuing NMD. The North Korean media has also responded strongly to Japanese cooperative involvement in the development of theater missile defense (TMD).[3] The emer-

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gence of NMD as a major issue in the U.S.-North Korea relationship has complicated an apparent North Korean willingness to hold negotiations over missile exports and development, although both sides have yet to put forward realistic proposals necessary to give serious momentum to such a negotiation.

North Korean public reactions to U.S. NMD efforts predictably presume that NMD really is all about Pyongyang. This is not surprising, given the self-aggrandizing nature of the regime's propaganda and the fact that North Korea is indeed consistently named as the primary threat justifying the pace of NMD development efforts. North Korea's own unorthodox invitation to a missile negotiation with the United States in June 1998, the catalytic political impact of North Korea's August 1998 rocket launch on the U.S. political debate over NMD, and subsequent North Korean public comments through the spring of 2000, suggest that both sides have been talking past each other all along.

North Korea's Missile Gambit

North Korean missile development and export of the Hwasong (300- to 500-kilometer range) and No Dong (range of up to 1,300 kilometers) missiles, adapted from Scud technology, were most active during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. Yet it was North Korea's nuclear program, rather than its missile exports, which received paramount attention in the United States until the signing of the Geneva Agreed Framework.[4] That agreement froze known North Korean plutonium reprocessing activities and suspended construction of two large graphite-moderated reactors in return for U.S.-led provision of two proliferation-resistant 1,000 megawatt light-water reactors through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization. The Agreed Framework also indicated that the United States and North Korea would address other issues, including concerns about North Korean missiles, as part of a process of improving the bilateral relationship over time. Several sporadic unsuccessful rounds of missile negotiations with North Korea were led by then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Robert Einhorn in 1996 and 1997 without significant progress beyond a restatement of opening negotiating positions.

Two reports released during the summer of 1998 set the stage for a negative action-reaction cycle between North Korean missile development and U.S. NMD efforts. First, in an aggressively worded June commentary entitled "Nobody Can Slander the DPRK's Missile Policy," the North Korean government both foreshadowed its own progress in developing the multi-stage Taep'odong rocket and indirectly offered a renewed negotiation over

missiles with the United States. The commentary criticized U.S. assertions that North Korea, as a "leading missile power," should freeze the development and export of its missiles as a precondition for lifting of the U.S. economic embargo against the North. Upholding North Korean missile development efforts as a matter of sovereignty and self-defense against the "military threat from outside," the commentary ties negotiations over missile development to the signing of a U.S.-DPRK peace agreement and the removal of the "U.S. military threat." Second, the commentary states that DPRK "missile export is aimed at obtaining the foreign money we need at present," and demanded lifting economic sanctions as the price for a North Korean pledge to discontinue missile exports. The commentary essentially laid out an opening negotiating position (however unrealistic from a U.S. government perspective) over the price it would demand to give up its missile exports as well as missile development, and invited the United States to respond at the negotiating table.[5]

The Report of a Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States (the Rumsfeld Report), issued in July 1998, underscored the expansion of the ballistic missile threat and of the capacities to utilize ballistic missiles to deliver nuclear or biological weapons against the United States. In particular, it highlighted the fact that missile development by newer entrants to the field are harder to track because they are not following the old Soviet or Chinese path in developing ballistic missiles. There are a wider availability of relevant technologies and applications on the international market, and enhanced capabilities to conceal ballistic missile development programs from the view of the international community. North Korea (along with Iran) was accused of leading efforts to pursue ballistic missile capabilities, in particular by developng the long-range (up to 6,000 kilometers) Taep'odong 2 ballistic missile. The fact that North Korea subsequently launched a three-stage Taep'odong 1 missile (with a range of 2,500 to 4,000 kilometers) less than two months after the release of the report served as a major catalyst for the NMD effort. In addition, the launching fixed North Korea as the leading potential proliferant of ballistic missile technologies.[6]

North Korean Strategic Counterresponses

Thus far, there has been no public evidence of a strategic North Korean counterresponse to NMD other than to continue Pyongyang's own indigenous missile development efforts to reach the continental United States. Statements by U.S. intelligence officials suggest that North Korean efforts to develop longer-range Taep'odong missile capabilities have continued to re-

ceive top priority within North Korea's rather limited resource base. Yet, Pyongyang did provide an oral pledge in Berlin in September 1999 not to conduct additional missile tests concurrent with U.S.-DPRK negotiations over the North's missile program.[7] North Korea is deemed unlikely under current circumstances to give up a program that has so effectively garnered international attention disproportionate to North Korea's relative size and aggregate power. It is unlikely that development or deployment of the U.S. NMD will deter North Korean missile development efforts, which are useful to Pyongyang both for tactical negotiation objectives and the broader strategic purpose of maintaining deterrence.

The U.S. public debate over whether NMD is viable and leakproof against rogue military threats has provided North Korea with the guidebook for how to effectively respond to NMD. Richard Garwin, chairman of the Arms Control Advisory Committee of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, said in recent testimony before the U.S. Congress, "It [NMD] would have strictly zero capability against the much more realistic and important threat from North Korea, Iran, or Iraq—short-range cruise or ballistic missiles fired from merchant ships near U.S. shores, a nuclear weapon detonated in a harbor, or biological warfare agent disseminated in the U.S. from a ship in harbor."[8]

Presumably, a strategic counterresponse to NMD might include the expansion and reorientation of past North Korean special forces operations primarily directed against South Korea to focus on penetrating U.S. bases in the Asian theater and the continental United States.[9] This type of North Korean operation on a global scale has not been attempted for more than a decade. The prospect of a response that would jeopardize North Korea's increasing dependence on external resources from South Korea and the United States would constitute an extraordinarily risky and desperate (but not unimaginable) counterresponse, given North Korea's own post-Cold War isolation and economic weakness.

Response to the Taep'odong Test: How to Achieve Effective Deterrence?

North Korea's 1998 Taep'odong launch reshaped the Northeast Asian regional security agenda and complicated U.S.-DPRK nuclear negotiations designed to allay doubts about North Korea's adherence to its pledge not to develop nuclear weapons that had been raised by the discovery of a suspicious site at Keumchang'ri. These latter tensions were subsequently resolved by the initiation of a review of policy toward North Korea led by former Secretary of Defense William Perry and specifically by North Korea's willingness

to allow inspections of the site in question in return for several hundred thousand tons of U.S. food assistance.

Pyongyang's Taep'odong test launch demonstrated that the ballistic missile threat to the continental United States was potentially real but not immediate. U.S. intelligence about North Korea's program had succeeded in predicting the launch but had underestimated the level of technical capability North Korea would display. At the same time, the launch provided a benchmark for the intense political and technical debate in the United States over the timelines necessary for adequate testing and deployment.

North Korea's own assertions that the Taep'odong 1 launch was designed not to test a missile but rather to put a satellite in orbit (a claim later confirmed by the U.S. government) accomplished two things. It preserved a fig leaf of ambiguity regarding North Korea's intentions. And, as a failed satellite launch, it demonstrated that much work would be required before North Korea could effectively master the technical aspects of flight control and atmospheric reentry necessary to effectively target the continental United States using intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) technology (an effort that would require development and production of the Taep'odong 2, rather than the Taep'odong 1, which cannot reach the continental United States from North Korea). In testimony to Parliament, a senior Canadian defense official has succinctly suggested that currently the most dangerous threat from North Korean ICBMs is "that when they aim at Colorado Springs they may hit Toronto."[10] Yet, the mixed record of U.S. intelligence regarding the pace of North Korean missile development is not reassuring.

North Korea presumes that NMD really is all about Pyongyang.

In combination with deterrence, regional diplomatic activity has been more active in recent months in response to the specific challenge posed by North Korean missile development efforts. Perhaps most notable has been the trilateral (United States, South Korea, and Japan) coordination process initiated as part of the Perry Review. The review has made North Korea's pledge not to pursue further missile tests an essential prerequisite for enhanced engagement (along with North Korea's continued adherence to the Geneva Agreed Framework). One result has been that the North Koreans made an oral pledge to the United States in September 1999 in Berlin to forgo additional missile tests for the duration of U.S.-DPRK negotiations over the missile issue. In return, the United Stated pledged to lift economic sanctions against North Korea.

The Berlin statement marks a starting point for further missile negotia-

tions analogous to the limited understanding over nuclear issues that resulted from the initial U.S.-DPRK meeting held in May 1993, at which North Korea suspended its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for the duration of nuclear negotiations. Of course, the road to a nuclear agreement that followed nearly led to U.S.-DPRK confrontation in June 1994 and even now has come under criticism for failing to prevent alleged North Korean nuclear conversion. The Berlin pledges come close to restoring the status quo ante in U.S.-DPRK relations that had existed in the immediate aftermath of the Geneva Agreed Framework. At that time, a much larger sanctions-lifting effort by the United States had been implied by the Agreed Framework but was not forthcoming as a result of political concerns on the part of the Clinton administration in the aftermath of the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress. The Berlin statement has put a temporary brake on a possible second Taep'odong launch, leaving open the door to additional negotiations.

Will NMD Hit the Wrong Target?

Following North Korea's Berlin pledge, several rounds of meetings have been held to arrange for a higher-level exchange of officials and to follow through on North Korean pledges to continue regular U.S.-DPRK negotiations on nuclear and missile issues. Those talks have made little progress through three rounds held from November 1999 to March 2000 toward setting dates for a high-level visit or resuming U.S.-DPRK nuclear and missile negotiations. Meanwhile, the North Korean media has been unusually sensitive to high-level U.S. administration characterizations of North Korea as a threat and as a rationale for NMD.

North Korean officials have reacted negatively to the perceived double-standard of continued U.S. NMD testing while they have pledged a moratorium on North Korea's missile tests. Following the January NMD test, the spokesman for the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated,

> The DPRK and the U.S. are now negotiating a solution to the issues of common concern including the missile issue. … However, the U.S. conducted the test of a missile interceptor this time. It is one more grave challenge to the magnanimity and good faith shown by the DPRK in its efforts to settle the outstanding issues through negotiations. The U.S. behavior has compelled the DPRK to take our moratorium into serious consideration.[11]

The North Koreans have mistakenly assumed that NMD is indeed targeted at Pyongyang rather than a response to ballistic missile proliferation more broadly. One result is that Pyongyang's leadership has failed to understand

that U.S. NMD efforts may have been catalyzed by a North Korean threat but are not driven solely by North Korean missile development activities. According to Under Secretary of Defense Walter Slocombe, "Even if the North Korean threat were to disappear entirely, we would still be concerned about threats from other parts of the world."[12] Nonetheless, the action-reaction dynamic that has developed between NMD and North Korea's own missile development efforts suggests the risk that premature collision is more likely than accommodation.

Both sides seem to have been talking past each other all along.

One unintentional casualty of the political atmosphere surrounding the NMD development effort may indeed be the time necessary to see if North Korean and other missile development efforts can be constrained through negotiations. Such a strategy assumes, of course, that the United States itself would be willing to put an offer on the table. The offer would have to be sufficient to give North Korea something to lose, rather than simply demanding that the cash-strapped country voluntarily give up one of its primary foreign currency-earning exports as part of its duties as a global good citizen (a category for which North Korea consistently fails to qualify). At the same time, North Korea's demand of upwards of $1 billion to end exports totaling no more than $100 million annually is an equally outrageous starting position. Any potential bargain requires provisions that verify that North Korea's missile development capacity has been frozen.

Conclusion

North Korea's own hedging strategy against a decisive post-Cold War shift in the balance of power on the Korean peninsula has led to its pursuit of WMD development to compensate for the inability to keep pace with U.S. and South Korean weapons modernization—insurance against invasion from Pyongyang's precarious perspective. Yet such programs have perpetuated U.S. distrust and have ironically even become the catalyst for a U.S. global counterstrategy against the rising threat of ballistic missiles. This counterstrategy now takes the form of a global project that with a $12.7 billion budget (although some estimates suggest that the budget may nearly double to over $20 billion) is larger than the DPRK's total annual reported budget of $9 billion to $10 billion. North Korea's awkward, blustering efforts to extract economic concessions as a tangible assurance that the United States will support its regime survival have been widely misunderstood, resented, and rejected as extortion in Washington. Yet critics of Pyongyang's

strategy also can not imagine a state such as North Korea voluntarily giving up what is probably perceived as the "ace" that can assure survival and economic gain of an otherwise failed system. It should not be surprising that in such a context, and absent a greater basis for cooperation to overcome half a century of mistrust, North Korean missile development efforts and NMD might be the sparks that put the United States and North Korea back on a course toward rhetorical collision if not military confrontation.

Notes

1. See Walter Slocombe, "National Missile Defense," speech given at Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 5, 1999.
2. Associated Press, "North Korea Denounces U.S. Missile Defense System," February 22, 2000. See also William S. Cohen, "Rogue States Cannot Hope to Blackmail America or Her Allies," *Times* (London), March 1, 2000.
3. For one example, see BBC World Wide Monitoring, "North Korea Blasts Japanese-US Research into Theater Missile Defense," February 7, 2000 (based on KCNA Web site reports, February 6, 2000).
4. For a comprehensive review of recent developments in North Korean missile development efforts, see Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., "A History of Ballistic Missile Development in the DPRK," Occasional Paper no. 2, Monitoring Proliferation Threats Project of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, November 1999.
5. Korea Central News Agency, "Nobody Can Slander DPRK's (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Missile Policy: KCNA commentary," June 16, 1998 (quoted in English from BBC Summary of World Broadcasts).
6. "Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States," July 15, 1998, available on the Internet at http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/bm-threat.html.
7. See Cohen, "Rogue States Cannot Hope to Blackmail America or Her Allies."
8. Brad Glosserman, "Missile Defense Opens a Pandora's Silo," *Japan Times*, January 23, 2000.
9. See Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *North Korean Special Forces* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998).
10. Edward Alden, "U.S. Missiles Make Canada Defensive over Arms Control: Plans to Deploy Ballistic Missiles in Alaska Are Compromising Ottawa's Principles," *Financial Times*, March 1, 2000, 4.
11. Korea Central News Agency, "North Korea 'Compelled' to Reconsider Moratorium by U.S. Missile Test," January 22, 2000.
12. See Slocombe, "National Missile Defense."