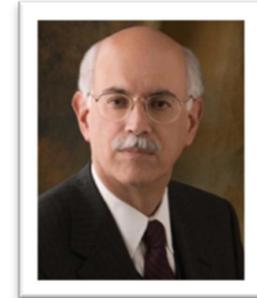


## KOREA CHAIR PLATFORM

## North Korea: A Different Perspective

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The succession drama following the death of Kim Jong Il in December has pushed North Korea back onto the center stage of media attention, but this public drama has obscured other more significant events in the reclusive state. Another food crisis has spread across the country over the past two years; though not as serious as the famine of the 1990's that killed as many as 2.5 million people. People are dying, but we do not know how many because of limited access. The crisis grew out of a poor harvest in 2010 and Pyongyang's disastrous currency manipulation scheme announced in December 2009 which wiped out people's savings they had kept to protect themselves against another food crisis. In December 2011 the United States government pledged 240,000 metric tons (MT) of food aid towards the UN appeal at the same time the US Special Envoy to North Korea, Steve Bosworth, announced that the US would resume six party nuclear talks, and acknowledged that the food aid offer would serve to demonstrate to the North Koreans "that they are getting something in return for the freeze in their nuclear activities." His comments connecting the nuclear issue with the food aid pledge resurrected the old debate over the connection of humanitarian assistance and nuclear proliferation.

Connecting the six party talks and the US food aid program pushes the US back on track to repeat the same mistakes made in the 1990's when the US government (USG) used food aid in the middle of a famine to coax North Korea to the nuclear table. Albert Einstein is reported to have once remarked that one definition of insanity was to repeat the same experiment over and over again expecting a different result; the USG announcement of aid and talks implies that US

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policymakers expect a different result this time than what happened last time this was tried. Connecting food aid and nuclear talks in the 1990's compromised both the aid program and the talks: the humanitarian response slowed to a crawl as diplomats haggled over the details of the nuclear talks, delays which ended up killing many poor Koreans. While the North Koreans sat at the nuclear table in the 1990's, they agreed to nothing, and got their food aid but too late to save many of the starving.

Unintentionally, perhaps, the United States sent three unambiguous messages on both the nuclear talks and the food aid program to the North Korean leadership over the past year, messages sent by our actions (always more powerful) rather than words (which the North Koreans often dismiss).

***First, if you want to eat, build more nuclear weapons.*** By connecting nuclear talks with US government humanitarian assistance, we have given the North Koreans a major incentive to continue, or even accelerate, their nuclear program in the future (despite the current temporary freeze). The inability of the North Korean regime to feed its own people is the greatest existential threat to its survival, and its survival is the central objective of both Pyongyang's domestic and foreign policy. Neither the US nor the South Korea governments responded to the need-based UN humanitarian appeals for two years, but approved food aid when Washington and Seoul wanted Pyongyang to return to nuclear negotiations. Thus, we have trained the North Koreans to build more weapons. When they were starving we did nothing, when we wanted them to sit at the nuclear talk, we feed them. This is exactly what was done in the 1990's, so the North Koreans now have ample evidence of both our intention and actions. While we can promise more food aid if they give up their weapons permanently they will not believe it, given the second message we sent to them as follows.

***Second, if you (North Koreans) give up your nuclear weapons, the US will hunt you down and kill you.*** If getting the North Korean government to give up its weapons of mass destruction—using a combination of carrots and sticks—were a central priority for US policymakers then they should have thought twice about intervening in Libya to remove the one government which voluntarily gave up their weapons of mass destruction. Every action the United States takes in foreign policy is related to every other action; policy in one country cannot be divorced from policy in another. North Koreans policymakers do watch television and read the newspapers, and we know they watched as the very world powers demanding they give up their nuclear weapons use US drones to assist Libyan rebels in capturing and lynching Muammar Gaddafi. Whether Gaddafi deserved his fate because of his despicable and bloody past or whether the US intervention in Libya was wise policy on other grounds is immaterial to the message it sent to the North Koreans: if you wish to survive, keep your nuclear weapons because if you give them up and a popular uprising begins the US will hunt you down and kill you.

How do we know that the North Koreans have taken this message from Gaddafi's downfall? Because they said so. The North Korea's state news service on March 24, 2011 quoted a Foreign

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Ministry official that the West's effort to get Libya to give up its weapons of mass destruction was "an invasion tactic to disarm the country", and then again "the Libya crisis is teaching the international community a grave lesson" and that was that Libya had been duped in 2003 to abandon its weapons of mass destruction in order to get promises of aid and improved relations with the United States. Reportedly 200 North Koreans working in Libya during the revolution were not allowed to return home for fear of the Libyan revolution infecting a vulnerable North Korea. That the Pyongyang state news service did not report the death of Gaddafi is even more evidence of how panicked they were by his demise.

***Third, if you get food aid from the US, you may do whatever you want with it, because the nuclear talks and nuclear freeze are more important than any other issues to the US government.*** The survival of the Pyongyang regime is dependent on the loyalty of its Communist party cadres, its 1.2 million man army and its internal security forces. A hungry army is a threat to the regime's survival, and so any food aid program presents a robust incentive for Pyongyang to divert food aid meant for poor people to feed their party cadres, police and soldiers. The only way to ensure that food aid goes to the poor and not the regimes support base is intrusive, ever-present aggressive monitoring, with unannounced visits, extensive nutritional surveys (which will tell us whether the malnutrition rates among the poor are really declining) and a large staff of expatriate monitors and translators (in the past the North Koreans have insisted they provide the translators for international humanitarian agencies which on the face of it compromises the integrity of any monitoring protocols). If it were up to Pyongyang they would only feed those who will keep the regime in power and triage the rest of the population. As long as we can ensure the food goes to the poor and powerless who are most vulnerable in famines, we will not be extending the regimes life since the regime wouldn't feed these people anyway.

The purpose of humanitarian assistance under both U.S. law (P.L. 480) and international humanitarian convention is to save lives and relieve human suffering, and must not be used to feed the military or the secret police in North Korea or any other country. Between 2002-2008 under a policy pursued by USAID, with the approval of the White House and State Department, food aid was offered to North Korea only when the regime allowed international aid agencies to enforce the same international monitoring standards used everywhere else in the world. Finally, in 2006, the North Korean agreed to the monitoring protocols. When Pyongyang violated the protocols (which they did twice) USAID stopped further food shipments which were sent on a monthly or quarterly basis, rather than all up front, as a control mechanism to enforce compliance. The second time USAID diverted aid shipments, the North Koreans became so enraged they threw out aid agencies and shut down the USG food aid program themselves. Late last year USAID once again put in place an aggressive and intrusive monitoring protocol which Pyongyang reluctantly agreed to, but now with one serious complication.

By connecting the USG food aid to the nuclear talks, the State Department has eviscerated USAID's ability to discipline the North Koreans when they attempt to divert the food aid for the

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military, party elite or police. The North Koreans invariably will attempt to feed their support base with our food aid, and then USAID will likely order the shipments to be stopped as they did six years ago. Pyongyang will threaten to walk out of the nuclear talks or end their freeze on production of more nuclear weapons unless the shipments are resumed. The State Department will then order USAID to continue the shipments and turn a blind eye to the diversions, since the purpose of the food aid in the first place was to get the North Koreans to the negotiating table and reward them for their temporary freeze on nuclear weapons production, not to feed hungry people. US diplomats know that and so do the North Koreans. Thus, US policymakers have now sent a third imprudent message to the North Koreans: do what you will with the USG food aid, since it is an inducement to talk and a reward for the freeze, not to feed the hungry.

In traditional diplomacy, policymakers use a combination of carrots and sticks to induce a change of policy with whomever they are negotiating. In the case of North Korea, the US is now practicing a new form of diplomacy—perverse diplomacy: we have unintentionally offered the North Koreans as carrots our food aid as an inducement to build more nuclear weapons if they want to eat, and demonstrated in Libya the use of US sticks—our drones—to scare them into never surrendering those weapons. US negotiations in the six party talks with North Korea might well have yielded—even without these perverse carrots and sticks—what they have for the past 18 years: nothing. But with our perverse offer of aid and threat of drones makes it a foregone conclusion that the nuclear talks will fail. The greater tragedy, however, is that so may our food aid program, as it may go to the army, secret police, and party cadres because US policymakers have surrendered the one stick USAID had to protect the program from abuse; its ability to divert the next shipment of food aid when the North Koreans stonewall the food aid monitoring protocols. Using food aid as a weapon of diplomacy is a mistake, it should only be used to feed the hungry and then only when we can guarantee it gets to those who are hungry. Thus, because of our perverse diplomacy US food aid may end up strengthening the regime's hold on power, and poor people will starve. Perhaps Einstein was right.

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