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## No Nuclear Blackmail

by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei



The standoff over North Korea's alleged nuclear-weapons program adds stress to a nuclear-arms-control regime already in a delicate state. More than 30 years have passed since the treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was put in place, but we have yet to achieve its objectives fully. Several thousand nuclear weapons, armed and ready, continue to exist. More countries - at least eight by the last count - possess nuclear weapons, and other countries, as well as subnational terrorist groups, are suspected of working to acquire them.

Projected onto this scenario, we have the defiance of North Korea - which surely has the capability to produce fissile material and launch nuclear weapons, whether or not we accept the intelligence estimates that it has already produced enough plutonium for one or two weapons, or the on-again, off-again reports of its admission of actually possessing such weapons. After a decade of noncompliance, North Korea has simply walked away from the NPT, and now, it is obvious, believes that its alleged weapons capability can be used as a bargaining chip - for security guarantees, for humanitarian aid, and possibly for raising its stature as a regional power. But at this bargaining table, the stakes are high. In seeking to defuse a volatile situation, the international community must not inadvertently legitimize the possession of nuclear weapons as a currency of power for would-be proliferators - a precedent that could jeopardize the future of the nuclear-arms-control regime.

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The recent history of efforts to come to grips with North Korea's nuclear program is worth considering. North Korea joined the NPT in 1985, but took seven years to sign its obligatory verification agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Shortly thereafter, in May 1992, IAEA inspectors discovered plutonium discrepancies in North Korea's nuclear-waste streams - indicating nuclear activity that had not been reported. When a more intrusive inspection was refused, the IAEA declared North Korea to be in noncompliance and alerted the U.N. Security Council.

In 1994, some progress in resolving the situation was seemingly made in the form of an "Agreed Framework" established between North Korea and the U.S. - an agreement under which the U.S. would provide light-water reactors for electricity generation in exchange for North Korea's dismantling of its proliferation-sensitive nuclear program. But the Agreed Framework, unfortunately, did not insist on prompt, comprehensive verification by the IAEA. In fact, North Korea used the framework as a means of delaying compliance with its comprehensive verification obligations under the NPT, and - as now seems apparent - continued its clandestine pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Last December, this progression of events came to a head when the IAEA made repeated requests for North Korea to confirm the accuracy of new reports that it had established an undeclared program for uranium enrichment. In the weeks after, North Korea responded by cutting all IAEA seals on its nuclear facilities, blocking IAEA surveillance cameras, ordering the immediate departure of IAEA inspectors from the country, and announcing its withdrawal from the NPT. Since that time, despite intensive diplomatic efforts and the involvement of the Security Council, no clear resolution has been achieved.

The international community is fully aware of the intricacies of this standoff - including North Korea's security concerns and the impact of its nuclear activities on regional stability. And all parties appear to agree on the goal: a peaceful resolution in which the Korean Peninsula is free of all weapons of mass destruction, and in which North Korea's security, economic and humanitarian issues are addressed.

The problem lies in the sequencing. It is vital - not simply for North Korea, but for other countries watching closely as the scenario unfolds - that "nuclear blackmail" does not become a legitimized bargaining chip. We must not send the message that the threat of acquisition of nuclear weapons is a recognized means of achieving political or security objectives, or that it affords special status or preferential treatment.

It must therefore be incumbent on North Korea to make the first move by a demonstration of good faith - by accepting its obligations for nuclear nonproliferation. One way to take that step is through the IAEA. North Korea's relinquishing of its alleged nuclear weapons program will only be credible if it is willing to accept intrusive international verification - a process that the IAEA can provide, and in fact has been insisting must be in place for all countries with significant nuclear programs. Once North Korea has demonstrated its good faith, all other components of a comprehensive settlement should fall into place. It is encouraging that the U.S. has made clear its readiness, as part of a settlement, to address North Korea's sense of insecurity through security assurances, and that Japan and South Korea stand willing to provide economic and humanitarian assistance.

All the pieces of the puzzle are thus known; what remains is agreeing on how to fit them together. The key will be the recognition by North Korea that nonproliferation is a serious concern, and that the manner in which a settlement is achieved has broad international implications. Conversely, other concerned parties should also recognize that some aspects of the standoff will be best resolved through bilateral or regional measures - and it is not beyond creative diplomacy to develop a scheme under which bilateral and multilateral negotiations can take place simultaneously, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement.

The settlement, however, must carry a clear message: that while the international community is ready to address seriously North Korea's security concerns and other needs, it will not be blackmailed through nuclear intimidation, and it remains steadfast in its position of zero tolerance for nuclear proliferation.

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