

## Why North Korea continues to defy the world

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Most of the recent diplomatic news on North Korea is encouraging. After protracted delays, Kim Jong-il last month honoured the promise he made in February to shut down his nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. This paved the way for the announcement last week of the first summit between leaders of the two Koreas in seven years. It will be held this month.

The summit almost certainly will result in warmer relations between Seoul and Pyongyang. North Korea undoubtedly expects material benefits as well. After the last summit in 2000, it emerged that North Korea had successfully demanded the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars in cash as a precondition to participating. South Korea has made clear that no money will change hands this time, but North Korea certainly does not expect to leave the meeting empty-handed.

The closure of Yongbyon has also led to resumption of the six-party talks on nuclear disarmament. But no matter what incremental progress is made in coming months, it would defy experience to believe that a permanent diplomatic resolution to the nuclear stand-off is at hand. After 15 years of negotiations over its nuclear programme, the main lesson North Korea has drawn is that obstruction, delay and non-compliance will elicit additional concessions. It therefore must be expected to obstruct, delay and not comply.

The international community never set out to reward North Korea for bad behaviour, but over the past 15 years that is precisely what it has done. In 1993 North Korea triggered an international crisis by announcing its withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). Its reward was the Agreed Framework. Under that agreement, North Korea took back its withdrawal from the NPT and committed to freeze and eventually dismantle its plutonium-based nuclear weapons programme. In exchange, North Korea was promised two light water nuclear reactors worth about \$4.5bn, plus 500,000 tons of fuel oil each year.

North Korea liked this bargain so much that it decided to set up a parallel, uranium-based nuclear weapons programme to see what price it might fetch. The Bush administration suspended implementation of the Agreed Framework over this violation in 2002, so again the North Koreans upped the ante. First, they again announced their withdrawal from the NPT. When that did not work, they geared up their nuclear weapons programme, testing a nuclear weapon in October 2006.

Despite years of warnings to North Korea that a nuclear weapons test would cross a "red line", the principal consequence of the test was to jump-start negotiations. By February 2007, agreement was reached on a Denuclearisation Action Plan. Under this agreement, North Korea again promised to freeze its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon. In exchange, it was promised 1m tons of fuel oil, plus the initiation of an energy dialogue in which the US has promised "to discuss, at an appropriate time, the subject of the provision of light water reactor [sic] to [North Korea]".

No sooner was this agreed than North Korea threw on the brakes, refusing to do anything until it received \$25m that had been frozen in a Macao bank. The Bush administration acquiesced in order to preserve the February agreement, even though that agreement contained no such precondition and the administration had long insisted that the issues were unrelated. Notwithstanding that the US Treasury considered the funds in question so dirty that it had sought to shut down the Macao bank that held them, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York ultimately was enlisted to transfer the funds back to North Korea.

Meanwhile, two UN Security Council resolutions adopted in 2006 immediately following North Korean weapons tests have been shelved. These resolutions had required more responsible behaviour by North Korea and imposed limited international sanctions. A late-June missile test by North Korea in plain violation of the resolutions elicited barely a whisper of protest.

Having got its way on the frozen funds and on implementation of the Security Council resolutions, North Korea is sure to make additional demands. It has already said it will take no further steps to implement the February agreement until the US ends the trade embargo and removes it from the US list of terrorism sponsors.

Assuming they receive satisfaction on these issues, two much more serious sticking points can be expected to emerge. First, they will not want to reveal the full extent of their nuclear weapons programme – most importantly their uranium enrichment activities – as required under the February agreement. Second, they will make further progress conditional on the resumption of the \$4.5bn light water reactor project begun during the Clinton administration.

If the North Koreans can prevail on both issues, they effectively will have reinstated the Agreed Framework – except that now they have additional nuclear weapons, have tested them, and will have been given a pass on their uranium enrichment programme. And, as under the Agreed Framework, they will insist that we do not get what we want – dismantlement of their nuclear weapons and related infrastructure – until construction of the light water reactors is complete. This will afford them another decade during which to present additional demands.

Alternatively, if the North Koreans do not prevail on both issues, they will put the diplomatic process on indefinite hold. Then, at a propitious moment, they will plunge it into another crisis to bully others into meeting their demands.

Either way, it is safe to assume that diplomacy is unlikely to end the North Korean nuclear weapons threat for the foreseeable future.

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