

SELIG HARRISON
NORTH KOREA SPEECH
4-12-07

THE FIRST QUESTION I'M GENERALLY ASKED AT MEETINGS LIKE THIS IS WHETHER KIM JONG IL, THE NORTH KOREAN LEADER, IS CRAZY. MY ANSWER IS, CRAZY LIKE A FOX.

THE SECOND QUESTION IS WHETHER NORTH KOREA IS REALLY DANGEROUS TO THE UNITED STATES. MY ANSWER IS, NOT YET, BUT IT COULD BE IN FIVE OR TEN YEARS IF WE MISHANDLE THE SITUATION. THEIR NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM IS STILL IN ITS EARLY STAGES AND THERE'S STILL TIME TO ROLL IT BACK WITH SMART DIPLOMACY.

FORTUNATELY, AT THE MOMENT, THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION IS USING SMART DIPLOMACY WITH THE NORTH KOREANS FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE IT TOOK OFFICE. THE PRESIDENT NEEDS A FOREIGN POLICY SUCCESS TO OFFSET THE CATASTROPHE IN IRAQ SO HE GAVE SECRETARY RICE SOME RUNNING ROOM AND A PROMISING DENUCLEARIZATION AGREEMENT WAS CONCLUDED ON FEBRUARY 13. BUT THERE ARE STILL BIG PROBLEMS AHEAD IN THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS. I WILL DISCUSS THE NEGOTIATIONS LATER BUT FIRST I WANT TO EXPLAIN HOW IT IS THAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO GO THERE TEN TIMES. THEN I WILL GIVE YOU A BIT OF ESSENTIAL HISTORY BEFORE TURNING TO THE CURRENT POLICY ISSUES.

I'M OFTEN ASKED HOW IT IS THAT I CAN GO THERE, SINCE MOST AMERICANS CANNOT. IN 1972 I WAS THE WASHINGTON POST BUREAU CHIEF IN NORTHEAST ASIA. IN MAY, 1972, CHINA OPENED UP TO AMERICAN JOURNALISTS AND NORTH KOREA DECIDED TO DO SO TOO. HARRISON SALISBURY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND I BECAME THE FIRST AMERICANS ADMITTED TO NORTH KOREA AFTER THE KOREAN WAR. I MET THE LATE KIM IL SUNG ON THAT FIRST VISIT, AND AGAIN IN JUNE, 1994. THOSE MEETINGS WITH KIM IL SUNG GAVE ME A SPECIAL STATUS THERE. THE NORTH KOREANS HAVE KNOWN ME A LONG TIME AND THAT'S WHY I HAVE ACCESS.

WHEN I GO THERE I TELL THEM HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT THEM AND WHEN I COME BACK I EXPLAIN THEIR PERSPECTIVE TO AMERICANS. THAT DOESN'T MEAN I ALWAYS AGREE WITH THEM, SO PLEASE, DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER. BUT I DO THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTAND THE VIEW FROM PYONGYANG IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH THEM EFFECTIVELY.

NOW, FOR SOME HISTORY INCLUDING RECENT HISTORY. THIS IS NECESSARY TO MAKE SENSE OF THEIR BEHAVIOR AND IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT BECAUSE THE AMERICAN MEDIA AND OUR POLITICIANS OFTEN CONFUSE THINGS. NORTH KOREA HAS NOW BECOME A PARTISAN

POLITICAL ISSUE. WHEN NORTH KOREA CONDUCTED ITS NUCLEAR TEST, JOHN MCCAIN AND THE PRESIDENT BOTH SAID THAT IT WAS ALL THE FAULT OF THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION.

TO UNDERSTAND WHY NORTH KOREA ACTS THE WAY IT DOES, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THE IMPACT OF THE KOREAN WAR.

AS YOU KNOW, EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND KOREANS, 115,000 CHINESE AND 36,400 AMERICANS LOST THEIR LIVES IN THAT TERRIBLE WAR. EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND KOREANS.

WHEN YOU GO TO PYONGYANG YOU ARE CONSTANTLY REMINDED THAT THE SCARS LEFT BY THE WAR WERE PARTICULARLY DEEP IN THE NORTH. THE SOUTH SUFFERED GREATLY, BUT NOT AS MUCH AS THE NORTH. THE NORTH USED RELATIVELY LITTLE CLOSE AIR SUPPORT IN ITS OPERATIONS SOUTH OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH PARALLEL. BY CONTRAST, THE UNITED STATES INFLICTED THREE YEARS OF HEAVY BOMBING ON THE NORTH IN ADDITION TO THE YALU OFFENSIVE ON THE GROUND. THIS HAS LEFT A DEEP-ROOTED SIEGE MENTALITY THAT STILL DOMINATES THE NORTH KOREAN PSYCHE.

PYONGYANG WAS BOMBED UNTIL ALMOST NO BUILDINGS WERE LEFT STANDING, AND AN ENTIRELY NEW CAPITAL HAD TO BE BUILT AFTER THE WAR. THE NORTH KOREAN PEOPLE ARE OF COURSE CONSTANTLY REMINDED ABOUT ALL OF THIS ON TELEVISION AND IN OTHER PROPAGANDA. TODAY, FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE KOREAN WAR, THERE IS STILL NO PEACE TREATY AND THE UNITED STATES STILL MAINTAINS ENOUGH CONVENTIONAL AND NUCLEAR FORCES IN AND AROUND NORTH KOREA TO DESTROY THE NORTH KOREAN REGIME WITH A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE. THEY'RE PARTICULARLY AFRAID OF OUR AIR SUPERIORITY – F-16'S AND F-4'S AND THE LATEST IN INTELLIGENCE AND COMMAND AND CONTROL CAPABILITIES AGAINST THEIR OBSOLETE MIGS. THE REASON NORTH KOREA KEEPS ITS CONVENTIONAL FORCES ON THE DMZ IS TO DETER A U.S. PREEMPTIVE STRIKE AND TO MAKE IT TOO COSTLY.

UNTIL 1991 THE UNITED STATES HAD TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN SOUTH KOREA. IT'S NOW WELL-ESTABLISHED HISTORY THAT THE NORTH KOREANS STARTED THEIR SERIOUS EFFORTS TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND LONG-RANGE MISSILES AS A DIRECT RESPONSE TO THE DEPLOYMENT OF U.S. TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE SOUTH FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES. PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH REMOVED THOSE TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS FROM THE SOUTH IN 1991. BUT THE UNITED STATES STILL HAS NUCLEAR WEAPONS CLOSE TO NORTH KOREA IN THE PACIFIC CAPABLE OF HITTING THEM. AND OF COURSE PRESIDENT BUSH HAS ANNOUNCED A NEW U.S. STRATEGIC DOCTRINE SAYING WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO STAGE A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE AGAINST ANY COUNTRY THAT THE U.S. REGARDS AS A POTENTIAL THREAT. IRAQ PERSUADED THE NORTH KOREANS THAT BUSH IS SERIOUS.

SO DID HIS INTERVIEW WITH BOB WOODWARD IN THE BOOK, *BUSH AT WAR*, IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT SAID HE “LOATHES” KIM JONG IL AND WOULD LIKE TO “TOPPLE” HIS REGIME.

IN SHORT, NORTH KOREA IS DEVELOPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS AS A DETERRENT AGAINST THE UNITED STATES, AND A SETTLEMENT IS NOT LIKELY UNTIL NORTH KOREA BELIEVES THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS GIVEN UP ITS GOAL OF BRINGING ABOUT REGIME CHANGE THROUGH MILITARY OR OTHER MEANS.

MANY OBSERVERS DOUBT THAT NORTH KOREA WILL EVER GIVE UP ITS NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM. BUT THE TECHNICAL EVIDENCE SO FAR AVAILABLE FROM THE MISSILE TESTS LAST JULY AND THE RECENT NUCLEAR TEST SHOWED THAT THEIR NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM IS STILL IN ITS VERY EARLY STAGES. THAT’S WHY I SAY THERE IS STILL TIME TO ROLL IT BACK.

THERE ARE INDEED GENERALS AND OTHER HARD LINERS IN PYONGYANG WHO WANT TO DEVELOP MILITARILY OPERATIONAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS. BUT THERE ARE ALSO PRAGMATISTS AND TECHNOCRATS. THE PRAGMATISTS ARGUE THAT IT WOULD BE IN THE NORTH KOREAN INTEREST TO GIVE UP THE NUCLEAR OPTION IN RETURN FOR FULL NORMALIZATION WITH THE UNITED STATES AND AN END TO THE BUSH REGIME-CHANGE POLICY. IN SHORT, THERE ARE HAWKS AND DOVES IN PYONGYANG.

WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT THE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION OVER HOW TO DEAL WITH NORTH KOREA. WE DON’T HEAR ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT THE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE NORTH KOREAN SYSTEM ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH THE UNITED STATES, BUT THAT’S THE KEY TO RESOLVING THE PRESENT CRISIS.

I’M NOT TALKING ABOUT A POWER STRUGGLE. KIM JONG IL’S POSITION IS SECURE. HE IS NEEDED OUT IN FRONT TO LEGITIMIZE THE REGIME IN PYONGYANG BECAUSE HE’S HEIR TO THE MANTLE OF HIS LATE REVERED FATHER, KIM IL SUNG. WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT IS A POLICY STRUGGLE. KIM JONG IL IS NOT THE ABSOLUTE RULER HIS FATHER WAS, HE CAN’T DISREGARD THE HARDLINERS MAINLY IN THE ARMED FORCES, AND HE BENDS WITH THE WIND TO PRESERVE HIS POSITION AS NUMBER ONE.

THERE ARE MANY THINGS YOU CANNOT FIND OUT WHEN YOU GO TO NORTH KOREA. IT’S A CLOSED SOCIETY. BUT ONE THING I’M CERTAIN ABOUT AFTER MY TEN VISITS THERE SINCE 1972 IS THAT THERE IS AN ONGOING POLICY STRUGGLE, AND THAT WHAT WE DO CRITICALLY AFFECTS WHETHER THE GOOD GUYS OR THE BAD GUYS WIN OUT. UNTIL RECENTLY, OUR POLICIES HAVE BEEN HELPING THE BAD GUYS. BUT A

SETTLEMENT OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE IS STILL POSSIBLE IF WE GO BACK TO THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY PURSUED BY THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AS THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION HAS NOW STARTED TO DO.

UNDER THE NUCLEAR FREEZE AGREEMENT OF OCTOBER, 1994, KNOWN AS THE AGREED FRAMEWORK, NORTH KOREA STOPPED PRODUCING PLUTONIUM. THE PRESIDENT AND JOHN MCCAIN SAID AFTER THE RECENT NUCLEAR TEST THAT THE 1994 AGREEMENT FAILED AND THAT'S WHY WE HAVE A NUCLEAR NORTH KOREA. BUT THEY ARE REWRITING HISTORY FOR PARTISAN PURPOSES.

THE 1994 AGREEMENT WAS SUCCESSFUL. NORTH KOREA HONORED THE OPERATIVE PROVISIONS OF THE AGREEMENT. THIS WAS VERIFIED BY INTERNATIONAL AND U.S. INSPECTORS. NO FISSILE MATERIAL FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS WAS PRODUCED BY NORTH KOREA FROM 1994 TO DECEMBER, 2002. SO WHAT HAPPENED TO GET US INTO THE PRESENT CRISIS?

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION WAS DIVIDED FROM THE START ABOUT KOREA. COLIN POWELL SAID HE WOULD "PICK UP WHERE THE CLINTON PEOPLE LEFT OFF." BUT HE WAS QUICKLY SLAPPED DOWN. SOME OF THE PRESIDENT'S MOST INFLUENTIAL ADVISORS LIKE VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY AND JOHN BOLTON WERE LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO ABROGATE THE 1994 FREEZE AGREEMENT. THEY THOUGHT IT WAS APPEASEMENT BECAUSE IT GAVE NORTH KOREA OIL AND OTHER AID IN EXCHANGE FOR STOPPING ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM. THEY WANTED A TOUGHER POLICY, AND THEY FOUND THEIR EXCUSE WHEN SOME NEW INTELLIGENCE CAME IN DURING 2002 SHOWING THAT NORTH KOREA HAD IMPORTED WHAT LOOKED LIKE COMPONENTS FOR URANIUM ENRICHMENT.

THEY HAVE YET TO REVEAL MUCH ABOUT THE NEW INTELLIGENCE, BUT THEY DECIDED TO USE IT AS A RATIONALE FOR ABROGATING THE AGREED FRAMEWORK. THEY ACCUSED NORTH KOREA OF OPERATING A SECRET WEAPONS GRADE URANIUM ENRICHMENT PROGRAM. SPECIFICALLY, THE C.I.A. TOLD CONGRESS THAT NORTH KOREA MIGHT BE ABLE TO PRODUCE TWO URANIUM BASED NUCLEAR WEAPONS A YEAR BY "MID-DECADE."

SINCE NORTH KOREA HAD CHEATED, THE ADMINISTRATION SAID, THE AGREED FRAMEWORK WAS DEAD. THE UNITED STATES STOPPED THE OIL SHIPMENTS TO NORTH KOREA. IN DECEMBER, 2002, PYONGYANG PREDICTABLY RETALIATED BY RESUMING THE REPROCESSING OF PLUTONIUM THAT HAD BEEN FROZEN SINCE 1994 AND BY OUSTING THE INTERNATIONAL INSPECTORS. IN OTHER WORDS, WE BROUGHT THE PRESENT CRISIS ON OURSELVES. SINCE DECEMBER, 2002, NORTH KOREA HAS BEEN CHURNING OUT THE PLUTONIUM USED IN THE NUCLEAR TEST.

IF WE HAD EVIDENCE OF SUSPICIOUS IMPORTS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN USED FOR A URANIUM PROGRAM, WE SHOULD HAVE CONFRONTED THE NORTH KOREANS THROUGH QUIET DIPLOMACY WHILE KEEPING THE PLUTONIUM FREEZE IN PLACE. BUT INSTEAD WE CONFRONTED THEM PUBLICLY AND ABROGATED THE AGREEMENT WE DID HAVE. WE THREW THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATHWATER. ROBERT GALLUCI, WHO NEGOTIATED THE 1994 AGREEMENT, SAID AT A RECENT MEETING THAT WE DROWNED THE BABY IN THE BATHWATER.

AS I MENTIONED, THEY WARNED IN 2002 OF TWO OR MORE URANIUM BASED WEAPONS PER YEAR BY "MID-DECADE." WELL, IT'S 2006, PAST MID-DECADE, AND WE'VE HEARD NOTHING SINCE THEN ABOUT THOSE TWO WEAPONS A YEAR. IN FACT, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS PRESENTED NO EVIDENCE AT ALL TO BACK UP ITS CLAIM THAT NORTH KOREA HAS A PROGRAM IN PLACE TO ENRICH URANIUM TO WEAPONS-GRADE. WHAT I HAVE LEARNED SO FAR SUGGESTS THAT THE EQUIPMENT THEY IMPORTED MIGHT HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM OR A LABORATORY, BUT NO MORE. IT'S TRUE THAT NORTH KOREA DID GET 12 SAMPLE PROTOTYPE CENTRIFUGES AND BLUEPRINTS FROM PAKISTAN, SO IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LOGICAL TO TRY TO IMPORT THE COMPONENTS AND EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO MAKE CENTRIFUGES. BUT IT'S NOT EASY TO GET THE MANY SOPHISTICATED COMPONENTS YOU NEED TO MAKE THE THOUSANDS OF CENTRIFUGES NECESSARY TO ENRICH URANIUM TO WEAPONS GRADE, AND IT TAKES YEARS OF TRIAL AND ERROR TO LEARN HOW TO OPERATE CENTRIFUGE CASCADES. TIME WILL TELL WHAT THE ADMINISTRATION KNEW IN 2002. SO FAR, IT APPEARS THAT THEY MADE A BIG LEAP FROM LIMITED EVIDENCE OF EQUIPMENT IMPORTS TO THE ACCUSATION THAT NORTH KOREA ACTUALLY HAD IN PLACE A FUNCTIONING WEAPONS GRADE URANIUM ENRICHMENT FACILITY. THEY WERE BLINDED BY IDEOLOGY AND A POLITICAL AGENDA JUST AS WHEN THEY TOLD US THAT THERE WERE WMD'S IN IRAQ. THE POINT IS THAT SOME PEOPLE IN THE ADMINISTRATION WERE LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO ABROGATE THE AGREED FRAMEWORK. AND WHEN THEY DID ABROGATE IT THEY BROUGHT ON THE PRESENT CRISIS.

THIS IS THE KEY ISSUE IN THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS. JOHN BOLTON IS SEEKING TO SHOOT DOWN THE FEBRUARY 13 AGREEMENT BY REVIVING THE 2002 CIA ASSESSMENT. BOLTON AND LIKE-MINDED ALLIES IN THE ADMINISTRATION SAY THAT NORTH KOREA MUST SHOW US WHERE THAT SECRET WEAPONS-GRADE PLANT IS LOCATED OR THE DENUCLEARIZATION DEAL SHOULD BE CALLED OFF. SO CHRISTOPHER HILL HAS BEEN FORCED TO REVEAL THAT THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY IS NO LONGER SURE WHETHER THERE ACTUALLY IS SUCH A PLANT. IN HIS RECENT SPEECH AT BROOKINGS, HE SAID THAT NORTH KOREA DID IMPORT EQUIPMENT THAT COULD BE USED FOR URANIUM ENRICHMENT, BUT "IT WOULD REQUIRE A LOT MORE EQUIPMENT THAN WE KNOW THAT THEY HAVE ACTUALLY PURCHASED" TO MAKE THE

THOUSANDS OF CENTRIFUGE CASCADES NEEDED FOR A WEAPONS-GRADE URANIUM ENRICHMENT FACILITY.

WHAT DID THE CIA BASE ITS ASSESSMENT ON? THEY KNEW ABOUT THE PAKISTANI PROTOTYPE CENTRIFUGES, AND THEY KNEW THAT SOME OF THEM WERE THE ADVANCED P-2 TYPE. SO THEY JUMPED WHEN RUSSIA TOLD THEM THAT NORTH KOREA HAD ORDERED ALUMINUM TUBES THAT WERE JUST THE RIGHT SIZE TO MAKE P-2 CENTRIFUGES. BUT IT'S NOT CLEAR THAT THEY ACTUALLY GOT THE TUBES. HILL HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS ABOUT THIS. ALL THAT IS KNOWN FOR SURE, HE SAID, IS THAT PYONGYANG "ATTEMPTED" TO PURCHASE ALUMINUM TUBES FROM GERMANY, AND THAT THERE ARE "SOME INDICATIONS THAT THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING SOME OF THESE TUBES ELSEWHERE." I HAVE TALKED WITH MANY SPECIALISTS AND THEY ALL SAY THE ALUMINUM TUBES COULD HAVE BEEN USED FOR MANY PURPOSES OTHER THAN URANIUM ENRICHMENT.

IT IS NOT YET CLEAR, AND MAY NEVER BE, WHAT LED THE CIA TO MAKE ITS ASSESSMENT. DID SATELLITE RECONNAISSANCE IMAGERY POINT TO THE SUSPECT CONSTRUCTION SITE OF A POSSIBLE ENRICHMENT PLANT? IF SO, NOTHING HAS BEEN HEARD ABOUT IT SINCE. IN ANY CASE, IT IS CLEAR THAT ADMINISTRATION HARD-LINERS, LED BY BOLTON, WERE LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO ABROGATE THE AGREED FRAMEWORK, WHICH THEY REGARDED AS APPEASEMENT. THIS WAS NOT JUST A CASE OF AN INTELLIGENCE FAILURE, BUT OF THE DELIBERATE DISTORTION AND EXAGGERATION OF INTELLIGENCE TO SERVE A POLITICAL AGENDA, AS IN THE CASE OF IRAQ. THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN DISASTROUS. IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE FREEZE WAS ABROGATED THAT NORTH KOREA RESUMED THE ACCUMULATION OF THE PLUTONIUM THAT ENABLED IT TO CONDUCT ITS RECENT NUCLEAR TEST.

IF NORTH KOREA REFUSES TO ADDRESS THE SUSPICIONS CONCERNING EQUIPMENT IMPORTS, HILL'S DENUCLEARIZATION AGREEMENT IS LIKELY TO COLLAPSE, AND EVEN IF PYONGYANG DOES ADMIT TO A URANIUM R AND D PROGRAM, BOLTON WILL NO DOUBT ARGUE AGAINST PERMITTING IT TO PROCEED, EVEN UNDER INSPECTION. BUT SINCE NORTH KOREA, LIKE IRAN, IS PERMITTED UNDER THE NPT TO MAKE LOW-ENRICHED URANIUM FUEL FOR CIVILIAN NUCLEAR REACTORS, PYONGYANG IS NOT LIKELY TO MOVE TO FULL DENUCLEARIZATION UNLESS THIS RIGHT IS ACCEPTED, AND UNLESS IT IS EVENTUALLY PERMITTED TO ACQUIRE LIGHT WATER CIVILIAN NUCLEAR REACTORS FOR ELECTRICITY GENERATION WHEN AND IF ITS NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM IS DISMANTLED.