



History Offers Insights in North Korea Nuclear Dispute

Transcript of radio commentary that aired March 4, 2003 on KUNM public radio 89.9 fm in Albuquerque

PLAY

•

As the world's attention is focused on Iraq, the North Korean nuclear crisis is developing quickly in an alarming direction. The US has put bombers on alert. North Korea is threatening all-out war, including possibly pre-emptive war. It has said that if the US can wage pre-emptive war, it can too.

Last December North Korea threw out United Nations inspectors. Then it withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT. In late January, North Korea began to take technical steps to extract and refine plutonium, the stuff of nuclear bombs. We do not know if North Korea has one or two nuclear weapons at present. But if the current program continues, it is likely to acquire several in a few months time.

It is only right that North Korea's violations of its NPT commitments have received a lot of publicity. North Korea has also violated its 1994 agreement with the United States, called the Agreed Framework. But U.S. violations are also at the core of the dispute, though they are not well publicized. Specifically, in 1994, the United States agreed to "provide formal assurances to the DPRK [that is, North Korea], against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the U.S."

The Clinton administration never gave that assurance. Then the Bush administration made matters much worse by naming North Korea as a potential nuclear weapon target. That was a direct violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework. After that, President Bush named North Korea as part of the "axis of evil." The United States has also announced that it may use nuclear weapons in retaliation for chemical or biological attack. That's a violation of U.S. commitments related to the NPT.

The United States has said that it wants to resolve the issue peacefully and talk. But it refuses to negotiate a new agreement even though both parties have violated the old one.

That is a big mistake. The United States must provide a formal assurance that it will not threaten to use or actually use nuclear weapons against North Korea. Such a security assurance should be part of the bargain that would return international inspectors to North Korea immediately and end its nuclear bomb program. The alternative points to war, may be nuclear war and catastrophe.

Nuclear weapons are illegal and immoral no matter who possesses them. The U.S. policy of possible first



use of nuclear weapons goes back to Hiroshima. Safety and security require that it be scrapped now not only for North Korea but for all countries.

Find out more on nuclear programs and treaties on IEER's website, www.ieer.org. This is Arjun Makhijani.