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About-face in North Korean Nuclear Monitoring

This was a reversal of a policy announced by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna on September 24, when the agency reported that the Pyongyang regime had barred United Nations inspectors from the Yongbyon plutonium plant. That action was expanded upon on October 9, when the communists made the remainder of the nuclear complex off limits to inspectors.



Following that action, Paik Hak-soon, director at South Korea's Center for North Korean Studies, told Reuters news service in Seoul: "North Korea is trying to strengthen its position. This is a follow-up to the decision to restore the nuclear facility.... It is something happening in the tug-of-war with the United States."

President Bush said in June that he would agree to remove North Korea from Washington's terrorism list in acknowledgment of the country's promise to halt its development of nuclear weapons. However, steps to reach an accord temporarily broke down when the North Koreans barred international inspectors who would monitor their compliance. Among the chief benefits to North Korea of being removed from the terrorism list is that it will give the communist state access to the international banking system.

The latest reports were attributed to the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency, which stated that the North Korean government would resume disabling the plutonium plant at its Yongbyon compound. The report, however, did not mention inspections at so-called undeclared sites where U.S. officials believe the communists may also be conducting nuclear testing.

In order to ward off potential criticism that it was "giving away the store," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack cited some sanctions against the North Koreans that would remain in force: "North Korea remains subject to numerous sanctions resulting from its 2006 nuclear test, its proliferation activities, its human rights violations and its status as a Communist state."

John R. Bolton, a former United States ambassador to the United Nations and former under secretary of state for arms control and international security, appeared skeptical of the arrangement. In an October 12 statement, he said: "By taking them off the terrorism list, you remove one of the legitimizers of the other sanctions. For North Korea, that was important, because it makes them look like more of a normal nation."



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