



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on November 12, 2008

North Korean Blackmail Beats the U.S. Blacklist

ITEM: *Fox News reported on October 17: "Six-nation nuclear talks took on new urgency after North Korea set off a test nuclear blast in 2006. It then agreed to dismantle its nuclear program in exchange for energy aid and other concessions, though negotiations have since been beset by deadlock and acrimony. North Korea halted its nuclear disablement in mid-August in anger over what it called U.S. delays in removing it from the terror list and began moves toward restarting its plutonium-producing facility. The U.S. said over the weekend that it took the country off the terrorism blacklist because it had agreed to all U.S. nuclear inspection demands."*



CORRECTION: The underlying precept governing U.S. arms-control agreements seems to have regressed from "trust but verify" to "trust and pretend to verify" to "appease and hope that not too many people notice it." That doesn't work well to keep North Korea in check.

When Washington repeatedly provides a Stalinist state with nuclear leverage, we shouldn't be surprised that the communist thugocracy in Pyongyang keeps using it to its advantage. After all, there is certainly one thing that you can depend on with Pyongyang — its ceaseless mendacity.

In return, American diplomats keep attempting to match North Korea by accepting its empty promises to carry out vague and ambiguous agreements. Adding insult to injury this time, North Korea was pulled from the terrorism list after Pyongyang actually utilized the terrorist tactic of extortion — threatening to resume its public nuclear development unless the United States removed it from the State Department's blacklist. The United States blinked.

The latest agreement proceeded, per usual, from North Korea's failure to keep its word over a previous deal. North Korea nevertheless demanded removal from the terrorist blacklist before actual verification occurred, a prior condition previously required by the United States. As Ralph Cossa put it in the *Japan Times*, North Korea supposedly made a June 26 "complete and correct" nuclear declaration. However, he said, the "only thing that appears to be verified thus far is that Pyongyang's declaration was neither 'complete' nor 'correct.'"

North Korea got a tangible "action" — being removed from the terror list — in return for an intangible and worthless promise (as evidenced by many years of experience with the North's lying and cheating). The communist regime said it would allow international inspectors to look for nuclear materials except



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in those places where they are most likely to be secreted. Those sites that remain "undeclared" in the agreement can only be visited if North Korea allows it, with prior permission being required on a case-by-case basis (obviously making it much easier to move anything incriminating).

As noted by Cossa, the president of the Pacific Forum CSIS, a Honolulu-based nonprofit research institute affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.:

Primary U.S. negotiator Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill once famously stated that "all means all," and that meant a full accounting of the North's suspected uranium enrichment and proliferation activities. We now know that the latter two issues were "addressed" (as opposed to explained or revealed) in side notes last June but remain the subject of future negotiation.

It is also clear that not all plutonium-related facilities were in the June declaration. In addition to not listing its nuclear test site, there was reportedly no reference to any weapons fabrication facility — experts say the bomb tested in 2006 could not have been manufactured at Yongbyon — or to any weapons or plutonium storage facilities in the June declaration. In short, "all" now apparently means "Yongbyon," which also means that Pyongyang will be asking for more payments to reveal its other plutonium-related facilities, if or when the process ever proceeds that far.

Even though the State Department has done its best to tone down the reasons that North Korea was long on the terrorist list, it still had to ignore evidence cited in its own recent official reports in its rush to make another bad deal. Allies and potential adversaries are taking notice. A study prepared by the Congressional Research Service, "North Korea: Terrorism List Removal?," updated on July 10, 2008, pointed out that "reports from French, Japanese, South Korean, and Israeli sources describe recent North Korea programs to provide arms and training to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, two groups on the U.S. list of international terrorist organizations. Moreover, a large body of reports describes a long-standing collaborative relationship between North Korea and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps."

One wonders if the minions in the State Department believe their own releases. In Washington, the single-minded eagerness to reach an arrangement with North Korea has become a joke, albeit a very bad and dangerous joke. Anne Applebaum, an adjunct fellow at the "moderate" American Enterprise Institute, reminded readers in an op-ed in the liberal *Washington Post*:

For the record, North Korea has sold missile technology to Syria and Libya, has assassinated diplomats, and has kidnapped Japanese and South Korean citizens and refuses to give a full accounting of their fate. North Korea keeps untold numbers of its own citizens in concentration camps that are direct copies of those built by Stalin, and its leaders knowingly starve many citizens to death as well. By any normal definition, North Korea is still a "terrorist state," and everyone knows it. The administration's decision was not a recognition of any change in North Korean behavior. It was, rather, a negotiated exchange of one set of words for another: We withdraw "terrorist" — and in exchange they offer a "promise," once again, to dismantle their nuclear facilities. Ritual favors were bestowed as well: Presumably as a sign of the respect in which they hold him, the U.S. official negotiating these terms, Christopher Hill, was, on his last visit to the North, ceremonially allowed to travel by car via Panmunjom instead of being forced to fly in from Beijing.

There may, of course, eventually be more "real" elements to the deal. There is probably more aid money in the offing, though no one really believes it will go to those who are once again starving. There is talk



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of more advanced verification systems as well, though it's widely assumed that the North Koreans will again try to cheat.

The latest cave-in did not play well in Japan, where North Korea's abductions of Japanese citizens remain an incandescent issue. A few international analysts even suggested that the move might reinforce those in Tokyo advocating that Japan develop its own nuclear-weapons capability. Certainly the Japanese didn't appreciate the way they were shoved to the sidelines to reach this accord.

Several family members of abductees were quoted in the *Washington Post* on October 13:

"I think it is an act of betrayal," said Teruaki Masumoto, a brother of one of the eight Japanese who were stolen away by North Korean agents in the 1970s and '80s and who the Japanese government says are still alive in North Korea. Masumoto is secretary general of the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea.

"Why did the United States remove North Korea from the list when it is clear to anyone's eyes that the North is a terrorism-assisting country?" asked Sakie Yokota, 72, whose daughter, Megumi Yokota, was 13 when she was kidnapped nearly 31 years ago and is by far the most famous of the abductees....

North Korea has infuriated Japan in recent years by saying that all the abductees are dead. It supplied death documents that the Japanese government said are forgeries. Japanese officials say DNA tests have shown that cremated bones sent to Japan from North Korea were not the remains of the abductees. "How can you trust a government that sends you phony bones?" a government official in Tokyo said last year.

Numerous experts, here and abroad, savaged the deal, rightfully. John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, complained: "The issue on verification has always been the rest of their program. Where are their weapons? Where is the rest of the plutonium? Where is their uranium enrichment program? What have they done in terms of outward proliferation? And we got essentially nothing other than a commitment to keep negotiating."

Why should North Korea ever stop negotiating? That is how it gets what it wishes. It often gets concessions just for agreeing to talk. Pyongyang's latest "diplomatic coup" came about in a familiar way, noted James S. Robbins, a senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council. "North Korea announced it would resume plutonium enrichment at the Yongbyon plant — a facility they said they had disabled — in direct violation of the previous agreement they had made. Rather than finding some means of punishing them — and really, if we didn't take punitive action when the North tested a nuclear weapon, would we really be expected to do anything over this? — the United States sought terms. North Korea agreed not to resume doing what they had previously agreed not to do, and we gave them what they wanted."

While weaknesses were revealed and the long-term problems that will grow from this agreement are palpable, there were, regrettably, some supporters. These included Barack Obama, who called it a "modest step forward." North Korea was probably hard-pressed to be modest about getting the United States to capitulate again.

Such a deal can only embolden North Korea and other would-be nuclear proliferators, who can see that Washington remains eager to placate adversaries as proof that the diplomatic process is working. It is. In this case, the process is working very well for North Korea.





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