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THE U.S. CONGRESS AND NORTH KOREA DURING THE CLINTON YEARS

Talk Tough, Carry a Small Stick

Robert M. Hathaway and Jordan Tama

Abstract

This essay explores the striking gap between Republican rhetoric and congressional action on North Korea between 1995 and 2001, when the GOP held majorities in both houses of Congress. While historical in nature, this inquiry offers lessons for President Bush—or, if elected president, John Kerry—as he struggles to meet the North Korea challenge.

Even by the frequently hyperbolic standards of Washington, U.S. Representative Curt Weldon's vexation was exceptional. "We write to you as Members of Congress from both parties who are dismayed and outraged" by administration actions and by the "arrogant and disrespectful" conduct of the National Security Council (NSC), thundered the letter to President George W. Bush, drafted by Weldon, a Republican, and co-signed by eight of his House of Representatives colleagues. The angry legislators, four Republicans and five Democrats in all, continued: "We are offended and believe you are being ill-served by your National Security Council staff." The five-page congressional missive then went on to catalogue the misdeeds allegedly perpetrated by the NSC and the president's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice. "Most disturbingly," the lawmakers wrote, Rice and her staff had "irresponsibly fabricated, with malicious intent," a rumor that constituted a "blatant attempt to smear our reputations."¹

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1. Curt Weldon et al., letter to President George W. Bush, October 30, 2003, courtesy of Representative Weldon's office.

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The occasion for this extraordinary outburst in autumn 2003 was a last-minute White House decision to block a planned congressional trip to North Korea. "As Members of Congress, constitutionally equal to the executive branch, we have the right and duty of oversight and fact-finding," Weldon and his colleagues reminded the president. The scuttling of the trip was particularly ironic, their letter noted, since the bipartisan delegation "has supported your position in regard to North Korea unequivocally." Not even Bill Clinton, Bush's predecessor and a president for whom Weldon in particular harbored little respect, had taken such a step, the Pennsylvania legislator pointedly observed.

Weldon and his indignant delegation are hardly the first members of Congress to tussle with Bush over North Korea (formally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK). Shortly after succeeding to the chairmanship of the high-profile Foreign Relations Committee last year, Senator Richard G. Lugar served notice that he intended to use his new position to prod the White House into negotiations with the North. Calling four hearings on North Korea in his first two months as chairman, the Indiana Republican laid down a public challenge to Bush's reluctance to enter into direct talks with the North.

Lugar's endorsement of diplomacy is not entirely representative of the uneasiness about Bush's approach toward North Korea that exists in some Republican Party (GOP) circles on the Hill. More typical are the hard-line critiques offered by senators like John McCain and Jon Kyl, both of Arizona. McCain, Bush's most serious rival for his party's presidential nomination four years ago, has called for more economic and political pressure on Pyongyang and lamented the "rapid deterioration of our resolve" to stand up to "the world's greatest rogue arms merchant." North Korea, McCain declared in the run-up to the Iraq war, posed a more serious threat to key American interests than did Saddam Hussein.²

Not to be outdone by their Republican colleagues, Democratic legislators have also joined the chorus of criticism of the administration's policy. The White House, according to Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, has transformed "a difficult problem into a dangerous crisis."³ Joseph Biden (Democrat, Delaware), Lugar's predecessor as Foreign Relations chairman, has complained about a "paralysis" within the administration that has prevented the executive from deciding upon a coherent policy. "There is no policy," Biden has charged. "I would not call it benign neglect, I'd call it malign neglect."⁴

To understand the nature and severity of this congressional challenge to administration policy, it is useful to review a little history. And there is no better

2. John McCain, "Rogue State Rollback," *Weekly Standard* 8:18 (January 20, 2003), <<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/002/093wsmmh.asp>>, accessed May 22, 2003; Kirk Victor, "'Very, Very Worried' over North Korea," *National Journal* 35:7 (February 15, 2003), p. 520.

3. Miles A. Pomper, "Eroding Support Leaves Bush in Foreign Policy Minefield," *CQ Weekly* 61:3 (January 18, 2003), p. 135.

4. "Democrats Criticize Bush N. Korea Policy," *Washington Post*, March 6, 2003.

moment to begin this process than November 3, 1999, when the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Dennis Hastert, released the most comprehensive congressional report ever on policy toward North Korea. The report by the Speaker's North Korea Advisory Group, which consisted of nine prominent Republican members of the House, concluded that the threat to the United States posed by the DPRK had increased considerably over the past five years. Rather than shutting down North Korea's dangerous nuclear weapons program, the Advisory Group charged, Washington was allowing Pyongyang to continue covert efforts to develop nuclear weapons and helping the outlaw regime obtain two light-water reactors that would give it the capacity to produce annually "enough fissile material for nearly 100 bombs."⁵

Additionally, the 80-plus-page document sounded alarms about North Korean ballistic missile activity, claiming hyperbolically that recent missile tests by North Korea indicated it could deliver a weapon of mass destruction "not just to Seoul, but also to Seattle."⁶ The report also condemned Pyongyang's overseas missile sales, horrific human rights record, harboring of terrorists, and production and trafficking in narcotics. Placing the blame for these disturbing developments squarely on the White House, the senior Republicans castigated President Clinton's policy of providing food and fuel oil to North Korea. Rather than advancing American interests on the Korean Peninsula, they asserted, such assistance propped up a despicable regime and encouraged it to employ brinkmanship to extract still more foreign aid. In a statement accompanying the report's release, the Advisory Group and International Relations Committee Chairman Benjamin Gilman employed even harsher language, calling the Clinton administration's failure to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons program "inexplicable and inexcusable."⁷

The Republican leadership clearly considered the Advisory Group's work important. Hastert held a press conference to publicize it, at which he asserted that North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs posed a direct threat to Americans. Yet, the most remarkable aspect of the review was what it did not include: policy recommendations. Indeed, the Advisory Group noted in a letter accompanying the report that it had been asked by Hastert only to determine whether the threat to the United States posed by North Korea had increased in the past five years.

5. North Korea Advisory Group, Report to the Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives, November 3, 1999, p. 12, <http://www.house.gov/international_relations/nkag/report.htm>. The Advisory Group was chaired by Rep. Benjamin Gilman and included Reps. Doug Bereuter, Sonny Callahan, Christopher Cox, Tilley Fowler, Porter Goss, Joe Knollenberg, Floyd Spence, and Curt Weldon.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

7. "Gilman Releases North Korea Report," House International Relations Committee Press Release, November 3, 1999.

Why did congressional Republicans want a major review of North Korea policy to focus on the past, rather than seeking to develop policy recommendations to meet current and future challenges? The most plausible answer, it would appear, is that they wanted to highlight what they considered deficiencies in the Clinton administration's approach, without taking on the responsibility of advancing policy alternatives themselves. Indeed, the unusual mandate of the Advisory Group reflected the broader approach to North Korea taken by congressional Republicans throughout the Clinton years. Most Republicans, including the party leadership, sharply criticized the administration's North Korea policies. Yet, even after securing a majority in both houses of Congress following the 1994 mid-term elections, they declined to back their rhetorical condemnations with legislative or other action designed to block the Clinton approach or fundamentally alter U.S. policy toward the communist country.

This article explores the striking disconnect between Republican rhetoric and congressional action on North Korea during the Clinton years. Because the opposition party in Congress is most likely to challenge administration policies, it is not surprising that the bulk of congressional criticism of Clinton's North Korea policies came from Republicans. What might be surprising to some is how unwilling the Republican majority was to match its tough words with meaningful action.⁸

This account also helps explain the approach toward North Korea adopted by Clinton's successor, George W. Bush. Republicans in the 1990s locked the party into positions that limited President Bush's freedom of maneuver after the Republicans recaptured the White House in 2000. For the first 21 months of his presidency, Bush employed hard-line, bombastic rhetoric designed to obscure the reality that, in its essentials, his approach toward North Korea displayed surprising similarities to Clinton's. Once the existence of Pyongyang's clandestine enriched-uranium program became public in late 2002, Bush found that the in-your-face policies of congressional Republicans during the Clinton years further reduced his options in a manner that vastly complicated managing the suddenly more urgent North Korea problem.

Patterns of Congressional Rhetoric and Action

Congress has an inherently difficult job in foreign policy because it is, in practice if not constitutionally, the president's junior partner in that sphere. Because

8. A few books on U.S. policy toward North Korea, such as Don Oberdorfer's outstanding *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, rev. edn. (New York: Basic Books, 2001) and the authoritative *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, written by Clinton administration officials Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2004), occasionally refer to Congress, but no scholar has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of congressional involvement in North Korea policy during the Clinton years.

the president is responsible for implementing American foreign policy, conducting diplomacy, and commanding the armed forces, members of Congress are often placed in the position of reacting to presidential initiatives rather than taking the lead on international issues. But along with the disadvantages that stem from Congress's subordinate position in foreign policy comes the luxury of criticizing or second-guessing U.S. policy without having the day-to-day responsibility of managing it. This institutional difference between the executive branch and Congress tends to make the former more pragmatic and measured than the latter. Presidents are more apt to appreciate the diplomatic risks of precipitous action or abrupt policy changes, while members of Congress are more likely to shoot from the hip.

During the Clinton administration, congressional Republicans criticized the president on numerous foreign policy issues, ranging from peacekeeping deployments and international treaties to China, Bosnia, and Iraq. But they less often articulated coherent alternative proposals to meet U.S. foreign policy goals. The contrast between congressional words and deeds on North Korea policy illustrates this tendency to a remarkable degree. Key members of Congress—mostly Republicans, but a few Democrats as well—voiced substantial concern about the administration's policy but declined to make a serious effort to change it. Strikingly, Congress fully funded the administration's requests for money to implement the Agreed Framework, the 1994 agreement between the United States and North Korea that served as the touchstone of U.S.-DPRK relations for the remainder of the Clinton presidency. Capitol Hill also supported administration initiatives to combat famine among North Koreans by providing the pariah nation with substantial food aid. When Congress did adopt legislation setting forth broad principles for governing North Korea policy, however, these measures were largely symbolic ones that lacked significant practical consequences or simply reaffirmed existing U.S. positions, such as calls for the administration to maintain a strong military presence on the Korean Peninsula or to consult with Seoul and Tokyo about its approach to Pyongyang.

While partisan considerations influenced Republican criticisms of Clinton's approach to North Korea, they do not tell the whole story. Equally important was a genuine difference of opinion about how to achieve U.S. goals in North Korea. The Clinton administration believed that Washington needed to offer Pyongyang certain inducements, including fuel oil, light-water reactors, food aid, and relaxed sanctions, in order to persuade North Korea to make positive changes in its behavior. Many congressional Republicans, on the other hand, believed that the United States should employ fewer carrots and more sticks. With less patience for the give-and-take of diplomacy and more confidence in the coercive elements of American power, they recoiled from agreements that seemed to suggest an equivalency between the United States and the much

weaker North Korea. Moreover, they argued that negotiations with North Korea set a bad precedent by demonstrating that dangerous behavior by Pyongyang would be rewarded by international concessions.

The complex nature of the challenge posed by North Korea also contributed to the contradictory nature of congressional activity. Reliable information about Pyongyang's actions and intentions was extremely hard to come by. U.S. lawmakers were forced to depend on executive branch agencies for factual assessments of North Korea. But the intelligence community, the State Department, and the Pentagon were often sharply divided over key issues, such as the extent of North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs. Some executive branch analysts who dissented from the mainstream administration view on such issues cultivated allies on Capitol Hill who shared their more alarmist assessments of the North Korean threat. Indeed, a significant portion of congressional activity on North Korea centered around the pursuit of alternative assessments of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs, so that members could point to analyses that helped them to challenge administration policy.

Underneath the often bitter debates between the administration and congressional Republicans was an honest disagreement about how the United States should deal with a nasty and repressive regime that might one day inflict serious damage upon America and its friends in East Asia. Additionally, North Korea often played into the hands of its most vehement congressional critics by engaging in provocative actions, such as staging commando raids into or initiating naval confrontations with the South. Pyongyang sometimes seemed to bluster and lash out in order to get American attention, and Republicans in Congress viewed that behavior as further proof that Clinton's policy of engagement was not working. Alluding to widespread skepticism about his country on the Hill, one DPRK diplomat, during a visit to the capitol in November 1997—the first ever by a North Korean official—pointedly noted that he did not have horns growing out of his head.

Congress did play an important role in helping to refine and monitor U.S. policy toward North Korea during the Clinton years. While it rarely initiated policy, the Hill influenced it at the margins, for instance, by encouraging Clinton to appoint a senior coordinator for North Korea in 1998 and by pressing the administration to oversee rigorously the distribution of food aid. The administration sometimes invited congressional oversight and tough questions by making mistakes and errors of judgment, such as underestimating the cost of the Agreed Framework and failing to consult sufficiently with members of Congress to build support for its policy. With a constitutional responsibility to share in the making of foreign policy, Congress had a right—indeed, an obligation—to speak out on North Korea policy and to complain when its members were misled or inadequately consulted. Congress also enjoyed a legitimate

right to deliberate on, delay, and alter executive branch decisions and requests. All of these activities it undertook with gusto during the Clinton years. Less happily, members of Congress also acted at times in a frivolous, unconstructive, or partisan manner. It is this combination of exercising responsibility and displaying irresponsibility that makes the congressional role in North Korea policy worth studying.

To the Brink of War

North Korea's covert nuclear weapons program presented one of the first foreign policy challenges for the incoming Clinton administration in 1993. The problem had emerged during the first George Bush administration, when inspections of North Korean nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) suggested Pyongyang was hiding evidence that it had produced fissile material that could be used to fashion nuclear bombs. This discovery greatly alarmed American policymakers because it threatened the delicate military balance on the Korean Peninsula, the roughly 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, and regional peace and stability. A North Korean nuclear weapons program could set off a nuclear arms race in East Asia and spread nuclear materials to outlaw nations in the Middle East and elsewhere.

In the spring of 1994, growing tensions over North Korea's nuclear program pushed Washington and Pyongyang to the brink of war. As North Korea refused to allow the IAEA to inspect its suspect nuclear facilities, the Clinton administration began to press the U.N. Security Council for international sanctions against the DPRK, which North Korean officials said would constitute a declaration of war. Influential American commentators openly speculated about the need for a preemptive strike against North Korea's nuclear facilities, and the administration prepared to move major reinforcements to East Asia. But administration officials realized that a preemptive strike against North Korea could lead to a general war on the peninsula, one that might decimate Seoul and claim as many as 100,000 American lives.

As the Clinton administration sought simultaneously to avert war and stop North Korea's nuclear program, Congress, with Democratic majorities in both houses, was generally supportive; however, some Republican lawmakers accused the administration of being too soft. Senate minority leader and presidential aspirant Robert Dole professed astonishment that "there are some in the administration who still believe that North Korea is willing to negotiate away its nuclear capability." The World War II veteran added, "The history of this century clearly shows that the best way to stop aggression is through firmness and strength."⁹ John McCain was even more scathing, charging that

9. Statement by Senator Robert Dole, *Congressional Record*, June 16, 1994, p. S6999.

North Korea had “consistently intimidated administration diplomacy” and that Clinton had become a “co-conspirator” with North Korean leader Kim Il-sung in dragging out diplomatic talks.¹⁰ Representative Gerald Solomon, the ranking Republican on the powerful Rules Committee, linked North Korea policy to the broader Clinton foreign policy in a partisan newsletter he entitled *Appeasement Watch*, arguing, “From Korea to China to Russia to NATO to Bosnia to Somalia to Haiti, this administration has made a shambles of American credibility.”¹¹

But even the harshest critics of Clinton’s policy, such as McCain and Solomon, stopped short of proposing military action against North Korea. They generally called only for the United States to strengthen its defenses on the peninsula and enact sanctions against the DPRK. They believed that war would not be necessary because Washington would be able to coerce Pyongyang into halting its nuclear program if the United States negotiated from a position of greater military strength. This view assumed that North Korea would act rationally when considering a military clash with the United States, even though members of Congress frequently described Kim Il-sung as irrational or bizarre. It also conveniently forgot that history is replete with instances when leaders have preferred glorious defeat to spineless surrender. The great confidence in the coercive capabilities of American military power voiced by these critics contrasted sharply with the administration’s belief that Washington needed to offer Pyongyang concessions in order to achieve U.S. objectives on the peninsula.

Typical of congressional action on North Korea during these tense weeks was a nonbinding resolution passed by the Senate on June 16, 1994, by a vote of 93–3, which urged the administration to “take all necessary and prudent actions to deter and, if necessary, repel a potential North Korean attack” but did not call for a preemptive strike or other offensive military action. This relatively toothless language reflected Congress’s reluctance to force action and thus assume responsibility for the results. More often than not, critics of the administration preferred posturing and tough-sounding rhetoric to taking the lead on the difficult issue.

The Agreed Framework

After months of tortured negotiations and a well-timed trip to Pyongyang by former President Jimmy Carter, in October 1994 the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework, which averted war between the two countries. The complex agreement froze activity at North Korea’s known nuclear facilities and allowed for IAEA inspections of those facilities. In exchange,

10. Statement by Senator John McCain, *ibid.*, June 23, 1994, p. S7497.

11. Gerald Solomon, *Appeasement Watch*, Dear Colleague letter, May 3, 1994.

the United States and its allies were to provide North Korea with heavy fuel oil and two light-water reactors. The accord also provided for the resumption of dialogue between North and South Korea and movement toward the normalization of relations between Washington and Pyongyang.

The Framework's creativity lay in its establishment of a detailed roadmap for reciprocal actions by the United States and North Korea that would allow each side to make concessions while being assured it would gain something in return. For instance, while North Korea was required to stop activity at its Yongbyon and Taechon nuclear facilities immediately, it was not required to dismantle them until the light-water reactors were completely installed. In another linkage, IAEA inspections would be phased in as work on the reactors progressed. These compromises allowed Pyongyang to save face while enabling Washington to achieve its most important goal: to stop North Korea from acquiring any additional plutonium that could be used to produce nuclear arms.

Initial congressional reaction to the Agreed Framework was mixed, with most leading Democrats voicing support and many Republicans calling it unacceptable. Shortly after the agreement was signed, four influential Republican senators—Jesse Helms, Frank Murkowski, Alfonse D'Amato, and Mitch McConnell—wrote Clinton, urging him to reconsider the agreement because it only papered over differences with North Korea and delayed their resolution. But Congress did not seriously take up the Agreed Framework until after the 1994 congressional elections, which occurred just a few weeks after the accord was signed. Those elections, which placed Republicans in control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1954, had a significant impact on congressional attitudes toward key foreign policy issues, including North Korea. The "Republican revolution," as it was called, ushered in an intensely partisan and ideological era in executive-legislative relations. For the first time in 40 years, the Republican Party found itself master of the levers of power on Capitol Hill. Many Republicans believed that it would constitute a betrayal of their revolution if they failed to use these levers to block the foreign policy agenda of the despised Clinton.

The first substantive congressional discussion of the Agreed Framework occurred at a December 1, 1994, hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a few weeks after the election but before the new Congress was sworn in. During the proceedings, senators of both parties raised questions about the agreement's benefits, timing, costs, implementation, and enforcement. Democrat Charles Robb wondered if the agreement might encourage other countries to blackmail the United States, while Murkowski asked why the accord was not written as a treaty subject to Senate approval. Other senators worried about the agreement's cost and whether other countries would pick up a share of the expenses. Additionally, some members argued that the accord was front-loaded

in North Korea's favor, postponing Pyongyang's concessions while obligating the United States to provide immediate benefits.

Some of these congressional concerns were legitimate, while others were unfounded or overblown. For instance, members were exercising their proper oversight role in asking how much the agreement would cost the United States and whether it might set a bad precedent by rewarding a pariah nation for violating international law. Secretary of State Warren Christopher told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January 1995 that the agreement would cost the United States \$20–\$30 million per year over 10 years, but subsequent events would show that estimate to be substantially below the actual cost, as some lawmakers had suspected. However, the oft-voiced Republican complaint that the agreement was front-loaded in Pyongyang's favor was patently inaccurate. The United States obtained the most important benefit immediately by stopping North Korea from producing more plutonium that could be used to make nuclear bombs. North Korea, on the other hand, would not receive its most substantial benefits, the light-water reactors and an easing of U.S. sanctions, for at least several years.

Over the following months, members of Congress raised various other concerns. Some strong supporters of nonproliferation norms, such as Massachusetts Democrat Edward Markey, worried that the accord undermined the credibility of the IAEA by postponing nuclear inspections that North Korea was legally obligated to permit. Others reasonably questioned how the United States could trust North Korea to implement the agreement when Pyongyang had a long record of stealth and deceit. An additional congressional concern was that North Korea's existing power grid would not be able to use the electricity that the light-water reactors would produce, which might lead Pyongyang to demand further assistance to upgrade its grid. Some critics also questioned whether the light-water reactors were truly "proliferation-proof," noting that the administration vehemently opposed allowing Iran to obtain such reactors from Russia.

As the decade unfolded, one of the most common criticisms leveled at the Agreed Framework was its failure to address North Korea's ongoing missile and chemical and biological weapons programs, as well as the threat posed by its large conventional forces. However, these critics refused to concede that had the administration held out for an agreement dealing with all of these other issues, there was little likelihood that any accord would have been reached. Such criticisms also failed to recognize that America's top priority for North Korea in 1994 was the North's nuclear weapons program, the issue that had nearly pushed Washington and Pyongyang into a full-scale war. The bottom line on the Agreed Framework, according to administration supporters, was that in its absence, North Korea might have obtained enough plutonium by the end of the 1990s for 50 or more nuclear weapons. Republicans who criticized

the Framework never adequately acknowledged its success in preventing Pyongyang from acquiring such a large quantity of the dangerous nuclear weapons ingredient.

Equally striking was the fact that while many members of Congress criticized the Agreed Framework on a wide variety of grounds, few articulated a coherent alternative policy. Frequently, members followed a laundry list of harsh criticisms of the agreement with only the mildest of recommendations. For instance, in a 1998 hearing on North Korea, House International Relations Committee Chairman Benjamin Gilman expressed grave concern that the United States was “paying for bad behavior by rewarding North Korean brinkmanship with benefits.” Gilman added that the Agreed Framework’s shortcomings included “a lack of on-site verification methods, a failure to address nuclear weapons research and development, and a questionable inventory of North Korea’s plutonium holdings.” But Gilman followed up these serious charges only by recommending that the administration appoint a bipartisan blue-ribbon commission to review its North Korea policy, get serious about building theater missile defense systems in East Asia, and consider appointing a high-level envoy to manage negotiations with Pyongyang.¹²

A handful of Republicans did articulate more substantial alternative policies, but they were unsuccessful in persuading even their GOP colleagues, let alone the administration, to embrace their ideas. Conservative firebrand Representative Dana Rohrabacher argued, for instance, that rather than implement the Agreed Framework, which he called “the screwiest policy that I have ever seen,” Washington should be doing everything it could to “bring down the government of North Korea and replace it with a government that is democratic.” Rohrabacher colorfully added that Clinton’s policy had “encouraged these crazy people over in North Korea to believe we are weaklings because we are giving them everything they want.”¹³ But no congressional critic of the administration presented a convincing strategy to keep North Korea from resuming the production of plutonium and the manufacture of a nuclear arsenal if the Agreed Framework fell apart.

Despite the many congressional criticisms of the Agreed Framework, key Republicans reached an informal consensus in early 1995 that they would not seek to overturn the accord. In January 12 testimony before the House International Relations Committee, former Secretary of State James Baker urged continuity, noting that if members of Congress blocked the Agreed Framework, they would then be shouldering the responsibility for the consequences of that

12. Statement by Benjamin Gilman, Hearing of the House International Relations Committee, September 24, 1998.

13. Statements by Dana Rohrabacher, Hearings of the House International Relations Committee, March 24 and October 13, 1999.

action.¹⁴ McCain voiced a similar concern a week later, complaining that “the administration has put us in a box. . . . If we refuse to fund it [the Agreed Framework], we can be accused of breaking it.”¹⁵ Craig Thomas, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said much the same thing on the Senate floor in February, conceding that he saw “little alternative but to support the administration’s deal,” even though portions of it made him uncomfortable.¹⁶ In September, McCain was even more explicit, stating, “I do not want the U.S. Congress blamed for something that will really be the result of North Korean complicity. When this agreement fails, I want it to be clear to all who is responsible for the failure.”¹⁷

As critics of the Agreed Framework became resigned to accepting it, their focus shifted to funding and implementation issues. Because the agreement was not a treaty, and therefore did not require Senate ratification, the primary source of leverage that members of Congress wielded was their hold over the purse strings. Leading members of both parties correctly suspected that the accord would cost the United States more than the administration’s 1995 estimate of \$20–\$30 million per year. In fact, the expense to the U.S. taxpayer for delivering fuel oil to North Korea; maintaining the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which would provide the light-water reactors; and canning DPRK spent fuel rods had escalated to three or four times that amount by the end of the decade. The rising costs upset members of both parties, who argued that the administration should make a greater effort to raise money from friends of the U.S. in Asia and Europe.

Over time, the administration’s persistent efforts to solicit funding from other countries brought results, particularly when South Korea and Japan agreed to provide the vast majority of the more than \$5 billion needed to build the light-water reactors. But Congress repeatedly threatened to block money intended to implement the Agreed Framework, every year creating uncertainty and unease among administration officials and in foreign capitals about whether Washington would hold up its side of the deal. Often House and Senate appropriators slashed funding for fuel oil and KEDO, only to have the money restored in conference committees at the end of the legislative process. Making the situation even more complicated, the appropriations bills providing this money usually contained provisions specifically prohibiting aid to Pyongyang, but allowed the assistance to go forward nonetheless through the use of presidential

14. Testimony of James Baker, Hearing of the House International Relations Committee, January 12, 1995.

15. Statement by John McCain, Hearing of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, January 19, 1995.

16. Statement by Senator Craig Thomas, *Congressional Record*, February 13, 1995, p. S2537.

17. Statement by Senator John McCain, *ibid.*, September 29, 1995, p. S14743.

waivers or other procedural techniques. These maneuvers enabled members of Congress to claim that they had voted against aid to North Korea without actually blocking the assistance—good politics perhaps, but peculiar policy.

Additionally, some Republicans sought to use the Agreed Framework funding issue to advance another popular GOP issue, promoting a greater role for Taiwan on the international stage. Republican members repeatedly urged Clinton to ask Taipei to contribute to KEDO and thereby ease the funding problems. But the administration steadfastly refrained from approaching Taiwan for a contribution because it feared that such a move would anger China, antagonize the U.S.'s KEDO partners, and possibly derail the Agreed Framework. Instead, administration officials grumbled that congressional efforts to involve Taiwan in the North Korea issue reflected the goal of some Republicans to use foreign policy not to advance U.S. interests but to score political points and embarrass Clinton.

Members of Congress also sought to exert influence by attaching conditions to funding for the Agreed Framework—for instance, requiring that North Korea cooperate with the United States to seal and store spent fuel rods from its nuclear reactors, or that Pyongyang engage in dialogue with Seoul—and by commissioning studies of the accord's implementation. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Frank Murkowski, a leading Agreed Framework critic, commissioned a series of reports by the General Accounting Office (GAO). These studies did not have a noticeable impact on U.S. policy, but they did help educate legislators about the agreement's details and serve notice on the administration that at least some in Congress were closely overseeing its implementation.¹⁸

As the years went by, support among Republicans grew for the notion of an "Agreed Framework plus," a new agreement that would expand on the Framework by addressing issues that the original accord had ignored, such as North Korea's ballistic missile and chemical and biological weapons programs, and its overseas missile sales. This interest in a renegotiated agreement reflected increased concern by the late 1990s that Pyongyang could soon possess missiles that could strike the United States with weapons of mass destruction. A March 1999 letter to the administration from Republican Representatives Gilman, Dick Arme, Christopher Cox, Henry Hyde, and Joe Knollenberg asserted, "Clearly, the Clinton Administration's 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework and related discussions with the North Koreans failed to accomplish the important American national security goals of terminating North Korea's nuclear weapons

18. For example, see U.S. GAO, *Nuclear Nonproliferation: Implications of the U.S./North Korean Agreement on Nuclear Issues*, October 1, 1996; *idem.*, *Nuclear Nonproliferation: Implementation of the U.S./North Korean Agreed Framework on Nuclear Issues*, June 2, 1997; *idem.*, *Nuclear Nonproliferation: Difficulties in Accomplishing IAEA's Activities in North Korea*, July 7, 1998.

program and the development, testing, deployment, and proliferation of long range ballistic missiles.”¹⁹ These prominent Republicans urged the White House to push for a new deal that would address the issues ignored by the Agreed Framework. Of course, their criticism of the Framework for not addressing issues such as ballistic missiles obscured the fact that in 1994, the primary American concern was Pyongyang’s nuclear, not missile, program. Moreover, these Republican critics failed to explain what inducements they were prepared to offer the DPRK in exchange for North Korean action to meet American concerns. Instead, they seemed to assume that Washington could dictate conditions to Pyongyang without making reciprocal concessions.

Almost from the moment of its negotiation, many Republicans accused North Korea of violating the Agreed Framework. They argued that the DPRK had neither shut down its nuclear weapons program nor engaged in dialogue with South Korea, as the Framework required. Administration officials, including North Korea Policy Coordinator William Perry and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet, substantiated the seriousness of these complaints by acknowledging in 1999 that U.S. intelligence indicated that Pyongyang appeared to be working on a nuclear program in secret.²⁰ Almost from the moment of the Agreed Framework’s negotiation, administration officials and their allies on the Hill were inaccurately claiming that the Framework had “frozen” Pyongyang’s nuclear program, when in fact only Pyongyang’s known nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and Taechon had been shut down. Those misleading statements invited Republican criticism that North Korea was still working to develop nuclear arms, as revelations in 2002 confirmed.

A serious new crisis emerged in August 1998, when the *New York Times* reported that U.S. intelligence had discovered a high level of activity at a heavily guarded North Korean bunker at Kumchangri, prompting American fears about the existence of a covert nuclear facility.²¹ Majorities in both houses of Congress threatened to suspend funding for the Agreed Framework unless Pyongyang opened the suspected complex to U.S. inspection. After months of negotiations, the United States and North Korea concluded an agreement in March 1999 in which Pyongyang pledged to allow Washington to conduct multiple inspections of the suspected site in exchange for large quantities of food aid. Congressional Democrats generally applauded this agreement, but prominent Republicans, including Gilman and McCain, sharply criticized it, arguing that the agreement encouraged North Korea to engage in provocative actions in order to extort concessions from the United States. Subsequent American inspections of the site found no evidence of nuclear activity.

19. Benjamin A. Gilman et al., letter to William J. Perry, March 5, 1999.

20. See, for instance, “CIA Sees a North Korean Missile Threat,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1999; “Clinton Adviser Says North Korea Is Advancing Its Nuclear Program,” *ibid.*, March 12, 1999.

21. “North Korea Site an A-Bomb Plant, U.S. Agencies Say,” *ibid.*, August 17, 1998.

The adequacy of consultation between the executive branch and Congress also became a source of contention. Leading congressional Democrats and Republicans complained that the administration was not paying enough attention to educating members of Congress about the North Korean problem and the administration's policies. For instance, House International Relations Committee ranking Democrat Lee Hamilton wrote in a May 1998 op-ed article that while the Agreed Framework was "one of the unsung success stories of the Clinton presidency," the administration had not put enough effort into articulating the merits of its North Korea policy.²² Administration insiders, on the other hand, were able to point to specific briefings they had arranged on the Hill where not a single member of Congress had bothered to attend. In truth, as on most foreign policy issues, the vast majority of members devoted little time or attention to North Korea, and the administration may have felt that expending additional energy in consulting with Congress was not likely to produce results commensurate with the effort. While perhaps understandable, this attitude was not calculated to win the Agreed Framework new supporters on the Hill.

Famine and Food Aid

While congressional discussion of the Agreed Framework continued throughout the 1990s, other North Korea issues emerged as well. In 1996 and 1997, severe famine became the most-discussed North Korea problem in Congress, while ballistic missiles dominated the congressional debate in the final two and a half years of the Clinton presidency. Many congressional concerns and themes related to the Agreed Framework were mirrored in discussions of these other concerns. Whether involving nuclear weapons or food aid, missiles or trade sanctions, North-South relations or terrorism, the debate revolved around the difficult question of how to advance U.S. interests in a country with an extremely repressive and secretive government that Americans could not trust. While the Clinton administration and its allies in Congress pursued a policy of inducements and engagement in order to further American objectives, many congressional critics argued that U.S. assistance served only to prop up a dangerous and brutal regime and reward it for misbehavior.

In early 1996, reports of severe food shortages in North Korea led the administration and some members of Congress to propose that the United States donate food to be distributed in the North by the World Food Program (WFP). Democratic Representative Tony Hall, widely admired for his efforts to combat hunger around the world, and Democratic Senator Paul Simon took the lead on the Hill in arguing that America had a humanitarian responsibility to prevent famine, regardless of the shortcomings of the North Korean regime.

22. Lee Hamilton, "Our Stake in Asia's Nuclear Future," *Washington Times*, May 13, 1998.

Hall made five trips to North Korea between 1996 and 1999 to monitor the famine firsthand. Other members of Congress, however, opposed giving unconditional food aid to the communist nation. Korean-American Republican Representative Jay Kim, for instance, argued that such assistance would reward North Korean intransigence and eliminate any positive incentive for Pyongyang to negotiate with Seoul.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers moved to place conditions on food aid to North Korea to ensure that it was distributed properly and effectively. Representatives Benjamin Gilman, Lee Hamilton, Pat Roberts, and Doug Bereuter wrote Secretary of State Christopher on February 6, 1996, to say they would support a \$2 million grant to the WFP only if the administration notified Congress that (1) South Korea did not oppose the assistance, (2) previous food aid had not been diverted to the military, (3) North Korean military stocks had been tapped to respond to North Korea's food needs, and (4) the WFP could ensure that no future food deliveries would be diverted from their intended recipients. The authors of the letter wrote that while they were "skeptical of any assistance to North Korea," they recognized that the North Korean people should not "pay with their lives for the misguided policies of the North Korean government."²³

The following year, Gilman, Hamilton, and Bereuter wrote a second letter to Clinton urging him not to support an expanded food aid program in North Korea unless an effective monitoring system were put in place.²⁴ In October 1997, however, an administration official acknowledged that North Korea had reneged on its pledge to allow more than a dozen U.N. personnel to monitor the food aid, although Washington did not have any evidence that food was being pilfered or diverted to the military. Persistent U.S. and international pressure and threats to withhold further assistance led Pyongyang to admit additional monitors 10 days later.

Despite the bipartisan support for close monitoring of food aid, this issue, like most others involving North Korea, also devolved at times into fierce partisanship. Gilman commissioned a report from the GAO, released in October 1999, that concluded North Korea had systematically obstructed the monitoring of food aid and that a substantial amount of food assistance might have been diverted to the government or military, although this could not be confirmed. Tony Hall sharply criticized the report, charging that it was shot through with bias and errors, served a Republican partisan agenda, and was designed to undermine support for the food aid program. Hall also pointed out that GAO

23. Benjamin Gilman et al., letter to Warren Christopher, February 6, 1996.

24. Benjamin Gilman et al., letter to President Bill Clinton, June 20, 1987. Democrat Hamilton, unlike his Republican colleagues, appears to have co-authored these letters primarily with the hope of encouraging the administration to take steps that would give food assistance some protection from congressional skeptics.

investigators had never visited North Korea, as he had done repeatedly. Hall and administration officials emphasized that no evidence of a significant diversion of food assistance existed, that aid continued to reach those for whom it was intended, and that this assistance was making a big difference in saving hundreds of thousands of North Koreans from starvation.

Throughout the late 1990s, the congressional emphasis on close oversight, while sometimes stemming from a partisan impulse, did play an important role in helping ensure that U.S. food assistance was being put to good use. It is also notable that key members of Congress who criticized the aid program did not seek to condition further assistance on North Korean economic or agricultural reforms, probably because such reforms were unlikely and legislators did not want to be accused of responsibility for North Korean famine and deaths.

Nebraska Republican Doug Bereuter's views on aid to North Korea merit an especially close look because he was widely viewed as one of the most thoughtful Republican experts on U.S. policy in Asia and because he served between 1995 and 2001 as chairman of the House International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific. While Bereuter was a strong supporter of engagement with China and frequently worked with administration allies on the Hill to block China-related initiatives from the more hawkish wing of his own party, he was also highly critical of engagement with North Korea. Bereuter repeatedly argued in 1996 and 1997 that the United States was providing too much assistance to North Korea in exchange for too few benefits. In a July 1996 article, he denounced the administration's policy of "appeasement," writing, "Amazingly, our policy of benevolence has made North Korea one of the larger U.S. aid recipients in Asia." More broadly, he charged that by "engaging in a strategy of concessions, the United States conveys an image of weakness to a country that is both a master at exploiting such weakness and one that may misinterpret American resolve against overt aggression."²⁵

A year later, Bereuter expressed dismay that the United States was providing larger and larger amounts of food aid to the DPRK through the WFP, increasing from an initial grant of \$2 million in early 1996 to grants of \$10 million and \$15 million by mid-1997. Additionally, the Representative asserted that the growing U.S. assistance reflected the lack of an overall Clinton North Korea policy, and accused the administration of "simply lurching from crisis to crisis." Bereuter added that the administration was not using all its leverage with North Korea effectively, arguing that Washington held "the high cards" when dealing with Pyongyang and therefore should be getting a greater political and security return for its economic assistance.²⁶

25. Doug Bereuter, "'Agreed Framework' Reinforces Doomed Regime," *Roll Call*, July 29, 1996, p. 8.

26. Doug Bereuter, "Prospects for U.S.-North Korean Relations: The Congressional Viewpoint," speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., June 12, 1997.

Some of these concerns were justified, though others appear overblown. Influential members of Congress from both parties believed that the administration's North Korea policy was inadequately coordinated, and the administration seemed to recognize that when it appointed former Secretary of Defense William Perry as senior coordinator for North Korea, in late 1998. Bereuter's worry that Washington was encouraging bad behavior by Pyongyang also deserved serious consideration, although that charge was virtually impossible either to prove or disprove. On another matter, Bereuter was correct in stating that North Korea had become one of the largest U.S. foreign aid recipients in Asia, but this assertion failed to acknowledge that very little U.S. aid went to Asian countries at all and that aid to North Korea was qualitatively different from other assistance because of its direct linkage to American national security. Finally, Bereuter's argument that the administration was not using its leverage with Pyongyang effectively was easy to make and impossible to refute, but the experiences of the George W. Bush administration beginning in 2001 underscored the difficulties of translating U.S. power into satisfactory diplomatic results with the North Korean regime.

While many Republicans shared Bereuter's concerns, few were willing to assume the responsibility for blocking assistance to prevent famine. Instead, even the severest critics of the regime, including Bereuter, voted for food aid, all the while voicing skepticism about the wisdom of the administration's approach. In a July 1997 "Dear Colleague" letter, House Republican Policy Committee Chairman Christopher Cox boasted that the House had unanimously passed an amendment he co-sponsored that would "ensure that the Communist government of North Korea does not receive U.S. food aid."²⁷ In fact, the legislation in question contained a provision authorizing assistance to needy North Koreans through the WFP or other nongovernmental organizations. By burying that waiver authority deep within the legislation, critics of North Korea could claim credit for blocking aid, without actually doing so. This delicate balancing act by Republicans reflected their understandable uneasiness in dealing with a government viewed by many lawmakers (in the words of a senior Republican congressional staffer) as "one of the last truly evil regimes on earth."

The Missile Threat

The terms of the North Korea debate shifted dramatically on August 31, 1998, when the DPRK surprised U.S. intelligence by test-firing a multistage rocket that flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean. Although the intelligence community eventually concluded that the test was a failure, immediate

27. Christopher Cox, "No U.S. Taxpayer Dollars for North Korea's Nuclear Program," Dear Colleague letter, July 29, 1997.

comment emphasized the potential threat to Alaska, Hawaii, and ultimately, the American heartland. Leading Republicans in Congress expressed great consternation that the Clinton administration was not taking appropriate action to counter this new challenge, and House Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Livingston grandiloquently announced that the missile test was the “death knell” of the Agreed Framework. Congressional Republicans moved to cut off funding for implementation of the Framework (though the money was later restored) and to accelerate measures to develop U.S. ballistic missile defenses. One member of Congress revealed the political use Republicans intended to make of the missile test, bragging to an administration official, “That did it—we’ve got the NMD [national missile defense].”²⁸

The missile test served to focus new attention on a July 1998 report on the ballistic missile threat by a bipartisan commission headed by Donald Rumsfeld, who had served as Gerald Ford’s secretary of defense and was to be appointed to the same position in 2001 by George W. Bush. The Rumsfeld report argued that a “rogue state” such as North Korea would be able to inflict “major destruction” on the United States within about five years of a decision to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile. The CIA, however, had told Congress in 1998 that Pyongyang would not have long-range missile capability until 2010 at the earliest. Upset with that CIA estimate, Republicans in Congress now pressed the intelligence community to provide assessments more in line with those of the Rumsfeld commission, according to subsequent news stories.²⁹ Members of Congress also voiced concern about North Korean missile sales to Pakistan, Iran, and other countries in the Middle East. Benjamin Gilman called Pyongyang the world’s “number one proliferator of ballistic missiles and enabling technology,” and Christopher Cox argued that the United States should strengthen its defenses by deploying more military assets to East Asia and speeding the development of missile defense systems.³⁰

The congressional outcry about U.S. intelligence assessments of the ballistic missile threat may have had an impact on the CIA, which by early 1999 had revised its judgments substantially. In testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 2, 1999, CIA Director Tenet warned that North Korea was on the verge of developing ballistic missiles capable of hitting the continental United States. Tenet also confirmed the frequent Republican charge that Pyongyang was the world’s largest proliferator of ballistic missiles and technology. He added, “I can hardly overstate my concern about North Korea. In nearly all respects, the situation there has become more volatile and unpredict-

28. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p. 411.

29. See, for instance, “How Politics Helped Redefine Threat,” *Washington Post*, January 14, 2002.

30. Statements by Benjamin Gilman and Christopher Cox, Hearing of the House International Relations Committee, September 24, 1998.

able.”³¹ The promoters of the Rumsfeld commission report felt vindicated, although CIA analysts insisted that their revised assessments stemmed only from improved analysis.

The dispute over intelligence assessments of North Korea’s missile capability reflected a broader tension within the intelligence community that spilled over into the congressional debate. On several North Korea issues, including Pyongyang’s missile and nuclear programs and the likelihood that it would initiate war against South Korea, American intelligence agencies during the 1990s were divided, with the Pentagon frequently developing more alarmist assessments than the State Department or CIA. A September 1997 article in the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Pentagon believed Pyongyang was likely to attempt reunification by force because the North’s worsening economic condition was making it desperate. State and the CIA argued instead that North Korea’s top priority was self-preservation, and that U.S. preparations for war might actually push Pyongyang into a conflict it in fact sought to avoid.³² Similarly, former Clinton National Security Advisor Anthony Lake revealed that during the 1994 crisis with North Korea, he had often received diametrically opposed estimates on Pyongyang’s intentions from the CIA and the State Department on the same day.³³ These and other conflicting intelligence assessments helped fuel criticism of the administration from members of Congress, who could point to the analyses that matched their own levels of concern about North Korea.

The August 1998 missile test also helped crystallize a growing congressional concern that the administration’s North Korea policy was drifting and poorly coordinated. Legislation that Congress adopted in October 1998 mandated the appointment of a senior administration official to coordinate North Korea policy, and Clinton named William Perry to that position on November 12. After a 10-month review, Perry submitted a report to Clinton on September 15, 1999, outlining two alternative courses of action. The first path envisioned a comprehensive set of negotiations that would lead to reciprocal actions by Washington and Pyongyang to eliminate the North Korean nuclear and long-range missile threats and would result in the normalization of diplomatic and economic relations. The second, less desirable path was a continued policy of containment, most likely leading to an increase in tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Two days after the report was submitted, Washington and Pyongyang took a potentially important step along the first path by announcing an agreement that suspended North Korean missile tests so long as negotiations

31. “CIA Sees a North Korean Missile Threat,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1999.

32. “U.S. Intelligence Community Is Split in Its Readings of North Korea’s Motives,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 1997.

33. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p. 307.

with the United States continued. In return, Washington pledged to ease a range of economic sanctions on the DPRK.

Congressional reaction to the Perry report and the new agreement was mixed. Some leading Republicans sharply criticized the partial lifting of sanctions, arguing that they should not be eased until North Korea firmly guaranteed it would suspend all nuclear and missile programs. Gilman and Cox were particularly scathing. Gilman charged that “we are once again entering a cycle of extortion with North Korea,” and Cox complained that “U.S. policy is conducting a one-sided love affair” with the North Korean regime.³⁴ Most prominent Democrats, on the other hand, continued to voice support for the administration’s efforts. Senate Foreign Relations Committee ranking Democrat Joseph Biden noted the difficulty of the task. “Err too far towards confrontation, and you might send North Korea over the brink and start another war. Err too far towards conciliation, and your initiative might be mistaken for appeasement.” The question, Biden added, “is not whether North Korea is a desirable partner for peace. . . . The question is how we manage the North Korean threat. I can’t imagine how the situation would be improved if we did not offer North Korea a chance to choose peace over truculence.”³⁵

In the final months of the Clinton administration, another issue took center stage as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made the first trip ever to Pyongyang by a U.S. secretary of state and the administration considered a path-breaking trip to North Korea by the president. Some Republicans sniped at Clinton for even entertaining that possibility, asserting that he was only trying to beef up his resume before leaving office. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs Chairman Craig Thomas said, “I don’t think the president needs to go. He’s trying to get his last licks in, and I don’t think this is one he has to do.”³⁶ In the end, Clinton decided not to go because he concluded that insufficient groundwork had been done for a productive visit.

Conclusion

Throughout the Clinton administration, and particularly after the GOP takeover of Congress in November 1994, key Republicans castigated Clinton’s North Korea policy on numerous grounds, asserting that the president had engaged in “appeasement” and acquiesced in “blackmail” by Pyongyang. Administration officials and their Democratic allies on the Hill routinely, and

34. Press release by Benjamin Gilman, September 17, 1999; statement by Christopher Cox, Hearing of the House International Relations Committee, October 13, 1999.

35. Statement by Senator Joseph Biden, *Congressional Record*, October 19, 2000, p. S10789.

36. Miles A. Pomper, “GOP Cautious on North Korean Thaw,” *CQ Weekly* 58:40 (October 14, 2000), p. 2426.

with some justification, complained that GOP partisanship and irresponsibility were undermining the achievement of key American national security objectives. But this was only partially correct. Partisan instincts, the natural rivalry between the executive and Congress, divergent estimates of the coercive power of American might, differing approaches to international relations by the administration and congressional Republicans, and, at times, administration missteps all gave rise to GOP criticism. Yet, despite the frequent congressional sniping, Republicans did not articulate a coherent alternative to administration policy or make a concerted effort to overturn it. They often seemed to prefer posturing and scoring political points to taking on the responsibility of formulating a coherent policy.

The election of George W. Bush in 2000 gave Republicans the chance to put into practice an approach to North Korea that differed from that of the Clinton years. Initial signals from Bush suggested that he shared the skepticism of congressional Republicans toward the North Korean regime and was reluctant to negotiate with Pyongyang. Bush's labeling of North Korea as part of an international "axis of evil" mirrored the hard-line rhetoric often voiced by Republican members of Congress.

Yet, for all the shrill rhetoric, Bush was slow to develop a dramatically different comprehensive policy. Instead, he backed the Agreed Framework so reviled by congressional Republicans, continued to provide food aid, and sought to resume negotiations with Pyongyang, in Colin Powell's formulation, anywhere, at any time, without preconditions.³⁷ Bush seemed to have learned the lesson that Republicans in Congress had learned during the 1990s: that it was far easier to criticize Clinton's North Korea policy than to replace it with something markedly different.

Pyongyang's October 2002 acknowledgment of a clandestine enriched-uranium program, however, largely rewrote the rules of the game. President Bush since then has confronted a serious crisis, notwithstanding administration insistence that there is no crisis. Bush's decision in April 2003 to renew high-level talks with North Korea, with Chinese participation, signaled his recognition that there was no good alternative to negotiations. Yet, reports that administration officials are considering ways to squeeze the North Korean regime by embargo or quarantine indicate that the more hard-line position of many Republicans continues to resonate in Washington.³⁸

In seeking to manage the dangerous situation on the Korean Peninsula, Bush—or John Kerry—will have to consider the policy agendas and political

37. "Powell Presses to Resume Talks with North Korea," *New York Times*, July 27, 2001.

38. See, for instance, "Pakistani Tells of North Korean Nuclear Devices," *New York Times*, April 13, 2004. In the words of a Republican congressional aide, Vice President Dick Cheney believes that "[t]alks aren't a good use of time. He's after regime change. Period." Murry Hiebert, "A Rare Glimpse," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 167:15 (April 15, 2004), p. 18.

objectives not just of North Korea and other countries in Asia but of American legislators down the length of Pennsylvania Avenue. The record of the 1990s suggests that key members of Congress will continue to take a keen interest in U.S. policy toward the pariah regime and that many senior Republicans will be instinctively suspicious of engagement and dialogue. But Bill Clinton's experiences with the Hill also suggest that Congress will be more likely to criticize and kibitz than take on the responsibility of blocking the administration's approach. The next president, then, will have considerable leeway to set the course for U.S. policy. Nevertheless, he should expect congressional second-guessing, responsible and otherwise, and close oversight that will inevitably complicate his task. In this sense, his relations with the Hill will more closely mirror the experiences of Bill Clinton than he might have anticipated.