



# Who Is Losing Asia?

*Desaix Anderson*

**A**fter World War II, the United States fought costly wars in Korea and Vietnam to rebuff communist aggrandizement. Now, however, the United States is risking its paramount position in East Asia through inept, ideologically driven policies and misplaced strategic priorities. Obsessed with terrorism and Iraq, the Bush administration has failed to deal effectively with the North Korean crisis. This grave mistake is the proximate cause of declining American influence and could cost the United States its alliances and its preeminence in Asia, which is vital to America's interests in the twenty-first century. What options does the United States have to preserve its interests and construct a hospitable and prosperous environment in East Asia?

## Strategic Implications of the Korean Crisis

Washington's handling of the North Korean issue has put the United States at serious odds with all its allies and partners in the region—South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia. All have urged the United States to pursue serious negotiations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), but the U.S. performance has not matched their hopes or expectations. China deserves great credit for having persuaded the United States and North Korea to go to the negotiating table. Exasperated with U.S. intransigence, China uncharacteristically openly pressured the DPRK from 2002 on to accept U.S. demands for a multilateral format and has been embarrassed since by U.S. ideologically driven inflexibility. China has challenged U.S. al-

legations that North Korea had a highly enriched uranium project, the premise on which U.S. demands for "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement" (CVID) are based. All of our friends and allies, despite their public stances, are profoundly disturbed by Washington's inflexibility. Recently Beijing appeared on the verge of abandoning its mediation role because of Washington's intransigence.

Washington's slightly more forthcoming approach at the June 2004 six-party talks is welcome but likely stemmed from domestic political considerations and a possibly cosmetic hedge against Asian capitals' remonstrance over U.S. inflexibility more than an epiphany on the part of the Bush administration. Killer conditions are still embedded in the U.S. positions, and we are far from agreement. In late August talks, top Chinese experts on Korea shared this analysis with me.

## Korean Anti-Americanism Rising

The most affected is South Korea. After the U.S. record of maintaining South Korea as one of its closest allies for 50 years, President Bush undermined South Korean President Kim Dae Jung at their joint press conference in March 2001 in Washington and then profoundly shocked the South Koreans, as well as all other Asian friends, by including North Korea in the "axis of evil" in his State of the Union speech in January 2002.

The alarming rise of anti-Americanism in South Korea stems from rapidly diverging threat perceptions in Seoul and Washington. Many

South Koreans have concluded that Washington is insensitive to Korean goals and that the Bush administration has been ineffective in dealing with North Korea and is thereby blocking hopes for North–South reconciliation. Criticism of American arrogance and unilateralism in the face of rising Korean nationalism played a significant role in the fall 2002 presidential elections in South Korea. The result was the surprise election of human rights lawyer Roh Moo Hyun. Roh, whose young South Korean supporters favor rapidly expanding engagement with the North and have resisted Washington’s hard-line approach.

The outcome of the April 15 elections in Korea also will affect the nuclear stalemate, for the new National Assembly has undergone a dramatic shift in its makeup, giving President Roh’s Uri party majority status. The opposition also has realigned itself by advancing a more forthcoming approach to the North. Legal support for North–South exchanges and cooperation has become even easier than it was before the election.

Recent polls consistently indicate that a majority of South Koreans, particularly the young, see the United States as more dangerous than North Korea based on the possibility that the United States might attack North Korea. In contrast, China is seen as a more constructive force. In a poll taken recently of the members of the National Assembly, 55 percent favor closer relations with China than with the United States. Reasons range from the common Confucian values shared by China and Korea to the growing importance of China as an economic partner and market for South Korean goods and especially the constructive regional role China is playing vis-à-vis North Korea. America’s 50-year alliance with South Korea is at risk.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s decision in 2003 to withdraw from the tripwire role that the United States played on the Korean DMZ for 50 years was insensitive, badly timed, and unhelpful. It only reinforced the Asian perception that the United States is indifferent to the feel-

ings and objectives of South Koreans. President Bush’s announcement, without genuine consultations, of the redeployment of 12,500 of the 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea (3,600 of whom were dispatched to Iraq) further undermined faith in U.S. guarantees against a North Korean attack.

## **The Koizumi–Bush Partnership**

Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi seemingly has staked his legacy on close cooperation with the Bush administration. He has pressed for broadening the interpretation of the participation of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces in external contingencies by sending some 3,000 noncombatant humanitarian Self-Defense personnel to Iraq. Tokyo is committed to joining Bush’s “missile defense initiative.”

Prime Minister Koizumi has generally sided with the hard-line approach of Washington. His reaction reflects both the public anger in Japan over Kim Jong Il’s acknowledgment during the Koizumi–Kim summit in September 2002 that North Korea had kidnapped 13 Japanese, as well as Kim’s initial refusal to repatriate the families of those still alive, and Koizumi’s predilection to track Washington’s views on North Korea. Nonetheless, Tokyo has joined South Korea, China, and Russia in urging the United States to negotiate more flexibly with the DPRK.

Following his second meeting with Kim Jong Il, Prime Minister Koizumi, on June 9, 2004, argued that Kim Jong Il’s willingness to negotiate an end to its nuclear facilities should be tested by Washington by presenting a genuine negotiating package of compensatory actions for CVID. There are many Japanese across the spectrum who disagree with Koizumi’s heretofore uncritical support of Washington. Ultraconservatives have used the threat from North Korea to argue for the development of nuclear weapons. Other influential Japanese, in private, sharply criticize Washington for its failure to show sufficient flexibility to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

Japan clearly favors peaceful evolution and stability on the peninsula and would not welcome either collapse or confrontation. When North Korea fired its Taepodong ballistic missile over Japan in August 1998, the Japanese became intensely angry at North Korea. Many conservatives, however, were also angered by the United States, charging that Washington had failed to protect Japan, despite the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty. They argue that Washington’s inflexibility and its exclusive focus on terror and Iraq are facilitating a nuclear-armed North Korea and, in turn, feeding nationalistic elements in Japan who advocate abandoning Japan’s nonnuclear policy.

## **The Broader Asian Context**

Both China and Japan have profound national security interests on the Korean Peninsula. Clumsy, uncoordinated U.S. actions that exacerbate the crisis on the peninsula have raised legitimate questions in Tokyo, Beijing, and Seoul about Washington’s judgment.

None of the surrounding powers wants a nuclear-armed Korea, North or South. But they also do not want confrontation caused by Washington’s inept diplomacy. China and South Korea are acutely concerned about North Korea’s economy. Its collapse could create dangerous instability extending beyond its borders.

We must realize that the United States has become a determined player in the Korean Peninsula, where deep motivations, emotions, and historic goals prevail. The hubristic attitude of the Bush administration, the cavalier treatment of South Korean leaders, and the ineffective policy instituted toward the North risk our strategic position on the peninsula and possibly in all of Northeast Asia.

If the outcome of this crisis is a nuclear-armed North Korea, the reaction in South Korea and Japan will be harsh. South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia will blame the United States for having refused to talk seriously with Pyongyang.

South Korea, Taiwan, and even Japan might reconsider a nuclear option. Recent reports of South Korean laser experiments in enriching uranium, however explained, complicate the dangers of the unresolved nuclear threat from North Korea.

## **Backdrop: KEDO and the 1998 Crisis**

As a result of former President Jimmy Carter’s efforts in June 1994 that led to the Agreed Framework between the United States and the DPRK in October 1994, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was established to build two proliferation-resistant nuclear reactors and provide 500,000 metric tons annually of heavy fuel oil in exchange for the termination of North Korea’s nuclear programs at a place called Yongbyon.

KEDO was the first real attempt to test whether we could collectively deal with this extremely isolated nation. For North Korea, it was a test of whether it could deal with the noncommunist world. For Pyongyang, it was an enormous step to adopt a policy premised on friendly coexistence first with the United States and then, after Kim Dae Jung’s “sunshine” initiative, with South Korea and Japan.

The Agreed Framework verged on collapse in early 1998, when Pyongyang charged that the United States remained hostile to the DPRK, had not lifted economic sanctions, had delayed the construction of the light water reactors, and had not moved forward to normalize relations—all promised in the Agreed Framework. At the time, the United States suspected that secret nuclear activities were underway at Kumchang-ri. If so, they would have threatened the Agreed Framework. The atmosphere was further inflamed when a Taepodong ballistic missile was fired over Japan.

Over the next year, former Defense Secretary William Perry consulted extensively with South Korea, Japan, China, and many American experts

and then convinced the DPRK leadership that Washington was genuinely prepared to end American hostility and to normalize relations. Subsequently, the United States and the DPRK opened the door to major progress on ending the other North Korean threat—long-range ballistic missiles.

The evolution in North Korea from engagement through the Agreed Framework, KEDO, the Perry process, the North and South Korea summit in June 2000, U.S.–DPRK dialogue, and missile talks raised the hope of ending the 50-year threat to peace in Northeast Asia. The first time in which all efforts appeared to converge, it suggested turning the DPRK from a dangerous wildcard into a less menacing and perhaps more constructive member of the community of Northeast Asia.

## **The Bush Administration's Refusal to Reward "Blackmail"**

Against this hopeful background, President Bush abruptly rejected the Clinton administration's achievements. In the stunning press conference after his March 2001 meeting with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, President Bush publicly labeled North Korea's Kim Jong Il an untrustworthy dictator, seriously embarrassing American ally President Kim Dae Jung and giving high offense to Pyongyang. President Bush even more definitively abrogated Perry's achievement by including North Korea in the "axis of evil." Pyongyang concluded that the threat of "preemptive nuclear attack," outlined in the U.S. 2002 National Security Strategy of September 2002, was aimed at North Korea. As a result, Pyongyang expressed its fear that the DPRK would be the next target after Iraq.

In deference to its preferred war on Iraq, the Bush administration downplayed the North Korean threat, but in reality it fell into a dangerous and unproductive self-imposed trap.

## **The Deepening Crisis**

The administration broadcast that it would not submit to "blackmail" or engage North Korea in negotiations to end the threat. President Bush declared that the United States would pursue diplomatic channels to resolve this problem, but instead the administration began pushing Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia to exert economic pressure on North Korea.

Despite claiming for more than a year to be "prepared to talk anytime, anywhere, without conditions," the United States spurned talks for 21 months until State Department Assistant Secretary James Kelly's visit in October 2002 to Pyongyang. Severely constrained by his instructions, Kelly demanded that North Korea end its suspected enriched uranium project but refused to discuss other issues, including a comprehensive proposal that North Korea had tabled for resolving all issues between Washington and Pyongyang. During the talks, according to American interpreters, the North Koreans confessed that they were secretly building a highly enriched uranium facility. It would violate the U.S.–DPRK Agreed Framework of 1994.

After the North Korean "confession," U.S. acceptance of North Korea's claims that the United States had "nullified" the Agreed Framework was misguided. Washington should have continued talks to resolve this new issue, as it had done in 1998. The intelligence community estimates that North Korea could have produced 50–100 nuclear weapons in the 1990s had we not concluded the Agreed Framework. Unwisely the Bush administration tossed the restraints out the window. As a result, the crisis has steadily become more dangerous.

At U.S. urging, heavy fuel oil commitments were suspended by KEDO. Pyongyang predictably announced that it would restart the five-megawatt reactor that can produce enough plutonium each year to build a nuclear weapon. They threw out International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and removed the seals on

nuclear facilities. North Korea regained control of 8,000 spent fuel rods stored under the Agreed Framework and claimed to have reprocessed them. It also ended its missile moratorium. Further ratcheting up the pressure, Pyongyang claims that North Korea is strengthening its nuclear deterrent, boldly suggesting that North Korea had become a nuclear weapons state.

## **U.S.–DPRK Relations in Free Fall**

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In the aftermath of the North Korean “confession,” which North Korea subsequently denied, U.S. policy toward the DPRK evolved in a period of two years into the Bush administration’s demand for “complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement” as a precondition to discussions of other topics. Washington has been unwilling to accept a “freeze” on North Korea’s nuclear programs, as Pyongyang proposed, which could produce a context in which sequential, verifiable, reciprocal obligations could conceivably serve as the basis for a comprehensive resolution of all issues. Washington’s unyielding insistence on CVID first barely masks the role of hard-line elements in Mr. Bush’s regime, whose ultimate goal remains regime change in Pyongyang, despite the administration’s claims to seek a “diplomatic solution.”

Many reports indicate that Vice President Richard Cheney has played a primary role in thwarting genuine negotiations and that he and his like-minded conservative colleagues still seek to impose economic sanctions that would compel North Korea to capitulate on nuclear issues or face economic strangulation. Hard-liners in Washington still cling to the fantasy that China and South Korea will join in this policy to coerce the DPRK into collapse. Cheney publicly remarked in Beijing on April 12, “There is not much time” for North Korea to accept U.S. demands. He also noted, “Time is not on our side.”

DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan

agreed, telling a January 2004 American delegation that time was on the DPRK side. Kim noted that “The lapse of time will result in the quantitative and qualitative increase in our nuclear strength.”

Time is indeed on North Korea’s side.

## **North Korea Crosses the “Red Line”**

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The Clinton administration drew a clear red line against any reprocessing of the 8,000 spent fuel rods. Preoccupied by Iraq, the Bush administration backed away from that red line, emboldening Pyongyang to violate that prohibition. President Bush and ROK President Roh, after a meeting on May 14, 2003, in Washington, declared that North Korea would not be allowed to have nuclear weapons. In reality, President Bush did nothing after the DPRK blatantly erased Clinton’s red line and boldly claimed that it was building up its nuclear deterrent.

Nearly two years have passed since North Korea announced the resumption of reprocessing the 8,000 spent fuel rods recovered from its five-megawatt reactor in Yongbyon. We can presume that North Korean nuclear engineers have added a few more kilograms of plutonium to their already suspect stocks, enough to build six to eight more nuclear weapons. In addition, the highly enriched uranium program, which the North is suspected of having with the help of Pakistan, could possibly begin production of enriched uranium within two years.

Despite these ominous moves, Pyongyang has repeatedly announced that North Korea is prepared to negotiate the resolution of all the issues of concern to the United States, including explicit nuclear issues, while explicitly denying the existence of any highly enriched uranium program. According to reliable Chinese sources, Chairman Kim Jong Il confirmed the North’s willingness to end its nuclear programs during his April 19–21, 2004, visit to Beijing.

Nevertheless, we may be moving beyond the point at which North Korea might be willing to negotiate away its nuclear facilities, especially if those facilities have increased “quantitatively and qualitatively.” Pyongyang may well decide, in light of the Bush administration’s continuing hostility and unwillingness to negotiate, that its best protection from the Bush administration is to become a nuclear-armed state. In any case, U.S. delays in treating the nuclear issue seriously have steadily escalated the dangers and the eventual cost of a settlement.

The hopes of late 2000 have been dashed, and we are in the midst of a very dangerous crisis. The threat from North Korea is far greater now than it was three years ago. (Since at least 2001 it has been a greater threat to U.S. national security interests than Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.)

## **The Radicalization of America’s Foreign Policy**

The administration’s obsession with Iraq, its downplaying and even exacerbation of the dangerous crisis on the Korean Peninsula, and its indifference and insensitivities to allies and friends in Asia, coupled with a lack of focus on profound economic and political evolution in East Asia, are seriously challenging and even risking the stability of U.S. alliances and the preeminent influence of the United States in East Asia.

Under President Bush, the United States has not played the constructive leadership role to which our allies had grown accustomed during the past 60 years. Instead, the United States under Bush has pursued policies that risk and even promote war, a radical departure for the United States. An implicit U.S. threat of a “preemptive attack” against North Korea has alarmed our partners in Northeast Asia.

To the consternation of those experienced Asian leaders, the Bush administration arrogantly presumed to know better than they how to handle North Korea. President Bush made this

clear in his initial meeting with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, who has spent his life thinking about the issue of North–South Korean reconciliation.

North Korea is an unusual nation with a history, perceptions, and ways of negotiating that are profoundly different from those of the United States. Although we can hope for success, we cannot demand that the North play or negotiate according to our rules. We must deal with realities, not attempt to dictate rules that are meaningless to Pyongyang. There are clear patterns of success even in the limited history we now have with Pyongyang, but the Bush administration seems determined to ignore what we have learned.

The vital national security interests of the United States and its allies demand that Washington deal urgently and effectively with North Korea. Attempting to postpone the efficient management of this issue because of ideological or domestic political considerations is unconscionable. North Korea may decide to force a denouement, precipitating deadly conflict. Awaiting the disposal of Iraq and other issues before dealing with North Korea may be irresponsibly and tragically too late to avoid a catastrophic war or a nuclear-armed North Korea.

## **Missile Defenses Cloud the Atmosphere**

Closely related to North Korean proliferation issues is the administration’s drive to develop and deploy a robust missile defense system.

After taking power, the Bush administration frequently pointed to North Korea as the threat that required a missile defense system, despite the fact that it did not pursue an effective strategy for eliminating that threat. Prior to September 11, 2001, the same conservatives who were promoting Iraq as a threat in the Middle East seemingly regarded China as the prime candidate to replace the Soviet Union as chief global vil-

lain. The Al Qaeda attacks and terrorism supplanted the Chinese target temporarily and fortunately at least some in the administration seem to realize that China's global role, including its performance in the United Nations and in combating terrorism, outweighs its role as challenger. But the same individuals who harbored concerns that China would be the U.S. global rival in the twenty-first century still promote missile defense as part of the global strategy for dealing with the security dangers posed by China as well as rogue states.

Thus while the North Korean threat was used to promote missile defense, China still appears as if it will become an ultimate target. With only 20 or so strategic nuclear weapons that could reach the United States, a robust missile defense system could attempt to counter China's intercontinental ballistic missiles. If the United States continues to pursue a robust missile defense system, China will likely install multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRV) on its current missiles, accelerating an East Asian arms race. The initial deployment of the missile defense system in 2005, long before it has been tested adequately and certified as effective, and strong U.S. pressure on Japan to join the system have given life to this questionable program.

Taiwan, of course, has shown great interest in the system, and some Taiwanese planners think that participation in the U.S.–Japanese missile defense system would be a silver bullet to deter China from considering an attack on Taiwan.

Reinforcing the geostrategic shifts emerging from the North Korean issue by pursuing the missile defense system, the Bush administration is setting the stage for a strategic split in East Asia. Its fault lines will pit the United States, Japan, and Taiwan on one side against China, the Koreans, and Southeast Asia on the other.

This dynamic would engender a deepening gulf between China and Japan. Doubts arising in Japan about the effectiveness of U.S. policy in dealing with the North Korean threat and the effective shift of the Koreans to China's sphere of

influence could combine to feed nationalist fervor in Japan. Such a shift could spark significant Japanese efforts to build their defenses as hedges aimed at alleviating doubts about American judgment and effectiveness in providing an adequate defense for Japan. Such national impulses could erode Japan's post-World War II nuclear aversion and lead Tokyo to a decision to build nuclear weapons, clearly well within Japanese capabilities but a seismic shift in Japan's military posture.

## **Meanwhile . . . in Southeast Asia**

While the United States is focused on Iraq and terrorism, Asia is moving forward without the United States to build new economic institutions. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus three (China, Japan, and Korea) and the Northeast Asia annual summits of China, Japan, and Korea are becoming major instruments for coordinating economic policies and integration and implicitly for making political arrangements for the future. China and ASEAN have made steady progress on a free trade agreement (FTA) that would include nearly 2 billion people with a combined GDP of \$2 trillion by 2010. Fulfilling the Japan–ASEAN targets would lead to the creation of an FTA by 2012 that would include the more developed members of ASEAN (by 2015 to include Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos) engaged in bilateral trade of \$700 billion involving 500 million persons in ASEAN. South Korea and ASEAN are negotiating an FTA to take effect in 2009 with the six original ASEAN states. Also, an FTA will be negotiated with the remaining four members by 2014. These efforts highlight Asians building Asia without American involvement.

A profound divergence of interests between the United States and its Asian allies seems to have emerged during the past three years. The United States is not engaged effectively in these

emerging institutions of the future. These developments are positive, but they may not serve America's long-term interests or sustain a pre-eminent American role in Asia.

With the end of the cold war, Asia is more interested in economic development and integration into the global economy than in America's aggressive and potentially disruptive military policies.

Keeping pace with the rest of the world, anti-Americanism has grown steadily throughout the region over the past two years. American indifference (except its reaction to terror) and the perception that the United States is anti-Islamic have stirred deeply antagonistic attitudes in Indonesia and Malaysia. Our traditional ally, Thailand, has been focused on its economic future and increasingly looks to China as its principal partner in the future, a mood growing throughout Southeast Asia.

In Southeast Asia, ironically, only Vietnam seems to have reacted to strategic developments by moving toward the United States, principally for economic reasons but also as a hedge against the widespread perception in the region that China is steadily and effectively reassuming its historic role as the Middle Kingdom of Asia.

## Possible Options

The core question remains North Korea. At this point what are our options?

The Bush administration can aggressively and essentially unilaterally attempt to change the regime in Pyongyang. South Korea, China, and Russia will not join in such an undertaking. Pursuing the path advocated by the radicals in the U.S. administration raises the grave risk of a war. With 11,000 long-range artillery pieces, North Korea could attack or respond to an attack that could destroy the capital of South Korea; kill an estimated million South Koreans, American civilians and military personnel, and Japanese; and destroy South Korea's economy and endanger Japan's.

As noted, this approach is irrational but still holds great sway within the Bush administration. It risks catastrophic war.

As a second option, the Bush administration can continue to dilly-dally and not deal seriously with the North Korean threat. For its failure to try to manage this very serious threat, Washington will be condemned by all of its allies and friends in Northeast Asia.

Unlike Clinton, Bush has drawn only one set of red lines restricting the export of or the transfer to terrorists of nuclear technology. By focusing on the role of terrorists, he has played into the hands of Kim Jong Il and allowed North Korea to reprocess the 8,000 spent fuel rods, restart the five-megawatt reactor to produce more unspent fuel that can be reprocessed, and continue toward the probable construction of the highly enriched uranium facility. If we are not prepared to accept the horrors of war mentioned above, then we may be faced with a dangerous North Korea that possesses nuclear weapons in the heartland of our strategic interests in Northeast Asia.

In either case the United States will lose the strategic struggle for preeminence in Northeast Asia, which is gathering speed.

China will assume that role by default. South Korea is already moving rapidly into China's sphere of influence. South Korea's trade with China has surpassed that with the United States. Its political and security affinities for Beijing look as if they are becoming increasingly close when assessed against the backdrop of growing disenchantment with Washington. Seoul may even ask that U.S. forces leave South Korea. Beijing could assume responsibility for managing Korean matters irrespective of whether that means the acceptance of a nuclear-armed Korea. Koreans would be beholden to China for the resolution of national security issues in Northeast Asia, including the reunification of the Koreans under Beijing's, not Washington's, auspices.

The Bush administration has, in effect, subcontracted American responsibilities for resolving the Korean crisis to Beijing, an ironic development in light of the fact that the United States

fought the Korean and Vietnam wars principally to curb China's influence.

As a third option, the United States can exercise its historic leadership to negotiate a settlement with North Korea and lead the six-party talks to construct a durable framework for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

## Conclusion: New Strategic Directions

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A broad five-point strategy could promote a more promising environment for American influence and probably avoid the dismal options that have emerged.

1. America's unidimensional focus on terrorism and Iraq needs to be balanced by renewed engagement in other strategic issues. We cannot afford to focus exclusively on terrorism and Iraq, despite the great dangers both now pose to American interests.
2. President Bush must break the deadlock in his administration and give full authority to Secretary of State Colin Powell to pursue bilaterally and with flexibility a comprehensive solution to the nuclear issues related to North Korea. The president is responsible for our national security interests, and as long as he lets the radical conservatives exercise a veto, he will continue to risk the national security interests of the United States and its allies and jeopardize the future strategic orientation of East Asia. The president can no longer outsource American national interests in East Asia to Beijing. Washington must engage North Korea directly and must forge a solution.
3. Although the key nuclear issue with North Korea must be negotiated essentially in bilateral talks between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea because Pyongyang regards the United States alone as a threat to its national security, bilateral negotiations should be rooted in the six-party-talk format. Those talks can construct a comprehensive solution as the principal organization for building a peaceful and prosperous Northeast Asia.
4. The United States should strive for a genuine partnership with China. Also, it should undertake a major initiative to establish a trilateral strategic dialogue and relationship among China, Japan, and the United States. Washington should move to defuse rather than exacerbate incipient rivalry between China and Japan and recognize that American interests will best be served by constructive relations among all three.

Although the Bush administration's lackadaisical approach has seriously risked American interests, Kim Jong Il appears to be willing to abandon North Korea's nuclear arsenal and facilities in exchange for American security guarantees; access to economic support from the rest of the world, particularly South Korea and Japan; and steady movement toward normalized relations with the United States. During Kim Jong Il's April 2004 visit to China, Beijing again pressed the North Korean leader to seek a solution that would be congenial to U.S. interests.

The dialogue should have as its aim,

at a minimum, capping the scope of any missile defense system by focusing on and dealing with rogue states and making clear that the system is not aimed at China's strategic forces.

At the same time, the United States should strive to achieve a new understanding with China regarding Taiwan. China should mitigate the continual military threat to Taiwan and ideally remove the missiles aimed from Fujian Province toward Taiwan. For its part, the Bush administration should assure Beijing that Taiwan will not be included in any U.S. missile system and that it will renew the Reagan commitment of 1982 and reduce its supply of advanced weaponry to Taiwan.

The U.S. goal should seek to bring China and Japan and eventually a reunifying Korea into strategic discussions aimed at curtailing the militarization of Northeast Asia.

5. Finally, the United States needs to reengage with Southeast Asia. With 500 million people prospectively developing a \$400 billion economic entity, Southeast Asia has strategic implications the United States is ignoring. We should pay much more attention to issues other than ter-

rorism. Our attention should be focused sharply on the regional ASEAN group, collectively and individually. There is no valid justification for ceding Southeast Asia's strategic direction to China or any other power. Top-level participation in the ASEAN and APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Conference) forums and paying serious and particular attention to the economic issues of Southeast Asia can restore a robust dialogue and relationship with this important region and provide a rationale for its not moving definitively into China's sphere of influence.

### ***About the Author***

Desaix Anderson, a 35-year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service, spent most of his career working on Asian issues. He was the first envoy to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam following the establishment of diplomatic relations. He served in various diplomatic capacities, including positions in Nepal, Vietnam, Taipei, Tokyo, and Thailand, and as principal deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, where he covered Japan, Korea, China, and Mongolia (1989–1992). He has taught contemporary Asian political economies and Asian security issues at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.