

# Review Essay

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## North Korea and Failed Diplomacy

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Three of the books in this review essay share in common their view of an “Axis of Evil” in American foreign policy under the George W. Bush Administration. This “Axis” is what authors Charles Pritchard, Jacques Fuqua, and Mike Chinoy describe as the “hard-liners” in the Bush Administration; a cabal led by then-Vice President Richard Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton. The three authors accuse these hard-liners of derailing any nuclear disarmament agreement with North Korea. They share the view that with continued, patient engagement the “Agreed Framework” with North Korea could have been salvaged, despite the highly enriched uranium program that was to replace the North’s plutonium nuclear weapons program.

In *The Peninsula Question* Yoichi Funabashi provides a more nuanced perspective, identifying a well-networked group of “neoconservatives” in the Bush Administration who were skeptical that any deal could be reached with North Korea. The author also provides a rich discussion of the perspective of Japan’s politicians on North Korea and explains Japan’s interests in the outcome.

Charles Bechtol’s *Red Rogue* provides an objective, well-argued, and balanced discussion that is well-documented. He is pessimistic about the future, but his writing is free of ideological or political bias. His book also has the advantage of providing a solid explanation of how the conventional military threat from North Korea against the South affects the nuclear issue. From Bechtol’s perspective, “precedent suggests the North Koreans will simply pursue an alternate path to nuclear weaponization” regardless of the interim agreements that may be reached. The author’s assessment is that Pyongyang will cheat or stall, regardless of the incentives that are offered.

This reviewer will attempt to assess and comment on these books based on a perspective developed during two tours of duty as a military attaché in China. This experience, and subsequent visits to China, provided a host of opportunities to solicit the views of Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) senior leaders regarding the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Chinese and American interests on the Korean Peninsula.

As the 1994 “Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” neared its first crisis, officials from the Clinton Administration traveled to China seeking counsel, to convey American frustration, and to attempt to meet with North Korean officials. In the senior ranks of China’s leadership, many feared war might explode, while at the same time it appeared that economic conditions in the North might bring about a collapse of Kim Jong-il’s regime.

In 1995 and 1996, as American politicians tried to deal with the North Korean nuclear program, some of the most senior officers in the PLA made it clear that neither the United States, nor its ally South Korea, should attempt to inject military forces over the 38th parallel, either to stabilize a collapse in North Korea or to attack suspected nuclear sites.

While the Clinton Administration debated whether to conduct air strikes on suspected nuclear sites in North Korea, several PLA officials at the highest echelons of the Defense Ministry and the PLA's General Staff Department stated, "China will not let North Korea collapse." Unlike their American counterparts, senior PLA intelligence officers did not agree that if North Korea had nuclear weapons it necessarily created a crisis. These PLA officers suggested that as early as 1995 Kim Jong-il had two to three plutonium-based nuclear devices, but that American nuclear superiority and extended deterrence to Japan and South Korea was sufficient to maintain peace on the Peninsula. In other words, the PLA was not concerned that North Korea was armed with nuclear weapons then, and they believed that the United States should continue a policy of patient engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

With respect to contingency missions on the Korean Peninsula, one of the most senior Chinese military leaders with whom this reviewer had contact said in 1996 that "if the leaders in the United States think the US military or its ally South Korea can simply march north in the event of a collapse in North Korea without some consultation with the PLA, it will look like 1950 all over again." He emphasized that this position should be reported accurately to the US government and that China had its own vital security interests and commitments in North Korea, which he expected the US leadership to consider and consult on before acting. These are critical points because they affect how far the United States and its allies could then go (and can go now) in pursuing sanctions related to the Six-Party Talks, as well as how to craft any response to crises on the Korean Peninsula.

The bottom-line from the perspective of this reviewer is that there are limits to what the United States and its allies can do unless they want a complete break with or to invite conflict with China. At the same time, no matter what sanctions are imposed on Pyongyang, the Chinese leadership is firm that they will take measures to forestall any collapse of the North Korean regime, which ultimately would make such sanctions less effective.

Given this perspective, the most realistic of the books discussed in this review essay is *Red Rogue: The Persistent Challenge of North Korea*, by Charles Bechtol, Jr. Bechtol is the only author who seems to consider that it may be impossible to create circumstances where North Korea would abandon its nuclear weapons program because of external support (from China and Russia). Yoichi Funabashi, in *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis*, comes to much the same conclusion. Both authors are realists, and Funabashi's work provides an important explanation of how the kidnappings of Japanese citizens by the North Koreans affect domestic politics as Tokyo takes part in the Six-Party Talks as well as its own bilateral discussions with the DPRK.

The author of *Failed Diplomacy* is Charles "Jack" Pritchard, a very experienced Asia hand. He is a retired Army colonel, a Foreign Area Officer, and was US Army attaché in Tokyo. Pritchard served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the Clinton

Administration and then on the National Security Council (NSC). In the Clinton Administration, Pritchard spent five years as senior director of Asian affairs on the NSC and became senior director for Asia. When President Bush took office, Pritchard was asked to fill the position of US representative to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization at the Department of State, reporting to the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. By that time he had retired from the Army after 28 years of service, but he was well-known to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage, and his direct boss, Assistant Secretary James Kelly.

Parts of Pritchard's narrative, however, are sadly almost naïve. He seems to believe that after serving in political positions for several years, he could just move over into an appointed position in another administration and have the trust of people ideologically committed to different policies and politics. These are some of the hard-liners that catch most of Pritchard's ire in his book.

Not all of these hard-liners are neoconservatives. In that sense Yoichi Funabashi also mischaracterizes some of the Bush appointees who were skeptical of any deal with North Korea. All of the people who frustrated Pritchard (as well as Powell, Armitage, and Kelly), however, did not trust Kim Jong-il, were convinced that North Korea would cheat on any agreement it made, and believed that the Clinton Administration had cut bad deals in all of its negotiations with North Korea.

Authors Pritchard, Fuqua, and Chinoy all point to roughly the same group of people as undermining any efforts toward a deal with Pyongyang. These include: then-Vice President Cheney; Cheney's chief of staff, "Scooter" Libby; Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld; Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz; Under Secretary of Defense Doug Feith; Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton; State Department staff appointee Mark Groombridge; Robert Joseph, the senior director for counterproliferation on the NSC; Erik Edleman in the Office of the Vice President; and Assistant Secretary of Defense J. D. Crouch. The three authors describe classic bureaucratic infighting throughout the interagency process between these committed skeptics of North Korea (and Clinton policies) and other moderate or pragmatic diplomats and political appointees in the Bush Administration.

*Failed Diplomacy* is a good read because of the detail and personal observations Pritchard injects regarding his North Korean interlocutors. He is critical of President Bush for the handling of then-South Korean President Kim Dae-Jong (insulting Kim by referring to him as "this man"), but does not discuss the policy errors Kim Dae-Jong made when assuming office in attempts to push a conciliatory agenda toward North Korea even before meeting President Bush. Pritchard is also correct in his criticism of the manner in which the President made disparaging remarks to the press about North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. Public insults in the international press are not the way to begin a diplomatic dialogue.

Part of the reason for Pritchard's discomfort is that he was a political holdover. It is hard to accept a political appointment and function effectively when you are not one of the activists and partisan political workers who helped frame a party's platform and the President's policies throughout the campaign and assumption of office. There are limits to how much trust a committed political team will place in outsiders. That may be a lesson for the Obama Administration and for Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a holdover who will undoubtedly keep some of his Bush team while he is in office.

Pritchard misses the mark, however, on whether the negotiations could have succeeded had the hard-liners not frustrated any efforts at a resolution. If the Chinese Communist Party leadership was always going to act as the “safety valve” to ensure that things would not get too tough in Pyongyang, why would Kim Jong-il need to live up to his agreements? Pritchard lays a lot of the blame on the Bush Administration for North Korea getting the bomb, as his subtitle indicates.

This reviewer thinks Pritchard is wrong. The real tragic story of how North Korea got not one, but two kinds of bombs is not because of Bush (or Clinton) administration policies, but because of Pakistan’s and China’s complicity. Bruce Bechtol covers that process well.

Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr., retired from the Marine Corps and went on to teach international relations at the US Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He is a former intelligence officer with the Defense Intelligence Agency and has experience working and teaching in South Korea. He holds a doctorate in national security studies from the Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. In *Red Rogue* Bechtol asserts there is plenty of evidence available to policy professionals, without resorting to classified information, to confirm North Korea’s highly enriched uranium (HEU) program. Further, he argues, Pyongyang pursued the HEU program because the agreement to freeze the plutonium program in the 1994 “Agreed Framework” and to submit to International Atomic Energy Agency oversight meant that Kim Jong-il needed an alternate nuclear weapons program. Bechtol blames Pakistan, the A. Q. Khan black-market nuclear supply ring that operated out of Pakistan, and Chinese complicity for North Korea getting these bombs.

If the Chinese intelligence officers with whom this reviewer interacted in 1995 are correct, North Korea had three to five nuclear weapons then and has added to them. Bechtol thinks they also have HEU weapons. He cites a number of sources to support this, including Hwang Jong-Yop, a defector from the DPRK; testimony by Bob Gallucci, the former Clinton Administration negotiator; and former Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lowell Jacoby’s testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Bechtol’s *Red Rogue* is well-written and argued in a balanced tone. The reader does not come away feeling that the author had an ideological or personal axe to grind. The treatment is pragmatic and full of historical detail. It also has a very useful discussion of North Korea’s conventional military threat against South Korea, which gives the entire issue some context. One goal of Bush Administration policies was to address both the conventional and the nuclear threats. Bechtol offers a short but excellent discussion of Chinese and Russian interests in maintaining the status quo on the Peninsula. Policymakers in both China and Russia have no interest in a North Korean collapse. Bechtol argues that China and Russia are comfortable with Cold War-like nuclear deterrence calculations and think that the likelihood of nuclear conflict is low. They think American deterrence and extended deterrence are adequate to keep the Peninsula stable. This analysis is very close to that of experts on Korea the reviewer has talked to in China.

Jacques L. Fuqua is another retired military officer. He was a Northeast Asia Foreign Area Officer in the Army and retired as a lieutenant colonel after 21 years of service. He went on to run international programs at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. In *Nuclear Endgame*, the author is quite critical of Bush Administration

policies, arguing that the whole concept of “complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement” of North Korea’s nuclear program (the Bush “CVID” formula) might be a decent policy goal for an end-state on the Korean Peninsula, but it is not a strategy for achieving that goal.

Fuqua instead offers four premises that he thinks should be the foundation of any strategy for dealing with North Korea. First, the nuclear issue should not be a standalone approach but must be part of a comprehensive approach to security and economic well-being on the Korean Peninsula. Second, any formula must offer economic benefits to North Korea to succeed; it cannot be an approach that relies solely on isolation and sanctions. Third, and this is really the crux of Fuqua’s thesis, negotiators should understand the ideological underpinnings of North Korea’s Communist Party and its history. Finally, he argues that constructive engagement with North Korea does not mean capitulation in the negotiation; therefore, despite negative circumstances, the United States needs to remain engaged.

Where has Fuqua been for the past 15 years or so? The United States began serious discussions with North Korea to address conventional security, economic well-being, and eventually the nuclear program in Poland in approximately 1988. Then, for another five years, American and North Korean diplomats met in Beijing and at the United Nations until the “Agreed Framework” was reached. All that time, there were military-to-military discussions going on to decide how to locate the remains of missing personnel from the Korean War. These were comprehensive approaches to problems, and they involved economic aid to North Korea.

Another facet of Fuqua’s logic is his advocacy for “asymmetric economic statecraft.” This was the approach that the People’s Republic of China suggested to US negotiators after the 1995 nuclear crisis. The idea was that the United States and other parties to the “Agreed Framework” would continue to supply fuel oil and economic assistance to North Korea as good will, with the idea that at some time in the future Pyongyang would reciprocate and end its security threats. Well, we have been there and done that. Fuqua also suggests that the West find a way to develop a market system and economic liberalization in North Korea. After all, Kim Dae-Jong’s “Sunshine Policy” was a failed experiment in “asymmetric economic statecraft.”

Another suggestion from the author is that just as the failure of the Soviet Union led to the unification of Germany, then only the end of China’s support to North Korea can lead to reunification on the Korean Peninsula. This reviewer’s recollection is that bankers and industrialists in South Korea were appalled at the cost of German reunification and preferred to keep separate while helping a viable economy to develop in the North. They did not want to foot the bill for reunification. Also, the Chinese Communist Party was in no hurry to abandon its support for North Korea and is not willing to do so today.

Do not spend the \$49.95 to buy *Nuclear Endgame*. The publisher, the Greenwood Press subsidiary Praeger Security International, has got to find a way to publish more affordable books. If you want to read about Fuqua’s personal interpretation of the North Korean concept of *Juche*, which he translates as “independence of action,” get the book out of the library. This may be the only part of the book worth the money.

Yoichi Funabashi is an experienced Japanese journalist and editor-in-chief of the *Asahi Shimbun* in Tokyo. This newspaper has a liberal editorial line and works very

hard to present objective, balanced articles that present both sides of any policy debate. Also, Funabashi is a strong “America watcher” who has written for the United States Institute of Peace and the Council on Foreign Relations in addition to being a distinguished guest scholar at the Brookings Institution. He takes a balanced approach in *The Peninsula Question*, an excellent, richly documented book. Funabashi interviewed all the principals from every participating nation in the Six-Party Talks and hundreds of other sources, although he does not name his North Korean interlocutors.

*The Peninsula Question* provides a superb explanation of the Japanese perspective on North Korea and Korean Peninsula security. For those who are not familiar with the actions of North Korea in forcibly abducting a number of Japan’s citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, Funabashi’s account is mandatory reading. He opens the book with a dramatic account of the internal debate among Japan’s diplomats and politicians who accompanied Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on his September 2002 meeting with Kim Jong-il. The account by Funabashi makes it clear that Koizumi closely coordinated with President Bush on the steps to be taken before Japan normalized diplomatic relations with North Korea. President Bush also updated Koizumi on what the United States knew about Pyongyang’s HEU program before the trip and expressed support for Japanese-North Korean normalization. Here, Funabashi’s account shows a more flexible Bush policy than that outlined in the Fuqua text. Also, Funabashi’s account differs from that of Mike Chinoy in *Meltdown* and Jack Pritchard’s in *Failed Diplomacy*. In the latter two books, the authors portray a George W. Bush who was less supportive of Japan’s policy initiative.

There is also a riveting (at least for this reviewer) description of the way that Kim Jong-il explained and apologized to Koizumi and the Japanese people for the abductions. For North Korea to take responsibility for the abductions was an internal precondition in the Japanese delegation’s negotiating position before bilateral relations could be normalized. Here again, Funabashi’s account differs from that of Mike Chinoy. Chinoy quotes a Columbia University professor, Gerald Curtiss, who says that the main issue for Koizumi was resolving the nuclear issue with North Korea and then “the abductee issue will not stand in the way of a rapid normalization between North Korea and Japan.” Funabashi makes it clear that Diet politics and domestic politics in Japan dictated that movement on the abductees must come before normalization could be accepted in Japan. Whatever other books a student of North Korea and the Korean Peninsula chooses to read, *The Peninsula Question* must be included.

Mike Chinoy, the author of *Meltdown*, is one of television’s most experienced journalists. He is no stranger to operating in “denied environments,” having spent more than a decade as CNN’s bureau chief in Beijing. He covered the Tiananmen Square massacre in China and has also made a number of trips into Pyongyang. Chinoy culminated his career with CNN as its Asia bureau chief in Hong Kong. He is now the Edgerton Fellow on Korean Security at the Pacific Council on International Policy in Los Angeles.

*Meltdown* provides an account from more of an American perspective and in that sense is a good parallel read to *The Peninsula Question*. Chinoy’s writing has more of an “edge” to it than Funabashi’s. Chinoy manages to capture the sometimes biting and personal internal dynamics between the hard-liners (or neoconservatives) in the Bush Administration and the pragmatists there. He puts Vice President Cheney and

the Office of the Vice President (OVP) at the center of the hard-line approach to North Korea. Samantha Ravich, of the OVP, is described by Chinoy as the “ultraconservative” who those in the Administration favoring negotiations with Pyongyang called “Samantha Rabid” behind her back. One gets some sense of the bitterness between factions in the Bush Administration and toward Clinton Administration policy from Jack Pritchard’s account in *Failed Diplomacy*, but *Meltdown* is pretty graphic about it all.

At times, however, Chinoy is a little repetitive. How many times does the reader need to see special envoy for talks with North Korea Joseph DeTrani (who replaced Pritchard in the job) described as a “former CIA agent” or “former CIA operative?” This happens at every mention of DeTrani’s name in the book. Surely anyone who has read *Charlie Wilson’s War* will be familiar with DeTrani’s history of work with the Chinese intelligence services to arm Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets after the Soviet military invaded Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, despite these minor but critical points, Chinoy’s *Meltdown* is a superb addition to any library on Korean Peninsula issues. He managed to interview liberals and conservatives alike, plus a solid number of his extensive international contacts, and provides a very good perspective. Read with Pritchard’s *Failed Diplomacy*, this book details the factional and policy fights in the Bush Administration and between the Bush and Clinton people.

Bechtol’s *Red Rogue* closes with a more or less pessimistic outlook that forecasts continued stalling, cheating, and obfuscation by North Korea. He also suggests that China and Russia will work to keep the Kim Jong-il regime alive. This is probably correct. As the Obama Administration takes up the issue, some familiar players will reemerge. At one point, some of the Clinton people seriously contemplated a military strike on suspected North Korean nuclear facilities. Former Clinton Administration Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Ashton Carter was fairly hard-line on North Korea and supported the CVID approach. Will he reappear?

We know that Robert (Bob) Einhorn, an excellent and patient nuclear non-proliferation negotiator from the Clinton Administration, may get a position under the new administration. He differed in approach from some of the Bush people but was pretty hard-line himself. Another pretty tough negotiator, Jim Steinberg, is supposed to be joining the State Department on the Obama national security team. Also, we may well see Jack Pritchard back with another administration. Certainly he will have some influence.

It will be ironic that President Obama, considered by many to be a liberal, will face a different landscape on the Korean Peninsula. The conservative Administration of President Bush had to deal with the liberal Kim Dae-Jong in framing policy toward Pyongyang. President Obama, at least as this article goes to print, will deal with Lee Myung-bak and a more conservative National Assembly in Seoul. All of this guarantees that the books reviewed will help to navigate the terrain of the Korea Peninsula.

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