



## IIPS Viewpoint Series

# Countering the North Korean Ballistic Missile Threat

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The Korean peninsula is a vital strategic location, around which land and sea powers hang in geopolitical balance. Moreover, it plays an important role as a buffer zone between these powers. From the perspective of the nations concerned—China, Russia, Japan, and the US—the preservation of a damage-free co-existence with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) represents a tolerable compromise situation. Under the current dictatorship, North Korea has long focused more on military development than on building a prosperous national economy, and is presently working at a frenzied pace to develop and acquire ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including nuclear weapons. As a manufacturer of these weapons, North Korea is becoming the primary source of global proliferation, exporting WMD and ballistic missiles to other “rogue nations.”

North Korea has never officially abandoned its long-standing plans to invade the south, and it continues to commit unlawful acts in the vicinity of South Korea and Japan. This threatening country has already built up a stockpile of biological and chemical weapons, has ballistic missiles ready and waiting that can strike anywhere in South Korea and Japan, and is also attempting to acquire nuclear weapons. In October 2002 the DPRK admitted to developing highly enriched uranium nuclear weapons in secret. They have since re-activated a nuclear facility in Yongbyon, which had been shut down since the Agreed Framework of 1994, thereby further escalating the crisis over the development of new weapons.

Even if the DPRK did somehow manage to keep to the terms of the Agreed Framework, many fear that it will simply play the nuclear crisis card again and again in order to stall for time while it builds up a military nuclear capability. As they have demonstrated by their actions since the introduction of the Agreed Framework, the DPRK obviously has no intention of abandoning its nuclear development program.

In the case of the current nuclear crisis, as in the handling of the Japanese abduction problem, the miscalculations of Kim Jong-Il play a major role. Kim is using the very same ploy that he used during the 1993 nuclear crisis; however, what he does not seem to understand is that the Bush administration is not the Clinton administration. From the start, Kim Jong-Il has been pushing the wrong buttons and he seems to recognize no lines whatsoever—let alone red lines. Thus, if Kim misinterprets the message of the US and the international community, and rebuffs the pleas of neighboring nations, the US will have no choice but to use military force.

Although the Bush administration appears to be taking all this in its stride, the recent tightening of controls may be an effort to force Pyongyang to either concede or to self-destruct. This gambit is reminiscent of US negotiations with Japan just before the beginning of the war in 1941. At that time, the US publicly stated that it was seeking a peaceful solution to the problem with Japan through negotiation; yet, at the same time it was stepping up draconian economic policies aimed at undermining Japan. In August 1941, the US enacted a ban on oil exports to Japan, effectively completing the so-called ABCD encirclement. On 26

November of the same year, the US issued what amounted to an ultimatum in the form of the Hull Note, which set out demands that Japan could not possibly accept.

If the situation is viewed in this light, North Korea could gradually be corralled with Chinese and Russian cooperation, once the problem of Iraq has been resolved. An internal regime change without a violent outburst would be preferable, but is highly unlikely at this point. Perhaps the time has come for Japan, the US, and South Korea to work with China and Russia to remove the regime of Kim Jong-Il and establish stability and order on the Korean peninsula. Of course, pursuing such a policy also entails certain risks. North Korean options are few. From Pyongyang's standpoint, a ballistic missile attack against Japan may constitute the easiest option, since Japan lacks adequate defenses against this type of attack.

The five defenses (5 Ds) against ballistic missile attack are (1) dissuasion, (2) deterrence, (3) denial, (4) defense (active defense), and (5) damage confinement (passive defense). It is vitally important that Japan make use of the synergistic effects of the 5 Ds in its ballistic missile defenses.

Japan should thus immediately announce its intention to attack strategic bases and start amassing the strength and equipment necessary for deterring ballistic missile attacks.

Meanwhile, national policies to promote both active and passive defense should be established. To prevent panic in the event of a ballistic missile attack, readiness among the general population for self-defense and damage confinement must be advocated, and the establishment of evacuation procedures must be made an urgent objective at the municipal level.