

Did Cheney and Co. Cook Korea Intelligence, Too?

by Kathy Wolfe

Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and their neo-conservative theorists have refused to rule out an American military first strike on North Korea, citing allegations of a North Korean nuclear threat. Rumsfeld adviser Richard Perle, of the Defense Policy Board, said on June 13 that Washington “cannot exclude the kind of surgical strike we saw in 1981,” on Iraq’s Osirak nuclear facility, this time by the United States against North Korea (the D.P.R.K.).

But some in the U.S. intelligence community are sounding a warning. Former CIA Director John Deutch told the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on July 24: “If no weapons of mass destruction or only a residual capability is found [in Iraq], the principal justification enunciated by the U.S. government for launching this war will have proven not to be credible. It is an intelligence failure, in my judgment, of massive proportions. . . . The next time military intervention is judged necessary to combat the spread weapons of mass destruction, for example, in North Korea, there will be skepticism about the quality of our intelligence.”

Korean and Japanese elites are asking: Is the Administration’s intelligence on North Korea also based political manipulation, as with its intelligence on Iraq?

Some professional U.S. military and intelligence experts are saying: “Could be.”

For example, Dr. Jonathan Pollack, chairman of the Strategic Research Department of the U.S. Naval War College, writing in the *Naval War College Review*,¹ presents documentation that under the Bush Administration’s new Korea policy since 2001:

1. “Decades-old” CIA estimates on North Korea’s plutonium

program were altered, to state that North Korea “has the bomb;” in effect, a re-writing of history.

2. Senior Administration officials created the October 2002 confrontation with Pyongyang, by charging the D.P.R.K. with also enriching uranium to weapons grade, despite the fact that evidence gathered by the CIA and other agencies “is far from definitive.”

3. The Administration did this in order to disrupt the normalization of North Korean ties with Japan and other neighbors, America’s allies.

4. Senior Administration officials “opted to exploit the intelligence for political purposes,” as did the North Koreans.

A ‘Scripted’ Conflict

U.S. diplomatic sources have told *EIR* that it was Vice President Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice who wrote the “fixed script” which Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs James Kelly took to Pyongyang last October, creating a confrontation over the uranium issue, which led to the collapse of the U.S.-D.P.R.K. Agreed Framework. Kelly charged that Pyongyang had an illegal uranium enrichment program to build nuclear weapons.

Dr. Pollack names no names, but he warns that “the severest of future crises could yet loom. One or both states might ultimately be sobered by these possibilities, but this realization is not at hand.”

Pollack’s perhaps most surprising conclusion—that the Administration in effect staged today’s confrontation course with Pyongyang, to stop normalization of D.P.R.K. ties with Japan and others—shows that some in the U.S. military might support such normalization, if they understood it as the road to a solution to the crisis, based on development of the region’s physical economy, in the interests of all concerned.

1. Jonathan Pollack, “The United States, North Korea, and the End of the Agreed Framework,” *Naval War College Review*, Summer 2003 [www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2003/Summer/art1-su3.htm].

In an interview, Pollack indicated that following the Kelly trip last October, he was gathering information for a routine briefing, when “a light went on” that something “was not quite right. . . . Wait a minute,” he said. “There is no enrichment facility. So how are they saying that uranium is being enriched?”

Working completely independently—including from investigations on the quality of intelligence on Iraq—Pollack made the decision that a scholarly study was in order, in early February. He insists this had no relation to President Bush’s January State of the Union speech—now the subject of such controversy—nor to Ambassador Joseph Wilson’s decision, also in early February, to debunk the speech’s assertions about Iraq’s uranium program. “Nobody told me to look for anything,” he said.

But wherever honest men look—even when they’re not looking for it—there is a pattern here, in the Land of the Pre-Emptive Strike.

CIA Altered Estimates, Retroactively

Pollack points out that the CIA, in December 2001, suddenly altered previously published 1990s reports, which stated only that North Korea had plutonium, without concluding that it had been weaponized, nor any bomb produced.

“In 1993, the Central Intelligence Agency first concluded that in the late 1980s, ‘North Korea . . . [had] produced enough plutonium for at least one, and possibly two, nuclear weapons.’ ” Pollack writes—but the agency did not conclude that Pyongyang “had the bomb,” he implies. “This judgment was reaffirmed in all unclassified intelligence . . . up to mid-2001.”

“However, the intelligence community assessment shifted noticeably in December 2001, when an unclassified version of a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) asserted that ‘the Intelligence Community judged in the mid-1990s that North Korea had produced one, possibly two, nuclear weapons.’ ” The new assessment “moved back the date that intelligence analysts believed North Korea had fabricated one or two weapons, or the supposed date when the CIA made this determination.”

“Decade-old estimates were now being sharply recast, with direct implications for future U.S. policy toward Pyongyang,” Pollack wrote.

To be more blunt: History was re-written, after Sept. 11, 2001, to cast North Korea as a direct threat to the United States. Then came Bush’s Jan. 29, 2002 “Axis of Evil” speech, and more.

“Other disclosures and policy statements, including the prospective [American] use of nuclear weapons in a major Korean contingency, outlined in the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review and reported in mid-March 2002; the President’s June 2002 speech at the U.S. Military Academy; and the September 2002 release of ‘The National Security Strategy of the United States of America’—all elevated North Korea to one of America’s defining national security threats,” Pollack reports.



Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly, whose “fixed script” for confrontation with North Korea, during his visit there last October, was written by Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice. The “intelligence” behind his allegations turns out to be a fraud.

“The U.S. intelligence community concluded in the summer of 2002 that North Korea had undertaken a covert uranium-enrichment program,” Pollack writes. *However*, he then points out, citing an unclassified CIA estimate to the U.S. Congress on Nov. 19, 2002, construction was not initiated “until recently” and “the facility was at least three years from becoming operational.”

The Enrichment Facility That Wasn’t

Thus, “a final but especially significant factor remains overlooked in the larger story of the U.S. intelligence findings—North Korea had no operational enrichment facility to declare. The intelligence community believed that North Korea still confronted daunting obstacles had it decided to build an enriched-uranium weapon, or even to acquire the production capabilities that might ultimately permit such an option.”

“Equally important, enrichment facilities serve an entirely legitimate civilian purpose,” Pollack points out: “fabricating the low-enriched uranium (fuel enriched to 4.4% U-235) to power light-water reactors. Numerous signatories to the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] possess such reprocessing capabilities.” Pollack states that “the evidence was far from definitive” whether the D.P.R.K. was planning 4.4% enrichment for fuel, or the entirely different process of weapons-grade high-enriched uranium (HEU) to 93% U-235, which would require more advanced equipment, and take even more years to complete.

Despite this, James Kelly was dispatched to Pyongyang during Oct. 4-5, 2002, with what Kelly told a Spring 2003 press conference, was a fixed script from his superiors. Kelly confronted the North Korean leadership with having an illegal uranium weapons program and demanded that “it had to be

dismantled immediately,” as Kelly himself put it in report-back discussions.

And yet, Pollack notes, “The imprecision in the CIA analysis underscored the difficulties of estimating the extant capabilities and ultimate purposes of the North’s enrichment program, a point that begs the question of how complete and compelling the intelligence data may have been on which the United States decided to confront North Korea.”

In plain English: None of the professional CIA or other intelligence reports justified the charges Kelly was told to make. The Bush Administration, since 2001, had made clear its distaste for the 1994 Clinton Agreed Framework. Now, “clearly, certain administration officials saw this as the opportunity for a deal breaker—and they took that opportunity,” as Pollack put it in the interview.

“In theory, a facility designed for low enrichment can be converted to high enrichment by the installation of additional centrifuges and tubing, enabling the repeated recycling of uranium hexafluoride gas to achieve higher enrichment levels, though the likelihood of equipment failure would be far higher when relying on more basic enrichment technology,” Pollack notes. But “despite these constraints and the absence of an identified enrichment facility, senior U.S. officials had concluded that North Korea was pursuing an HEU capability, not one designed for civilian use.”

Intent to Block Japan

Secretary of State Colin Powell is quoted as saying in July 2002 that he had a friendly meeting in Brunei with his North Korean counterpart, “to move forward with the North Koreans.” Pollack suggests that Administration officials, absorbed with the looming war against Iraq, did not want to be distracted by the Korean situation, and believed there was no urgency to the nuclear issue.

But Pollack’s next sentence reads as follows:

“Four weeks later, the stunning disclosure of Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi’s impending visit to Pyongyang, triggered movement in U.S. policy. The negotiations over a possible Koizumi visit had been conducted with the utmost secrecy within Japanese bureaucratic channels. . . . Given that messages had been passed between Pyongyang and Tokyo as early as the previous Fall, the absence of prior communication between Japan and the United States on the prime minister’s impending visit was remarkable enough in its own right. In the context of recent intelligence findings about North Korea’s enrichment activities, the prime minister’s last-minute disclosure to the United States was even more stunning to American officials. . . .

“The Bush administration confronted the prospect of abrupt and unanticipated changes in the Northeast Asian political and security environment. The D.P.R.K. had opened the door to a new relationship with America’s most important Asian ally and, prospectively, a major aid donor to the North. There was a real possibility that U.S. options on the peninsula

would be driven increasingly by policy agendas of others.”

This was intolerable to the Administration, and they sent Kelly to Pyongyang to create a confrontation.

Koizumi’s surprise visit to Pyongyang was key in the plan by China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea, to create a strategic shift in the region, which led to the opening of the Korean Demilitarized Zone last September, and the June 14, 2003 re-connection of the Trans-Korean Railroad. Japan, as the industrial leader in Asia, is crucial to the construction of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, and the necessary financial reorganization for it. But since the overture to Pyongyang, Tokyo has been under heavy pressure by Cheney and Rumsfeld to shift to a less friendly policy toward North Korea: sanctions, or even a blockade.

Pollack points out that, even after Kelly’s October 2002 Pyongyang trip, the CIA briefed Congress on Nov. 19, 2002 that the uranium facility “was at least 3 years from becoming operational” if it were to produce only civilian-grade uranium—and even more years away from being operational, if it were to produce weapons-grade uranium. “However, on 12 March 2003, James Kelly sharply contradicted this assessment,” Pollack writes. “In testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Kelly stated: ‘The enriched uranium issue which some have assumed is somewhere off in the fog of the distant future is not. . . . It is only probably a matter of months, not years. . . . Despite his much less equivocal judgment, he also acknowledged ‘serious limitations . . . [in the U.S.] ability to verify the uranium enrichment.’ ”

Diplomatic sources say that Mr. Kelly has since admitted that he was “dead wrong” in asserting the North was on the verge of reprocessing. Yet he has never corrected himself on the record.

Thus Pollack concludes, U.S. officials, as well as North Korean officials, “opted to exploit the intelligence for political purposes.” “Is there a parallel with what is now going on, after the fact, in estimates about Iraq?” Pollack was asked by Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* in a July 16 interview. Pollack answered: “I think there may be.”

Koizumi plans to visit Pyongyang again this September, Tokyo’s *Nikkei News* reported July 6. This visit is “to finally break the stalemate in international negotiations,” a Tokyo official told *EIR*. “The Iraq revelations raise the question—just as you said last month—as to how much Bush Administration intelligence on North Korea is valid.” the official said. “It has been difficult for Japan to take leadership in the region, however interested we are in the Eurasian Land-Bridge, because we are under such enormous pressure from Washington to join their blockade of North Korea, and worse. . . .

“But the bottom line is: there is not a single country in Eurasia, which will go along with the U.S. if it proposes a war on the Korean peninsula. We must do everything in our power to prevent it.” Even Koizumi, dumb as he is, the official said, had told Bush at their May summit: “Japan won’t stand for an attack on North Korea.”