

## **The Latest Crisis on the Korean Peninsula**

*The Korean Peninsula and the international community were plunged into another major crisis over revelations of a nuclear development programme in North Korea which could provoke either renewed or escalating tension or lead to breakthroughs toward a negotiated peaceful resolution.*

*The latest global incident disclosed in Washington October 16, if managed effectively, could lead to major improvements in relations in Korea and the region, according to academic experts and diplomats in Brussels reacting to the disclosures and their immediate diplomatic aftermath this week.*

*Although he said it was still "premature" to make conclusive forecasts, one noted South Korean academic speaking at a conference in Brussels October 21 noted, the latest problem could represent "two steps back or open the door to a comprehensive deal."*

*Another American researcher speaking at the same gathering remarked that "the US would not be so moderate if it felt there was an imminent risk," and added that the uranium enrichment programme at the base of the latest crisis, was "a long and protracted process."*

*One senior diplomat also suggested that the situation might be more propitious to a solution than the previous crises because North Korea is in a "desperate" situation and be more inclined to compromise.*

*Others noted the intensity of diplomatic contacts by the US as a more positive sign than a previous tendency to act and react unilaterally in such situations.*

*The two main US officials dealing with Asian and arms control issues, James Kelly and John Bolton, were due in Brussels October 24 to confer with EU external relations Commissioner Chris Patten following their visits to interested countries around the world.*

*But many experts agreed that the latest incident could also lead to the demise or at least undermine the Agreed Framework negotiated in 1994 by the US and DPRK and the Korean Energy Development Organisation, international consortium. Both were widely regarded as seriously flawed and compromised but were nevertheless regarded as the basis for some stability in the region.*

### **Nuclear issue raised in EU-North Korea Seminar**

The nuclear issue figured prominently in the first ever high-level EU-North Korea conference in Brussels last week aimed at examining future relations between the two, but senior North Korean officials participating did not directly address the surprising news that surfaced the following day from Washington regarding its nuclear development programme.

The one-day conference provided new information and additional details on some of the recent economic reforms adopted in the formerly entirely planned economy and concerning the significant diplomatic contacts in recent weeks with neighbours such as South Korea and Japan and the US.

But the officials from Pyongyang and the other European participant did not directly address the details of the latest major international storm which erupted the following day involving the country and its nuclear and weapons development activities.

Revelations by the US State Department that North Korean officials had acknowledged during a meeting with a senior US envoy in Pyongyang a few weeks earlier that their country was involved in an ongoing uranium enrichment programme sent shock waves in the region and throughout the international community. In some contrast to other tough declarations in the past directed against North Korea, Iraq or other problems related to weapons proliferation, Washington officials expressed the desire to resolve the issue through peaceful means. But the US revelations came in the midst of major North-South Korea talks on a number of confidence-building measures. Hurried consultation took place between Washington, South Korea, Japan, China and Russia and the matter was soon raised in contacts between North and South Korea. The European Union presidency in Copenhagen also issued a declaration warning of "grave consequences" in case North Korea did not halt the nuclear programme and an EU Spokesman said the EU was "deeply disturbed."

The situation was thrown into further confusion and uncertainty on Sunday 20 October when US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington stated that North Korea had also called the 1994 Agreed Framework "nullified," raising the possibility of further nuclear development in North Korea and a threat of calls for sanctions against it. A leading US Senator called North Korea a bigger threat than Iraq and U.S. national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said, "This is a situation that cannot remain unresolved ... a nuclear-armed North Korea is a huge problem for peace and security."

In discussing security issues at the earlier Brussels conference, the DPRK delegation dealt with both conventional and nuclear aspects of the situation on the Korean Peninsula as well as the role of other powers and confidence-building measures. And they were told by numerous European speakers that it would also be to their advantage to agree on a system of nuclear safeguard inspections by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency as soon as possible and to accept other arms control regimes in nuclear, missile technology and biological weapons. Noting their readiness to engage in additional confidence-building measures, the North Koreans said their military forces and missile programmes were partly in response to the strong US military presence in the Peninsula and region, which included nuclear weapons targeted on North Korea and high-technology weapons.

They also repeatedly underlined that their nuclear, missile and other weapons technology development programmes were both to defend against the threat from "hostile superpower" forces in South Korea, but had been an important source of export earnings which would have to be compensated if abandoned. During the EU-DPRK in 2001 and more recently during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi, the DPRK indicated a moratorium on testing of rocket technology they argued was holding up important communications and weather satellite programmes which should also be compensated by the international community.

They also said that during the recent contacts with the special US envoy James Kelly, they had been asked to "take their clothes off" militarily without being offered anything in return by the US, which they said had not fulfilled their part of their Framework Agreement which eased a previous nuclear crisis in 1994-1995.

They contended that the US had violated the terms of the Framework Agreement by failing to deliver certain promised technology associated with the nuclear power programme.

During the day-long seminar at the European Parliament, North Korean and European officials and experts took stock of these and other key elements of their overall relationship. This relationship began in 1995 and has involved some 227 million Euros in humanitarian aid and technical assistance. During that period the EU and its member states have become the largest single international donor to North Korea.

The major conference in Brussels October 15 explored future possible relations and cooperation between the European Union and North Korea in the aftermath of the EU-DPRK summit in May 2001 and more recent moves by Pyongyang to normalise relations with key neighbours.

Among the objectives of this one-day discussion between North Korean and European officials and experts in the European Parliament were informal discussion of possible policy, economic or humanitarian-development plans that could be visualised in the aftermath of the 2001 and other EU-DPRK meetings. The European Commission had proposed a number of such activities in a country strategy paper devoted to North Korea.

North Korea is in the midst of major policy and economic changes that were characterised as "irreversible" by the high-level delegation from Pyongyang participating in the seminar.

The team which included a Vice Foreign Minister and several other senior Foreign Ministry officials also appealed to the European Union to maintain its policy of engagement toward their country.

In this regard, top EU officials forecast that a policy review would be undertaken in the Council of Ministers and that the consensus appeared to be to maintain and extend the relationship. It was also expected that the EU and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea would soon accredit diplomatic delegations to each other.

The conference was sponsored by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, associated with the German Free Democratic Party, and organised by the European Institute for Asian Studies in Brussels. The Institute also organised a seminar on the Korean Peninsula in January 2001 in the European Parliament and has published a number of reports on the situation in the region.

The DPRK delegation included Choi Su Hon, Vice Minister of the Foreign Ministry; So Chang Sik, Vice Director of the Department of European Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kim Son Gyong, Section Chief of the Department of European Affairs at the Ministry.

The European participations included British Labour MEP Glyn Ford, who co-sponsored the event, Dutch Liberal MEP Jules Maaten, the rapporteur of a recent Parliament report on the EU Asia Strategy, Danish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Carsten Staur, a number of EU Council and Commission officials dealing with Asian relations, member state diplomats and officials and noted academic experts. Mr Ford has dealt extensively with relations with North Korea and has visited the country several times.

The conference took place following several months of fast-moving diplomatic and other events which have seen Pyongyang engage further in contacts with countries in Asia, including South Korea, Japan, the Russian Federation and others, and the US and the European Union.

Among the most notable international contacts were the re-establishment of activities with the Republic of Korea, the first DPRK-Japan summit in over 50 years, the resumption of discussions between the US and North Korea and with partners in the ASEAN Regional Forum. In August, construction was also begun on a nuclear power plant in North Korea by the international KEDO consortium, composed of the EU, Japan, South Korea, the US as part of a 1994 agreement which eased regional and international tensions which had built up in the region. The EU joined the KEDO partnership in 1997 and has since contributed some of the overall costs.

Some of the more recent developments roughly coincided with reports of changes regarded as significant in the management of the North Korean economy by introducing some elements of a market system and prices. Pyongyang more recently also announced the intention to create a free-enterprise zone along the border with China.

**The European Institute for Asian Studies**  
**Brussels, October 22, 2002**