

'Mediators' in Korea are cause for worry

by Lydia Cherry

If there is anything more worrisome than the current sabre-rattling of the isolated, heavily armed North Korean regime with seemingly little to lose, it is the fact that the mediators in the "North Korean crisis" are the powers bringing the world close to World War III. Since the North took the provocative action the first week in March of pulling out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Britain's *Daily Telegraph* has called for bombing North Korean missile sites; South Korea has "taken the North's nuclear problem to a higher international level"—the U.N. Security Council; and representatives from Russia, the United States, Britain, and Communist China are meeting to "solve" the problem.

The North Korean decision to pull out of the NPT was announced in the midst of war exercises in South Korea, exercises that were cancelled last year because former Prime Minister Noh Tae Woo's main focus was on reunifying the peninsula. These "Team Spirit" exercises have increased from 10 days in 1976 to 89 days in 1990, and from 46,000 troops to 180,000.

There is little agreement among analysts of North Korea about the reasons for North Korea's decision to pull out of the NPT. There is speculation that the North Korean leadership has smelled out the power-shift that is occurring in Russia. As a senior European strategist put it: "Pyongyang and others like them are watching Russia carefully. They think a tough crowd will come to the fore there. . . . I wouldn't be surprised if some of the Russians, privately, tacitly, and quietly, have told the North Koreans: 'Forget the START treaty, forget the Non-Proliferation Treaty.'"

U.N. big powers meet

Senior officials from the United States, Britain, and Russia began meetings in Vienna March 17 on the "crisis"—the three depository states of the NPT. The following day, a high-level Russian official called for Big Power talks on North Korea. In an interview with the Japanese daily *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Russian Foreign Ministry official Nikolai Solovoyov proposed an emergency meeting of the United States, China, Japan, and the two Koreas to discuss North Korea's decision to walk out of the NPT. *Yomiuri* said that Solovoyov expressed certainty that China would accept Russia's proposal to hold such a "two plus four" meeting. This formula had

been rejected by the last South Korean administration; Noh Tae Woo insisted that the interests expressed by the big players were not necessarily those of the Koreans.

New South Korean President Kim Young Sam—a former dissident with close ties to the U.S. elite—has announced that he will focus, in his dealing with North Korea, on the country's human rights violations.

According to South Korean Foreign Minister Han Jung-soo, the key players in mediating the crisis are China and the United States. "China has said they are putting a lot of effort into the matter," Han Sung-joo told a seminar in Seoul March 17. The Chinese said "they have a lot of influence over North Korea, but it is really the United States and South Korea who hold the key," he said. "China believes the United States should try to hold talks with the North, which would help the situation."

It seems clear that, if left to their own devices, the nations of East Asia could reach an arrangement with North Korea, a country in economic difficulty. In early 1991, for example, the North Koreans sought exchanges with some of the more prosperous and politically neutral countries, for economic deals, technological cooperation, and food aid. North Korea widened its diplomacy from historic allies like China, Iran, and Cuba, to Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

The plutonium issue

As for the plutonium in North Korea, U.S. officials are widely reported as saying "they do not know if there is enough for a bomb." In the first week of March, the chief spokesman for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) armed forces, Lt. Gen. Valery L. Manilov, was in Boston, where he said that the campaign against North Korea in the western countries had erupted with such intensity and coordination that it looked suspicious. Manilov, who heads the information office of the strategic forces of what was formerly the Soviet Union, was asked about a report by the new director of the CIA, James Woolsey, that Korea is "our most grave concern." Manilov said it was the CIS's thinking that North Korea is one of about 15 or 20 countries with some potential for developing nuclear weapons, but is in no respect number one: "You simply cannot put North Korea into the top rank."

South Korean Science and Technology Minister Kim Si-chung claims that the North Koreans have obtained the plutonium necessary to produce nuclear weapons, but says that their technological level is not high enough to enable them to do so.

Of far more concern to the world powerbrokers than North Korea having nuclear weapons, however, is the prospect of a *unified* Korea having such a capability. The Permanent Five of the U.N. Security Council, and also Japan, are known to be committed to ensuring that under no circumstances will a reunified Korea be allowed to have the kind of nuclear capability that countries such as Israel now have.