

# 'Neo-Cons' Demanding A New Korean Conflict

by William Jones

On March 13, the “neo-conservative” American Enterprise Institute (AEI) hosted a conference on “Korea Policy: New Challenges for the New Administration” in Washington. A gaggle of “non-proliferation experts,” led by conservative arms control guru Henry Sokolski, put forth the argument that the Agreed Framework of 1994, between the United States and North Korea, should be unilaterally reopened, renegotiated, and amended.

The achievement of this hard-won agreement, the first of its kind with North Korea, had been a diplomatic breakthrough by former President Clinton, at a point in time when the United States was beefing up its military strength in South Korea, in order to deal with a threat of North Korea building a nuclear weapons facility. An imminent conflict over this issue was happily thwarted by a diplomatic initiative led by former Defense Secretary William Perry, which led to North Korea establishing relations of civility with its closest neighbors and with the United States.

South Korea then took this new opening into its own hands beginning in 1999, when South Korean President Kim Dae-jung began his “Sunshine Policy” of rapprochement between the Koreas, giving the world, for the first time, hope that this last area over which Cold War powers are pitted against each other, might soon be relegated to the dustbin of history.

President Bush’s expressed “concern,” given out to the press after his March 7 meeting with the South Korean President, regarding problems of “verification” of the agreements with North Korea, seriously undercut the South Korean leader’s Sunshine Policy. However, Bush did not directly call into question the 1994 nuclear agreement, the only agreement the United States presently has with North Korea. But, this is precisely what the “neo-con” ideologues are demanding he do.

## Negotiations Already On Hold

Bush officials have already indicated that they will conduct a thorough review of the situation before proceeding further with any negotiations with the North regarding missile proliferation, thus losing valuable time in what may be a very limited window of opportunity. They have also said they will conduct a review of the Perry initiative itself. Congressional Republicans are demanding a tougher line towards North Korea.

“The Agreed Framework got us past the crisis,” House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde

(R-III.), the luncheon speaker for the AEI conference, admitted. He quickly added that it should now be scrapped: “It did so not by resolving the dispute between North Korea and the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], but rather by postponing resolution of the dispute to a point well into the future. Against this background—essentially one of alleged violations of international agreements in the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction—many of us in Congress became increasingly concerned after 1994 about the unseemly enthusiasm in certain quarters to construct nuclear reactors in North Korea.”

But the 1994 framework agreement specified precisely that: scrapping the plutonium-rich graphite-cooled reactors then being constructed by the North Koreans for energy production, in return for construction of two light-water nuclear reactors, which would produce considerably less plutonium and would be under international supervision. Now, after seven years in which the United States has made no move to provide the nuclear plants it had agreed upon, AEI demands “substituting” an offer to construct conventional power plants for North Korean use.

Even Fred Iklé, a Cold War stalwart who touts himself as being one of the authors of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was trotted out from retirement for the occasion. “Why do we want to keep the North Korean dictatorship alive?” Iklé asked. “If we could bring down the mighty Soviet Union, why not also North Korea?”

Some 47 million South Koreans may have something to say about that, since it is they, not Iklé, who would be in the line of fire, if there were again war on the Korean Peninsula. “To assure success with North Korea,” Iklé ranted, “we don’t need agreements, but political change in North Korea. Only this would cement an agreement.” While the Perry report had emphasized the need to deal with the North Koreans as they are, Iklé urges that we deal only with a “democratic” North Korea.

Already the rumblings of this new provocation are affecting the peninsula. A statement issued by the North Korean Central News Agency on March 17 said, “By dragging out the Light Water Reactor project, [the U.S.] aims to bar the D.P.R.K.’s [North Korea’s] independent nuclear power industry from developing, and weaken its economic and military potentials. In other words, it is designed to impose unilateral sacrifices and losses upon it. It also seeks to scrap the Agreed Framework and stifle the D.P.R.K. by force of arms when an opportunity presents itself.” The North Koreans warn that if there is interminable delay in realizing the agreement, they themselves may abrogate it.

The ideologues in Washington are playing a very risky game. If North Korea does abrogate the agreement, all bets are off with regard to a peaceful development on the Korean Peninsula. In addition, this brazen “neo-con” policy could place in jeopardy the viability of U.S. cooperation with Japan and South Korea, as they become convinced that they face reckless and suicidal Washington policies.