

North Korea, The Ultimate Negotiator?

Now that the war with Iraq is over, the controversy between North Korea and the United States has once again become front page news. North Korea has created controversy in the past in order to gain both economically and politically. This time is no exception. Last year, North Korea restarted its nuclear program, and threatened the United States on more than one occasion. Now it has given Washington a proposal in which it will disarm. In return it expects economic and political compensation. Colin Powell has been quoted as saying "They did put forward a plan that would ultimately deal with their nuclear capability and their missile activities, but they of course expect something considerable in return."

It will be interesting to see how the United States reacts to North Korea's actions. I find the situation especially interesting because North Korea is exploiting one of the more profitable weaknesses of the United States. The United States will not allow North Korea to produce nuclear weapons and will do anything to prevent the acquisition or production of such weapons. Therefore, the resolution presented by the Koreans, however manipulative and one sided, may be appealing to the United States.

The reaction of the United States is also hypocritical. It is especially interesting to see the contrast between the reaction of the U.S. to Iraq and its reaction to the North Korea. While North Korea has not been associated with terrorism, they are engaging in a form of political terrorism. Even though they do not support acts of terror, their threat of nuclear weapons can be seen more destructive than anything the Iraqi's could have done.

The United States, however, does not publicly share this notion. Had Iraq made similar attempts to negotiate with the United States, they may have been met with even swifter action.

If the United States agrees to most of North Korea's terms, it will be interesting to see how other countries react. Will other countries with potential for nuclear weapons pull the same kind of stunt that the North Koreans are pulling? It seems both profitable in the short and long term for them to follow in the Korean footsteps. The Koreans will undoubtedly gain economic support from the U.S. as well as political support. They make themselves a priority with potentially empty threats. The seriousness of the threats however, as empty as they may be, warrant action. It will be interesting to see if development of nuclear weapons becomes a race to produce, manipulate, and dismantle. The seriousness of these weapons makes them an unequalled negotiating tool.