

Who is Really Opposed to the Libyan Model of Disarmament?

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As the dispute between the United States and North Korea on the nuclear issue continues, an argument that North Korea should follow the Libyan path is gaining strength inside as well as outside the George W. Bush administration. However, this argument may not be based on a careful analysis of Libya's internal situation and the three-party negotiations among the United States, United Kingdom, and Libya that served as an effective catalyst for Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's disarmament pledge.

George W. Bush, in his 2004 State of the Union address on January 20, urged North Korea to follow Libya's example, saying that the Libyan leader last December voluntarily promised to reveal and dismantle his country's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, as well as the uranium enrichment program used for nuclear weapons.

Lee Su-hyuk, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and South Korea's head at the six-party talks, in a meeting with South Korea's correspondents in Washington also suggested the "Libyan model" for resolving the dispute surrounding North Korea's highly enriched uranium (HEU) program. Deputy Minister Lee remarked that if North Korea does not report its uranium program as was done by Libya, it will be difficult to achieve a similar resolution.

However, North Korea has already demonstrated its reluctance to follow the Libyan model. It says, "The USA is under the illusion that the manipulative role it has played in some Middle Eastern countries (such as Iraq and Libya) will work the same on the Korean peninsula. We were never influenced by outsiders before and so we will never allow this to happen in the future."

On the surface it would appear that South Korea and the United States are approaching the North Korean nuclear issue in a similar fashion to the approach taken toward Libya, and that it is North Korea that refuses to conform to this model. However, upon deeper analysis of the Libyan pledge to disarmament, it becomes more obvious that it is actually the Bush administration that refuses to apply the Libyan model of disarmament

to North Korea.

Why Did Libya Give Up Its WMD?

First, it is important to provide some background on the Bush administration's emphasis on the Libyan disarmament. Bush wanted to justify the invasion of Iraq, which was carried out with the supposed intention of eradicating the threat of weapons of mass destruction. Through correlating the Iraq invasion and subsequent Libyan disarmament pledge, the Bush administration is seeking to rationalize its foreign policy toward countries like Iran and North Korea.

In response to the Bush administration's interpretation of the Libyan disarmament, Flynt Leverett, a scholar at the Brookings Institute (an American think-tank), says that "by linking shifts in Libya's behavior to the Iraq war, the president misrepresents the real lesson of the Libyan case."

Leverett, who personally participated in the negotiations between Libya and the United States while working at the U.S. State Department during the early stages of the Bush administration, emphasized in his article published in the *New York Times* on January 23 that "the roots of the recent progress with Libya go back not to the eve of the Iraq war, but to the Bush administration's first year in office. Indeed, to be fair, some credit should even be given to the second Clinton administration." What this essentially says is although Bush depicts his administration as having obtained Libya's concession through a show of American power in Iraq, Libya's policy toward the United States had already changed prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

As a matter of fact, Libya tried to improve its relations with the United States in the late 1990s during Bill Clinton's second term as president. At that time, Clinton responded to Libya by asserting that he would not make any efforts to improve relations unless the Gadhafi government took responsibility for the 1988 bombing of Pan-Am Flight 103. Saudi Arabia mediated between the two countries and as a result Libya handed over to the courts in the Netherlands the two intelligence agents suspected of involvement in the bombing. The United States, in response, agreed on the UN's policy to lift sanctions on Libya, clearing the path for the current agreement.

The Bush administration, endowed with this reconciliatory atmosphere with Libya, additionally asked the Libyan government to compensate the families of the Pan-Am bombing victims and as this was accepted by the Libyan government, the United States agreed to the U.N.'s lifting of sanctions against Libya last summer.

Stepping forward, the Bush administration asked Libya to give up its weapons of mass destruction in order to achieve a better relationship with the United States. Libya, which sought normalized relations with the United States in order to escape international isolation, went into secret negotiations with the United Kingdom and the United States in early March 2003. On December 19, 2003, given a U.S. promise for an improved relationship as well as the lifting of economic sanctions, Libya proclaimed its disarmament.

Flynt Leverett argues that the lesson here is incontrovertible: “To persuade a rogue regime to get out of the terrorism business and give up its weapons of mass destruction, we must not only apply pressure but also make clear the potential benefits of cooperation. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has refused to take this approach with other rogue regimes.”

Leverett also went on to say that “One reason the Bush administration was able to take a more constructive course with Libya was that the White House, uncharacteristically, sidelined the administration’s neoconservative wing--which strongly opposes any offer of carrots to state sponsors of terrorism, even when carrots could help end such problematic behavior--when crucial decisions were made.” In fact, the initial approach on Libya was approved by an informal coalition made up of Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. National Security Adviser, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. This is why the Libyan model has not been applied to North Korea, Syria, Iran, or Iraq.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association and a prominent nonproliferation expert in the United States, also said that the successful Libyan case was the result of a combination of preventative diplomacy, a nonproliferation treaty, inspections, the lifting of economic sanctions, and the provision of incentives rather than an effect of the “Pre-emptive Strike Doctrine.”

In the January/February edition of *Arms Control Today*, Kimball said that based on the trust built upon continued negotiations with the United States, Libya surrendered its weapons of mass destruction based on the promise of better Libya-U.S. relations.

Lisa Anderson, dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and prominent American Libya expert, cited Libyan internal circumstances as an important reason behind its decision to give up its WMD. In an interview with the Council on Foreign Relations, Anderson explained that Gadhafi’s government was facing challenges from Islamic fundamentalists inside the country and has since pursued improved relations with the United States by giving information on Islamic terrorist

networks after 9/11.

Viewing Islamic terrorist organizations as a “common enemy,” the Gadhafi government suppressed an opposing domestic force and the Bush administration has used this pursuit of a common interest in the “war on terrorism.”

The Bush Administration: Avoiding the Libyan Model

Putting two and two together, it is the Bush administration that has been avoiding application of the Libyan model of disarmament to the North Korean issue. It is also in this context that Leverett strongly criticizes the current U.S. foreign policy.

First of all, while the Bush administration, through “direct negotiation” with Libya, tried to broker a “removal-of-sanctions-for-WMD” trade, the United States has never offered North Korea any incentives to give up its WMD and has steadfastly refused to negotiate directly with the regime in Pyongyang.

Secondly, the United States and Libya built up trust through the process of negotiations by mutual fulfillment of promises since the late 1990s. In contrast, the Clinton administration was negligent in fulfilling the Agreed Framework with North Korea and the Bush administration identified North Korea as a member of the axis of evil and viewed it as a candidate for a preemptive strike, which only intensified North Korea’s distrust of the United States.

Lastly, while the Bush administration accepted most agreements with Libya made by the preceding administration, it totally disregarded those made with North Korea. Near the end of Clinton’s presidency, the two parties made an agreement on important issues, including the North’s missile problem, by adopting a “joint communique,” which included plans for the normalization of relations between the two countries and established mutual intent for the creation of a peace building system. With respect to these agreements, Collin Powell, during the early days of the Bush administration, showed his intention to follow up on the Clinton administration’s North Korea policy by saying there were promising elements. However, Powell had to take a step back after being harshly criticized by the White House.

One reason that the Bush administration prefers threatening North Korea to sitting at the negotiation table is that the Bush administration wants to consolidate its military status quo by constructing a missile defense system and needs a perceived North Korean threat as a justification, and may also want to eventually eradicate North Korea at the

opportune time.

The Libyan Model as a Practical Alternative

While the effectiveness of a simple application of the Libya model would be misleading, this model can be used as an alternative in resolving North Korea's nuclear issue. With regards to this, Suh Jae-jung, a professor of politics at Cornell University and an expert on U.S. foreign policy said, "There is a tendency in which people believe that the US's power-based foreign policy made Libya surrender, but the fact is that it was negotiation and compromise between the two countries rather than unilateral power exertion." This statement highlights the potential applicability of the Libyan model to North Korea's nuclear issue.

The Roh Moo Hyun administration needs to take advantage of this model by insisting on the American use of the same sticks and carrots that brought about Libya's concession and disarmament pledge. In fact, this is what many pundits from prominent newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* are calling on the Bush administration to do.

Given that the six-party talks have been adopted in place of direct negotiation and a comprehensive agreement replacing the Geneva Agreed Framework, if the Bush administration can apply the Libyan model--which it views as the best outcome of its foreign policy--to the North Korean problem, U.S. foreign policy will change in a positive way and at the same time act as a face-saving mechanism for Bush.

Accordingly, the Roh administration, rather than simply demanding the North's nuclear disarmament based on a misinterpretation of the Libyan case, should work hard to ensure that both the United States and North Korea adopt the actual Libyan model consisting of secret contacts, effective inducement, and a sincere fulfillment of what is agreed upon by the two parties.