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## KPI Statement on NK Nuclear Test October 10, 2006

In September 2005, the parties to the 6-party talks—the United States, North Korea, China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia—agreed on a basic trade: North Korean denuclearization in return for something approaching normal relations between the U.S. and North Korea. In plain language, North Korea would stop its nuclear defense program and the U.S. would stop attempting to isolate North Korea and start up official diplomatic relations with it. Everyone immediately declared that the key issue was whether or not the two countries could build trust in each other, and those interested in making the agreement stick began to plan a progressive series of steps—trust-building measures that would compel each side to live up to its part of the agreement before moving on to the next step. However, almost immediately after the agreement was made, neoconservative forces in the Bush Administration, fearing that real diplomatic progress would be made, went after North Korea's banking arrangements in an effort to ensure the premature death of any budding diplomatic trust. North Korea not surprisingly demanded that these sanctions be dropped. The Bush Administration, rather than re-focusing on enacting the September 2005 agreement, not only stepped up sanctions, but also pressured other nations to join them in putting the squeeze on North Korea. Quite predictably, these neoconservative-inspired actions inflamed North Korean negotiators and strengthened the position of those in North Korea arguing that the Bush Administration could not be trusted to follow through on any agreement.

If this neoconservative maneuver had been a stand-alone action, then North Korea would not have tested its nuclear capability. However, since the Bush Administration came into office, it has, at times openly, at times quietly, relentlessly pursued a policy of regime change toward North Korea. President Bush publicly marked this policy's launch in his 2002 State of the Union address by including North Korea in an "axis of evil," a political phrase designed to vilify North Korea and the other nations so designated, while also erasing the space for diplomatic negotiation by invoking an absolutist, all-or-nothing framework. The Bush Administration put North Korea on a list of potential *first-strike* nuclear targets. It promoted John Bolton as its Ambassador to the United Nations—a man who had declared that the U.S.'s North Korea policy was the "end of North Korea." Bush himself took the time to openly discuss his hatred for the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-Il. In October 2002, Administration officials finally acted on their unconcealed contempt for the 1994 Agreed Framework to end North Korea's independent nuclear program, an agreement negotiated by the Clinton Administration, by accusing North Korea of having a secret uranium program—an accusation that has still not been

confirmed to anyone's satisfaction except for the Bush Administration's—and using this accusation as an excuse for why the U.S. had not moved forward in building the two light-water reactors promised to North Korea by the 1994 Agreed Framework. It halted oil supplies to North Korea that had been part of the Agreed Framework. It rejected the policy of controlling military armaments through international treaties. It accused North Korea of failing to follow the obligations of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty despite the fact that NPT's Article X provides for withdrawal if a country considers its “supreme interests” to be threatened—and this after the Bush Administration unsuccessfully sought funding for nuclear “bunker-busters” designed to burrow deep into the ground before explosion. North Korea, with its extensive underground system specifically designed to withstand military attack from the air—a legacy of U.S. bombing during the Korean War—undoubtedly saw this effort as directed toward attacking it. Most importantly, perhaps, the North Koreans watched as the Bush Administration failed to pursue in good faith the diplomatic possibilities and preemptively invaded Iraq—an aggressive military action that has led to untold misery and severely damaged U.S. credibility throughout the world. Those who are beating the drums for a pre-emptive, illegal military attack on North Korea are not surprisingly members of the very same neoconservative cabal that got the U.S. into Iraq in the first place.

North Korea is often portrayed in commercial media as being irrational and unknowable, yet it is worthwhile to note that the North Koreans have been, in many ways, remarkably straightforward about their goals and intentions. For example, during the second Clinton Administration, Kim Jong-Il famously told then Secretary of State Madeline Albright that North Korea would stop research, development, and testing of its missile program with the understanding that this would move the two governments closer to normalizing relations with each other. The North Korean government made it clear to the Bush Administration that it would continue its self-imposed ban if the Administration would get serious about negotiations as the Clinton Administration appeared to be in the late 1990s. The Administration did not get serious, and so the rockets flew this past July. Faced with the reality that the U.S. pressured Iraq to disarm, and then invaded it once their defenses were weakened, North Korea openly declared that the lesson they had learned was that rather than disarming, they needed a strong deterrent against U.S. aggression. (What other lesson could we have expected them to have learned? Should we have expected North Korea to unilaterally give up its defenses before serious diplomacy was allowed to begin, as the Bush Administration believes that North Korea should do?) Those who claim that North Korea's nuclear test is the result of a failure of U.S. diplomacy are wrong because this claim presupposes that the Bush Administration has actually engaged in good-faith efforts to negotiate with North Korea. On the contrary, ever since it came into office, the Administration has avoided being drawn into meaningful negotiations with North Korea. Tellingly, Congressman Curt Weldon (R-PA), Vice Chair of the House Armed Services Committee, recently commented on the Bush Administration's policies toward North Korea that, “while we're tough with the North Koreans, you have to have dialogue and discussions as well.” Weldon, a prominent Republican who has taken the lead on the North Korean issue, is essentially admitting that the Bush Administration has not engaged in this necessary dialogue and discussion.

Indeed, given the tenor of current conversation about the supposed threat of an irrational nuclear North Korea, what is so ironic about North Korea's recent actions is how rational they are. Faced with a Bush Administration that has never committed itself to genuine diplomacy—not only in North Korea but almost everywhere else in the world—and has gone even further by taking active steps to torpedo North Korean diplomatic efforts to normalize relations with the U.S., the North Koreans are deeply skeptical that talking with a U.S. government unwilling to negotiate in good faith can lead to genuine progress. If the Bush Administration truly wanted North Korea to come to the table, it would naturally need to treat diplomatic negotiation as a starting point, rather than a reward for unilateral concessions. Nothing that the Bush Administration has done over the past six years suggests that Bolton's policy "to end North Korea" is not Bush's policy—a fact that cannot be lost on the North Koreans who are responsible for charting its foreign policies and building relationships with other nations. North Korean leaders obviously knew that testing their nuclear capability would bring worldwide condemnation, yet they went ahead anyway. Given the efforts North Korea has made, efforts that have been expanded in recent years, to forge relations with other nations, one can only conclude that they felt themselves under a threat worse than the extremely costly effects of worldwide disapprobation—that under the threat to their very survival posed by the Bush Administration, they calculated that having an effective deterrent was necessary.

There are those who argue that North Korea is not a reliable negotiating partner. However, their actions on the very issues that currently bedevil U.S.-North Korea relations suggest that this is simply not true. The North Koreans voluntarily imposed a ban on themselves on the research, development, and testing of its missile program—a ban they followed for eight years. The claim that the North Koreans violated the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework always glosses over the stark reality that North Korea stopped processing weapons grade plutonium, and did not restart its plutonium-based nuclear program until after the Bush Administration in 2002 made an unverified accusation about a uranium-based nuclear program to claim that the North Koreans had not lived up to the Agreed Framework. In plain language, people ignore that the diplomacy during the Clinton Administration succeeding in curtailing the development of the North Korean nuclear program for eight years. (No doubt some North Koreans are kicking themselves for believing that the U.S. government would abide by the Agreed Framework and move forward on normalizing relations—a key aspect of the Agreed Framework.) Moreover, the reality that the North Koreans did not process plutonium in the years that the Agreed Framework was in force suggests that those painting North Korea as an impoverished and desperate state willing to do anything—including sell its plutonium—to survive are flatly wrong. From roughly 1993 to 1998, years labeled the "Arduous March" in North Korea, everything went wrong for North Korea. The fall of the Soviet bloc, the worst floods in a century followed by intense drought, continuing U.S. economic sanctions, and an inadequate agricultural policy led to intense suffering that reached both broadly and deeply into the North Korean population. The food situation was far, far worse than it is today, yet at the very moment that North Korea was the most impoverished and the most desperate—so desperate that it significantly opened up its borders to outsiders who could provide assistance—the North Koreans did not violate the Agreed Framework and start processing plutonium for use or for sale. Rather,

when it became unmistakably clear to the North Koreans that the Bush Administration was not planning to abide by the Agreed Framework any more than it was going to abide by the Kyoto Protocols, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, or any other international treaty, the North Koreans saw no point in not processing its plutonium, especially in the context of U.S. activities in the Middle East. All of this suggests that the North Koreans are, if anything, intensely watchful of the United States, and that they are willing to make trade-offs about the very things that neoconservatives and other opponents of an enduring peace on the peninsula claim that they are unwilling to trade away.

That things have come to this point are deeply unfortunate, especially given that six years ago this June, then-President of South Korea Kim Dae Jung and Secretary General Kim Jong-Il of North Korea met at a historic summit that brought great hope to Koreans on the peninsula and Korean Americans that the unification of divided Korea was a very real possibility. Since June of 2000, the North and South have engaged in literally hundreds of formal cultural, social, economic, military, and political exchanges at every level. Over a million South Koreans have visited the North since the historic summit, and there has been a sea change of public opinion in the South about the North, and about the possibility of unification. Over a half-century after when the Korean nation was unnecessarily and artificially divided by the United States and the Soviet Union, unification was not just a far off dream, but rather, a present-day process propelled by meetings and events, little and big, all threading together to bind the two Koreas down a single path. North Korea's relations with Japan were also moving forward, with then Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi openly speaking of Japan's plan to normalize relations with North Korea and his historic visit to Pyongyang. China, Russia, and South Korea were busy beginning to invest into the infrastructure of North Korea as a means to propel their own respective economies. And since the fall of the communist bloc, North Korea had reached out to a number of capitalist countries and was slowly but surely building diplomatic and economic relations with them.

Indeed, what is perhaps most tragic about this situation is that it ensures, for some time at least, that the global and domestic headlines about North Korea will be about men with power and weapons, and not about the hopes and dreams of Koreans in the North, South, and all over the world to achieve a peaceful unification. It will be about U.S. troop movements and strength in Korea and nuclear bases in Guam, and not about finally and formally ending the Korean War and bringing U.S. troops back home. It will be dominated by popular depictions of North Koreans caricatured as either ignorant innocents or evil monsters and South Koreans framed as inexperienced children incapable of understanding the threat that the North supposedly poses, and not about reuniting the millions of family members that heartbreakingly remain divided from each other.