

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

**North Korea's Nuclear Decision**

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**Q1: How far does North Korea's declaration bring us toward a nuclear-free Korean peninsula?**

**A1:** North Korea has handed over a 60-page document declaring—hopefully—all of its past plutonium production. While it does not include the actual number of nuclear weapons North Korea possesses, it is an important interim step in verifying North Korea's nuclear past. This, if verified, can form the baseline for the eventual elimination of its weapons program. Unfortunately, the declaration does not include a full accounting of North Korea's past uranium enrichment program or its reported cooperation with Syria, but the process may eventually enable such a disclosure by Pyongyang.

**Q2: North Korea plans to blow up the cooling tower of its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. How significant a development is this?**

**A2:** For the past several months, North Korea has been taking steps to disable its nuclear program. It has removed key equipment from its plutonium production reactor, its plutonium reprocessing facility, and its uranium fuel fabrication site. The destruction of the cooling tower is a largely symbolic step, but it will make it even harder for the North to resume operations at the plutonium production reactor. None of the steps North Korea has taken thus far are irreversible, but the destruction of this tower makes it harder to reconstitute their plutonium program.

**Q3: Can we rely on North Korea's information and can we effectively verify it?**

**A3:** No one is suggesting we simply trust the North Koreans. Their declaration will have to be carefully and thoroughly verified. Although the administration has suggested the verification phase might be completed in the next 45 days, it will likely take many months to complete. The United States will have to get access to the nuclear reactor, the spent fuel on site, the plutonium that now forms the cores of North Korea's nuclear weapons, and the waste from past plutonium production. Procedures for visas, access, housing, and many other technical steps remain to be worked out. We have learned from our past efforts that the process of verification will be long and complex and, in the end, may not resolve all the outstanding issues.

**Q4: How important are the steps taken by President George W. Bush today to remove North Korea from the list of states that sponsor terrorism and to lift certain sanctions?**

**A4:** North Korea has made these steps a condition for their compliance with the six-party agreements that they have signed. They are largely symbolic steps and, it is important to note, can be reserved. No one expects the lifting of sanctions to lead to any significant increase in investment in North Korea. These steps are mainly designed to improve the overall tone of the dialogue between North Korea and the United States and appear to be seen as a test of America's commitment to engagement with Pyongyang.

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