

What Will Make Them Stop?

Carrots? Sticks? Inside Bush's diplomatic struggle to persuade Iran and North Korea to give up their nuke programs

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NEOCONSERVATIVES ARGUE THAT THE ONLY way to curb the suspected atomic ambitions of the regimes in Iran and North Korea—the remaining points on the “axis of evil”—is to depose the rulers. Moderates counter that engaging adversaries in dialogue can diminish the threat more easily and cheaply. So the Bush team has alternately ignored, threatened, cajoled and coerced the two countries, driven not by a coherent strategy but by a disorderly struggle at the highest levels to find common tactical ground between two irreconcilable approaches, engagement and confrontation.

For the moment, a President viewed abroad as a go-it-alone cowboy is looking more like a born-again multilateralist. The potentially important deal that Iran signed with European leaders last week to slow its nuclear program could push Bush to accept a level of engagement with Tehran that his hard-line advisers have resisted. And his offer of a written, multinational security guarantee for North Korea if it gives up its nuclear ambitions could commit the U.S. to protracted negotiations there, as well.

The stakes could hardly be higher. Iran has long been considered one of the world's most active sponsors of terrorism. With nuclear weapons, it could pose precisely the kind of threat Bush argued was so dangerous in prewar Iraq. North Korea is the world's most active proliferator of advanced weapons and the self-proclaimed possessor of a bomb or two. Backed into a corner, it might react with reckless irrationality. What comes next will depend on whether Bush's turn to diplomacy is a temporary expedient or a sincere strategic shift. Here are the twin threats and the Bush Administration's efforts to contain them.

IRAN

Earlier this year, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) learned that Iran was cheating on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In August 2002 exiled dissidents revealed that Iran had secretly built an underground uranium-enrichment facility at Natanz equipped with centrifuges that could spin out weapons-grade uranium. And then IAEA inspectors found the Natanz centrifuges were tainted with traces of highly enriched uranium, a telltale sign that Iran could be brewing fissile material. Iran denied that it was covertly making bombs and claimed that the centrifuges had been contaminated before they reached Iran.

Washington charged Iran with violating its NPT commitments and insisted that the agency take Iran's noncompliance to the U.N. Security Council, which could impose punitive sanctions. To Tehran's dismay, the international community sided with the U.S. The IAEA gave Iran until Oct. 31 to explain itself or face possible U.N. sanctions.

According to close associates, Iran's reformist President Mohammed Khatami built a broad coalition for a moderate response to IAEA demands. What made it all work was the intervention of Britain, France and Germany, which devised a face-saving deal. The three countries wrote to Khatami in late August, offering to recognize Iran's right to peaceful nuclear development and to provide “cooperation,” meaning trade, if Iran would meet the IAEA demands. That let Khatami show hard-liners that Iran would profit by giving in and prove the country is prepared to play by the world's rules. Last week, Iran announced it would sign the Additional Protocol, which calls for unfettered inspections and a suspension of uranium-enrichment and -reprocessing activities and requires Iran to answer all questions about the “possible failures and deficiencies” of its nuclear program.

NORTH KOREA

In October 2002, North Korea admitted that it had cheated on its 1994 accord with President Bill Clinton to stop pursuing nukes. In January 2003 the nation quit the NPT, threw out inspectors and accelerated its plutonium production. North Korea is thought to have one or two bombs plus fuel to make up to six. But when North Korea's leaders saw Bush invade Iraq, they fretted that their country could be next. They demanded that the U.S. sign a nonaggression pact as a prerequisite for a nuclear stand-down. The U.S. said it would strike no bargain unless North Korea scrapped its nukes.

Secretary of State Colin Powell finally persuaded Bush and China to form a united front with Russia, Japan and South Korea to negotiate with

North Korea. The show of unity at a six-way session in Beijing in August highlighted North Korea's isolation, but the principal antagonists did not budge.

The Bush team offered a multilateral "agreement with a small *a*"—not a treaty—assuring that the U.S. would not attack North Korea. In return, Kim Jong Il would have to start dismantling his nukes. Bush's offer was out there for two days before North Korea dismissed it as "laughable." But prospects brightened Saturday as North Korea reversed itself and said it would "consider" Bush's proposal. ■

Questions

1. How do neoconservatives differ from moderates in their approach to addressing nuclear threats?
2. How did Iran and North Korea respond to demands that they dismantle their nuclear programs?





Interpreting Maps and Charts

Accompanying “A Different Road Map” on page 12 and “What Will Make Them Stop?” on page 14 are a series of maps and charts. These visual aids are packed with information, but what does it all mean? Use the questions below to sharpen your skills in reading and interpreting maps and graphics.

A Different Road Map

1. What is the Green Line?

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2. What is the difference between the Geneva and Taba plans in regard to Jerusalem?

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3. True or false: It is less than 15 kilometers from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip.

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4. Name the southernmost city on the map that would be a part of a Palestinian state.

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5. Under the Geneva plan, how many gates in Jerusalem’s Old City would be under Palestinian control?

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6. How would the Geneva plan address the issue of settlements?

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Measuring the Threats

7. True or false: There are 10 nuclear facilities in Iran.

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8. At which facility did the International Atomic Energy Agency find weapons-grade uranium?

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9. What is the difference between the ranges of the Shahab-2 and the Shahab-3 missiles?

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10. Name five countries that are within the range of Iran’s Shahab-3 missile. Which country do you think would be the mostly likely target for the Shahab-3?

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11. How many nuclear facilities are there in North Korea?

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12. Why are experts worried about the development of an advanced Taepo Dong-2 missile?

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