U.S. Weighs Reward if North Korea Scraps Nuclear Arms

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 12— The Bush administration, which had barred concessions to North Korea before it dismantled its nuclear weapons program, is now considering some conciliatory steps. In return, North Korea would have to either fully disclose its weapons or allow international inspectors into the country, administration officials said today.

Possible concessions include some form of written assurance that the United States has no intention of attacking North Korea and some relaxation of curbs on activities by international institutions to help the North with its economic problems, the officials said.

An administration official said the United States might even be prepared to offer economic incentives, an idea it previously disparaged in connection with the Clinton administration's 1994 deal to freeze North Korea's nuclear program, which the North subsequently breached.

But, the official added, economic benefits would come only after the dismantling of the nuclear program. ''There's no such thing as you-do-this and suddenly Ed McMahon shows up with a check for $10 billion,'' the official said.

Asian and American officials said today that the next round of talks with North Korea would take place from Aug. 27 to 29 in Beijing. That session was made possible last month, when North Korea dropped its demand that the talks be limited to direct negotiations with the United States.

''There are a lot of ideas being discussed,'' said an Asian diplomat. ''The question is how they will be packaged, and in what sequence. The United States clearly wants its concerns addressed at an early stage, while the North Koreans want their concerns addressed at an early stage.''

The Beijing talks will involve six nations: North Korea, the United States, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea. The only other recent session was in Beijing in April, with only North Korea, China and the United States involved.

As the next Beijing meeting approaches, the Bush administration is reported once again to be divided over concessions to the North. There are also differences of view between Washington and its allies, Japan and South Korea.

An American official said Japan and the United States take a harder line, while South Korea is inclined to accept the idea of ''front-loading'' some concessions in return for preliminary steps by the North toward nuclear disarmament.

A senior administration official emphasized that no final decision had been made. The final goal, he said, remains what it was: ''A complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons program.''

Japanese and South Korean envoys are to confer with American officials in Washington on Wednesday and Thursday.

An administration official said hard-liners at the Pentagon, who oppose preliminary concessions, were once again at odds with State Department officials, who favor moving the process along with step-by-step concessions.

One point under discussion, according to American and Asian diplomats, is exactly what concessions might be offered if North Korea were to agree, for example, to disclose the exact number of its nuclear weapons or give more details about its plutonium reprocessing program.

Though such steps would be far short of the dismantling of nuclear programs demanded by the United States as the price for any future economic aid, the Bush administration was said to be considering preliminary steps to encourage North Korea to keep cooperating.

''The question is what actions do you take if they freeze their program, versus dismantling it,'' said an administration official. ''There is not now a fully coordinated U.S. position on that. There are some principles, but we have to decide the whole issue of sequencing.''

For nearly a year, North Korea has insisted that in exchange for dropping its nuclear program, it must get a a nonaggression treaty with the United States and large infusions of economic aid.

The Bush administration has ruled out a nonaggression pact. But Secretary of State Colin L. Powell has said some form of written assurances might be acceptable as a means of underscoring President Bush's declaration that the United States had no intention of attacking North Korea.

''We won't do nonaggression pacts or treaties, things of that nature,'' Mr. Powell said last week, speaking to foreign journalists. He added that ''there should be ways to capture assurances to the North Koreans from not only the United States, but we believe from other parties in the region.''

Asian diplomats said today that the wording of a written assurance was already under discussion. The administration has already ruled out any language that would assure the North that there would never be a pre-emptive attack, they said, on the ground that an imminent attack by North Korea might require one.

Meanwhile, the administration said today that John R. Bolton, the Under Secretary of State for nonproliferation and a figure much reviled by North Korea, would not be a part of the delegation in the Beijing talks. But officials said President Bush reserved the right to decide who would make up the delegation.

The issue arose earlier this month after Mr. Bolton gave a speech in Seoul attacking the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, as a tyrant who could not be trusted. That was followed by a North Korean attack on Mr. Bolton as ''human scum'' who would not be welcome to any negotiations.

Mr. Bolton is regarded in the administration as a hard-liner close to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, who advocates making as few concessions as possible. But he has been involved in nuclear proliferation issues and not in direct negotiations with North Korea.

After the White House issued a statement saying that Mr. Bush, and not North Korea, would decide who would attend any talks with North Korea, Mr. Bolton issued a statement saying, ''I am happy to play whatever role the president and secretary want me to play.''

Administration officials emphasized that President Bush had yet to make any final decisions on either what concessions to make or what timetable to adopt, if North Korea agrees to take steps toward nuclear disarmament.

Some administration officials acknowledge that North Korea has been one of the most internally contentious issues that has been faced by President Bush.

Mr. Rumsfeld and other hard-liners are said to support negotiating with North Korea, if only because they expect the talks to fail. They believe that would make it easier to rally support from other countries for more economic and political pressure and, eventually, military confrontation.

An administration official, echoing what Chinese diplomats have said publicly and privately, said there was little expectation that the talks this month would yield progress but that, over time, there was some hope for resolving the stalemate with North Korea peacefully.