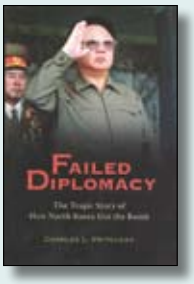

Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb
by Charles L. Pritchard
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Reviewed by
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Charles L. Pritchard offers this statement by a North Korean official as evidence of flawed American policy in *Failed Diplomacy*: "If the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] feels that it could trust the United States, then there is no need for a single nuclear weapon and we will dismantle them." This book is Pritchard's insider's account of the U.S. inability to halt the Korean Peninsula's nuclearization through the Six-Party Talks. Though *Failed Diplomacy* is primarily aimed at North Korea watchers, it is also useful for those concerned with counterproliferation in places where multilateral methods have been similarly unsuccessful.

As with the recent *The War Within* by Bob Woodward, *Failed Diplomacy* is as much about perceived dysfunction in the George W. Bush administration as it is about policy toward North Korea. However, Pritchard, who was special envoy to North Korea for negotiations until resigning in August 2003 over policy disagreements with the White House, lacks Woodward's flare for a compelling and consistent narrative. Those who do work their way through the book will find sound policy suggestions regarding counterproliferation in general and the DPRK in particular. Other gems include private information, such as the complete text of less than diplomatic emails between Pritchard and Secretary of State Colin Powell's office as well as correspondence between Pritchard and his North Korean counterparts.

The first half of the book, Pritchard's first-hand account of policy toward North Korea from 2000 to 2003, is the most intriguing part as he reveals the kind of unique insider details that are absent from most analysis. Because of Pritchard's resignation in 2003, the second half of the book consists of his evaluation of the success of the Six-Party Talks as an outside observer. This section includes conclusions relevant to policymakers, though it is marked by rather dry reporting devoid of groundbreaking information. Primary among these conclusions is the belief that Pyongyang's demands in exchange for denuclearization—including a security pact, provision of a light water reactor, and the removal of North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism (which occurred in October 2008)—have more to do with proving that the United States does not intend to invade North Korea than they do with gaining economic benefits. Pritchard's regional expertise also comes across in this section, and he provides insightful analysis of the policies of all the members of the Six-Party Talks that is relevant to more than just North Korea watchers.

Pritchard finishes the book by outlining the need for and format of a permanent security forum in Northeast Asia. While this section is less germane to the principal topic of U.S.–DPRK relations than the rest of the book, it offers a novel look at the challenges and opportunities of any potential security framework in the region. Pritchard argues for the institutionalization of the Six-Party Talks to provide a permanent stage for multilateral security cooperation. Critically, North Korea would be not a principal member of this proposed organization, but only a nonvoting observer with the same status as extraregional players such as Singapore or Australia. Though Pyongyang might be reluctant to participate as a less than full member, as an observer it would still be able to have bilateral contact with the United States, while Washington could continue to maintain a veneer of multilateralism.

Based on his personal experience negotiating with Pyongyang and his extensive regional expertise, Pritchard makes three important arguments in *Failed Diplomacy*. The first is that diplomatic success with Pyongyang has only come through bilateral negotiations. Though Pritchard believes that direct talks are the best way of dealing with the nuclear question in North Korea, such as those that occurred during the Clinton administration that eventually led to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright traveling to Pyongyang, he concedes that even bilateral contacts that occur in the inefficient context of a multilateral setting are better than a hard-line policy of no direct negotiation with the "evil" Kim regime.

In addition, Pritchard makes the controversial case that the growth in North Korean nuclear weapons was caused by the inability of the highest levels of the Bush administration to properly coordinate interagency policy toward North Korea. Pritchard points to a cabal led by Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that inserted itself into North Korean policy by pushing non-hardliners and Clinton-era Korea experts out of the State Department and replacing them with personnel who shared their ideology but had little knowledge of the region. While it is obvious that Pritchard has an ax to grind, he is not partisan, and his case is certainly not without merit.

Pritchard also offers intriguing evidence of the real power of public diplomacy to influence other actors, even unintentionally. According to Pritchard, the White House's refusal to conduct high-level bilateral diplomacy and the constant drumbeat of belligerence (exemplified by the characterization of North Korea as part of the "axis of evil" and Vice President Cheney's comment that the United States doesn't "negotiate with evil, we destroy it") convinced Pyongyang that Washington intended to end the North Korean regime. Pritchard writes that Pyongyang's decision to resume nuclear weapons development in 2005 was rational in the face of this perceived threat and that more refined and nuanced diplomacy could have halted or slowed North Korea's nuclearization. Such a policy may have prevented Pyongyang from obtaining the nuclear weapons (as many as 10) it has now.

Beyond North Korea, *Failed Diplomacy* also has particular utility for those officials dealing with Iranian proliferation efforts. Current policy toward Iran—inconsistent and weak multilateral efforts, an almost doctrinal refusal to consider bilateral negotiations, and a public diplomacy that cannot but leave the impression that the United States intends regime change—is sadly similar to the methods that have been tried and have failed with North Korea. Pritchard's recommendations may keep the United States from facing another, more dangerous instance of failed diplomacy.

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