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Special Analysis

NORTH KOREA: Nuclear Program of Proliferation Concern

North Korea is rapidly expanding its nuclear-related activities.

The Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center, about 90 kilometers north of P'yongyang, is the focal point of North Korea's nuclear program.

North Korea, despite severe economic constraints, has expanded activities at Yongbyon over the past decade. It operates a 4-megawatt-thermal (MWt) research reactor, supplied by the Soviets in mid-1964, an indigenously designed 30-MWt research reactor modeled after 1950s British plutonium production reactors

The Program's Goal

The North suffers chronic energy shortages, and the new plants at Yongbyon may be part of a civilian power-generation program. The 30-MWt reactor can generate electrical power.

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North Korea and the IAEA: The Next Round

P'yongyang has assured Soviet and IAEA officials that it will open formal safeguards negotiations with the IAEA this month. [REDACTED]

The North has repeatedly missed target dates for such talks, and the IAEA is concerned that P'yongyang may find new pretexts to postpone any talks. [REDACTED]

Even if negotiations are successful, there are loopholes in the standard safeguards agreement that would allow the North to delay implementation indefinitely or to limit coverage to select facilities:

- North Korea must officially notify the IAEA that an agreement meets all internal statutory requirements before it can enter into force. There is no explicit time limit for this step.
- Once an agreement takes effect, P'yongyang has 60 days to declare all facilities that contain nuclear materials subject to safeguards. [REDACTED]

Lengthy delays in implementation or incomplete declarations to the IAEA would increase international concern that the North's activities at Yongbyon are not strictly peaceful.

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