

# **The North Korean Plutonium Stock Mid-2006**

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## **Press Release**

The Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) has completed an analysis of North Korea's plutonium production activity through mid-2006, and the resulting impact on its plutonium stockpile.

We conclude that North Korea is estimated to now have enough separated plutonium to develop a credible nuclear arsenal, on the order of 4 to 13 nuclear weapons similar in size to South Africa's nuclear weapons arsenal in the late 1980s at the height of its effort. Our assessment is based on analysis of satellite imagery indicating activity at the 5 megawatt reactor at Yongbyon, media reports, and statements by North Korean officials. The attached report also addresses the issue of North Korea's 50 megawatt reactor, still under construction, and notes the absence of any significant construction activity in recent months. Construction activity would be viewed as provocative, because the reactor, once finished, would increase North Korea's plutonium production tenfold.

Little is known about North Korea's exact ability to make nuclear weapons, although it is believed to be developing and perhaps building nuclear warheads for delivery on ballistic missiles.

Since the start of the Bush Administration and dissolution of the Agreed Framework, North Korea has gone from having enough separated plutonium for perhaps one or two nuclear weapons to enough for between 4 and 13 weapons. By the end of the Bush Administration, North Korea could have enough plutonium for 8 to 17 nuclear weapons.

North Korea is unlikely to view its current plutonium stock as large enough for its own deterrent needs. Within a few years however, if plutonium production continues at current, modest levels, North Korea's stock of plutonium may be sufficient for its deterrent needs, at which point there is a risk that North Korea's cash-strapped leadership may decide to sell some of its excess plutonium to others.