

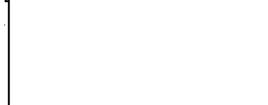
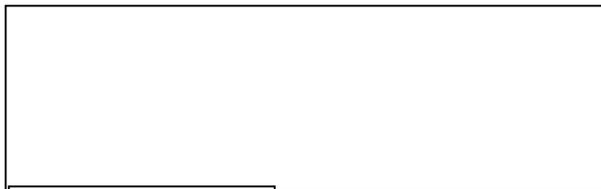
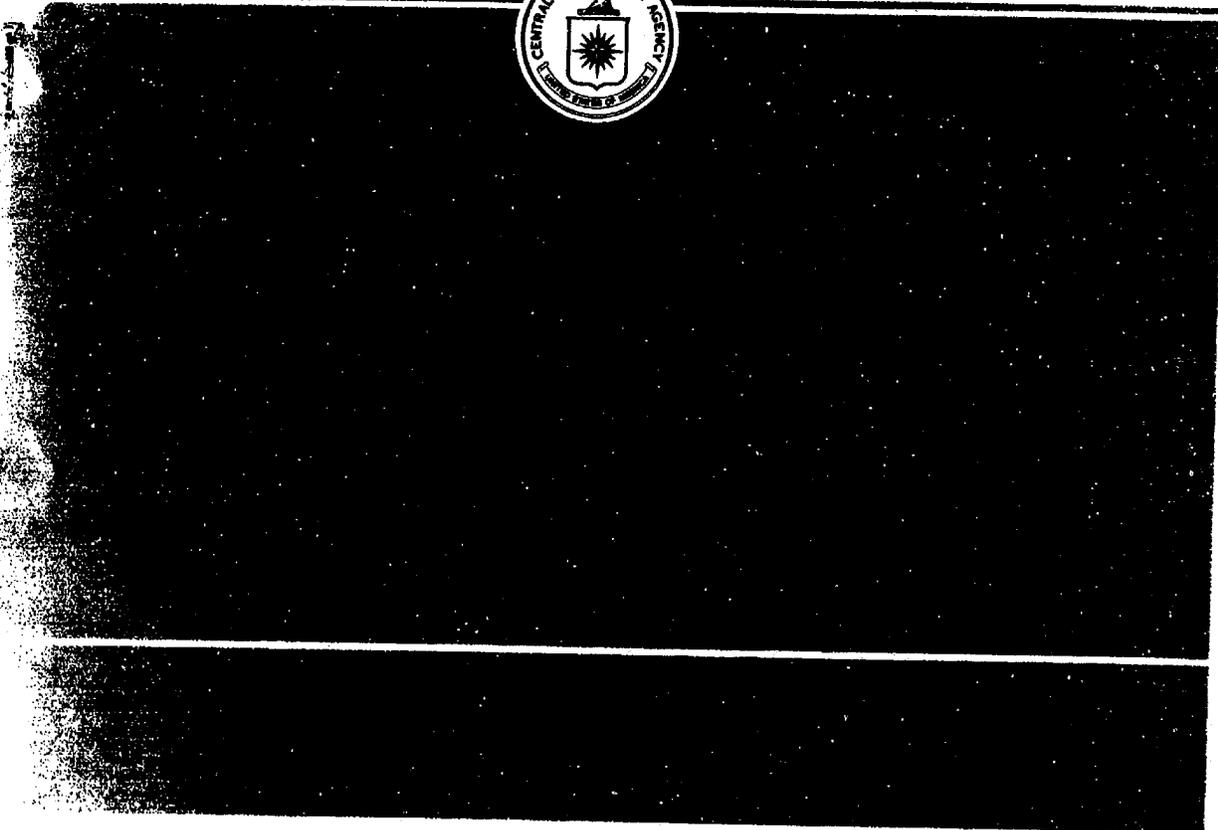
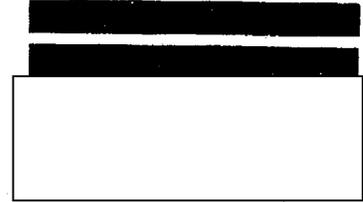
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~~Top Secret~~**NORTH KOREA: Withdrawal From NPT**

P'yongyang's sudden abrogation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty suggests it may have feared that further IAEA access to its nuclear facilities would result in additional incriminating discoveries; the North probably hopes that making the announcement during the Team Spirit exercise will help justify its claim that it faces a US threat.

North Korea announced today that it was withdrawing from the NPT in order to defend the country's "supreme interest." The announcement comes in the wake of last month's IAEA Board of Governors' resolution calling on P'yongyang to grant IAEA inspectors access to two suspected nuclear waste storage sites at the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center. The IAEA believes the sites could contain evidence that North Korea extracted more plutonium from spent fuel than it declared to the IAEA.

Comment: Although the IAEA had given P'yongyang until 25 March to accept special inspections of the two sites, several considerations may have driven the North to act now. North Korea may have calculated that withdrawing while the US-South Korean Team Spirit exercise was in full swing would buttress its argument that it is the one facing the threat. In addition, P'yongyang may have feared that further IAEA access at Yongbyon would have uncovered additional incriminating evidence.

IAEA Director General Blix probably will now convene a special session of the IAEA Board of Governors to formally conclude that North Korea is not in compliance with its safeguards agreement and refer the matter to the UN Security Council. The North almost certainly expects this and may be waiting to assess international reaction before deciding its next move.

Given the North's penchant for high-risk brinksmanship, it may even consider concocting or provoking a military incident along the DMZ during Team Spirit as "proof" of US hostility.

P'yongyang yesterday accused the US of bringing heavy weapons closer to the line than allowed under the armistice agreement.

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