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## REVIEW & OUTLOOK

### U.N. Cash for Kim

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The U.N.'s Oil for Food disgrace rolls on, with this week's indictment by a federal prosecutor in New York of the program's former administrator Benon Sevan. But now a new dollars-for-dictators scandal is breaking into the open, this one involving the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) and North Korea's Kim Jong Il.

Our Melanie Kirkpatrick lays out many of the gory details nearby, based on documents reluctantly produced by the U.N. after prodding by American officials. The tale is similar to Oil for Food in that money for programs designed to benefit North Korea's poor appears to have been used instead to sustain the government. While the total amount of cash spent by the UNDP in North Korea isn't clear thanks to the opacity of U.N. record-keeping, any hard currency is manna from Turtle Bay for the isolated Kim regime. If dollar amounts into the tens of millions over nine years are accurate, that's money that would have helped Kim stay in power and continue his nuclear weapons program.


The documents we've seen follow the program back to 1998 and the era of detente between Kim and the Clinton Administration. But what's especially alarming is that the UNDP's programs have persisted in North Korea even as Kim has banished U.N. weapons inspectors, raised the volume on his threats, tested long-range missiles and even tested a nuclear weapon -- all in defiance of the U.N.'s own stated positions and Security Council sanctions.

A defense that the UNDP merely does humanitarian work -- for the people of North Korea and not the government -- isn't credible given the details exposed by Ms. Kirkpatrick. U.N. officials can't even say with confidence that all of the "development" projects exist because they haven't been allowed to visit their sites. Pyongyang officials insist on payments in cash that become fungible hard currency for the regime. Every U.N. dollar is one more that Kim doesn't have to raise from other (and often illegal) sources to pay off his generals or to buy a nuclear centrifuge.

The desire in some circles, including parts of the U.S. State Department, will be to dismiss all of this as no big deal because the bigger game is getting Kim to end his nuclear program. So why let a little more U.N. corruption, or incompetence, interfere with serious diplomacy?

Well, one reason is because we still don't know how wide or deep this scandal is, especially if it extends to other U.N. programs operating in North Korea. Another is that any cash to Kim contradicts U.N. and U.S. policy and helps ease pressure on the dictator to give up his nukes. And then there is the matter of the U.N.'s own credibility and failure to reform. In the wake of Oil for Food especially, why would U.N. officials allow this program to continue?

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The generous explanation is incompetence, or perhaps the kind of feckless idealism that really believes such a program helps poor Koreans apart from Kim's regime. But given the U.N.'s recent track record of indictments for corruption, more venal motives need to be investigated. And it is also worth asking whether outright hostility to the U.S. policy of trying to isolate Kim has also played a role.

Whatever the motive, the Cash for Kim scandal is one more blot on the record of former Secretary General Kofi Annan. It also raises questions about the role played in North Korea by Maurice Strong, the Canadian who was Mr. Annan's envoy to Pyongyang.

We'd feel a lot better if the U.N. had quickly responded to U.S. queries and tried to get to the bottom of the mess at UNDP. But the exchange of letters between U.S. Ambassador Mark Wallace and UNDP officials described by Ms. Kirkpatrick is certainly reminiscent of the early U.N. stonewalling on Oil for Food.

Mr. Wallace and his colleagues from other nations on the UNDP executive board are right to demand a stop to the program and an independent investigation. The U.N.'s new Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, could make his own early mark by calling for a probe as part of a new era of U.N. transparency. Democrats in Congress could also be constructive by insisting on accountability, especially given how much stock they put in a competent U.N. to promote American security.

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One lesson of Oil for Food, and its failure to lead to any serious reform, is that to some foreign policy elites there can be no such thing as a U.N. "scandal." That's because for them the U.N. is all about good intentions, and the hopes and dreams for peace, rather than about actual results. But it is precisely that forbearance that has allowed too many dictators to exploit the U.N. for their own purposes, and has brought Turtle Bay to its current low ebb. Getting to the bottom of Cash for Kim is one more chance to make the U.N. shape up, and to stop financing a global menace in the bargain.

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