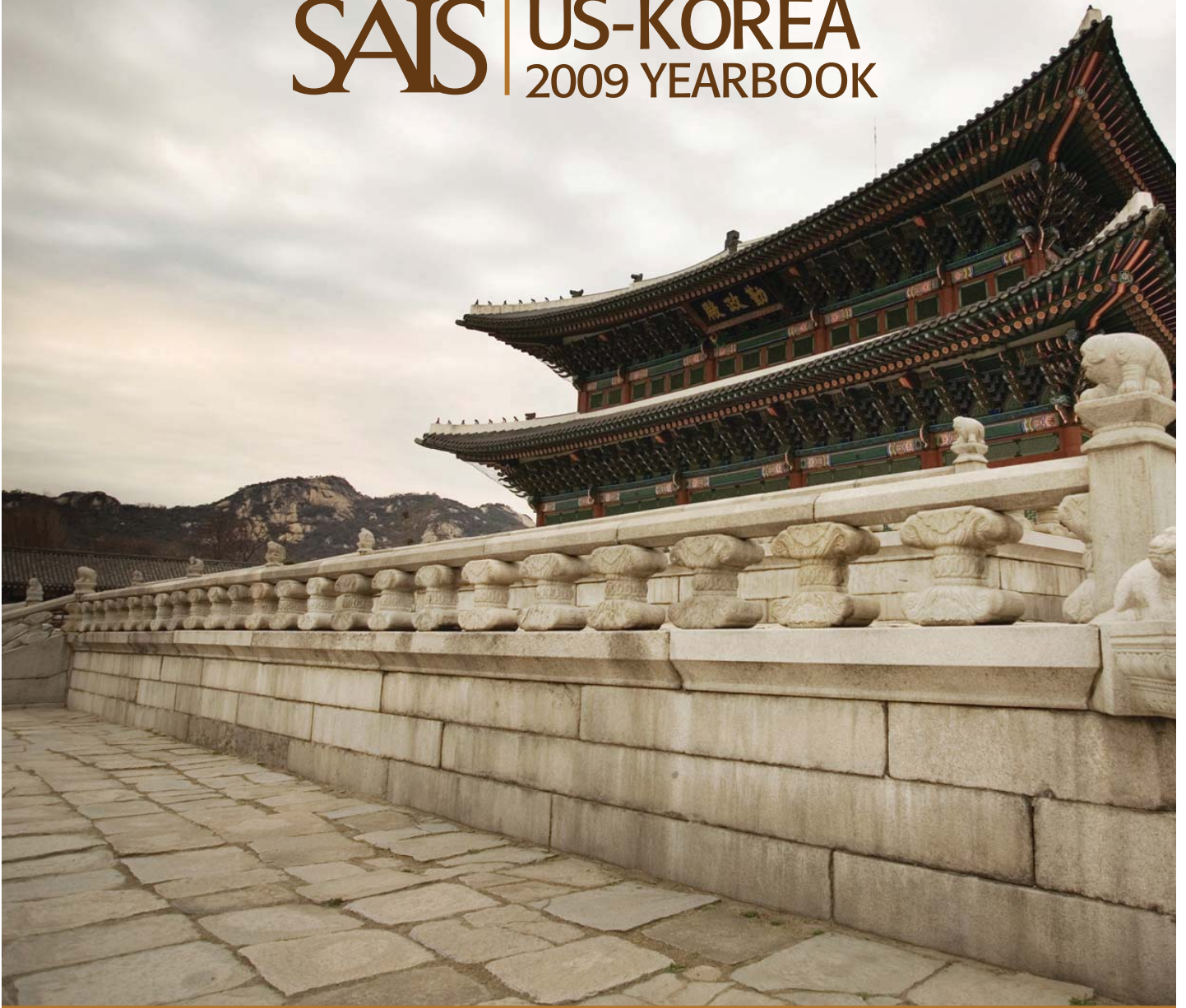


SAIS | US-KOREA 2009 YEARBOOK



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THE LOST YEAR: NUCLEAR ESCALATION AND THE ABSENCE OF SIX-PARTY TALKS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The last round of Six-Party Talks in December 2008 ended in stalemate over how to verify North Korea's compliance with its denuclearization obligations. Despite major diplomatic successes earlier in the year, which culminated in the delivery of more than 18,000 pages of documents detailing North Korea's nuclear program, followed by its removal from the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism, negotiators failed to come to an agreement as to how to proceed. With hard-liners in the Bush administration calling for more stringent inspections and North Korea refusing to comply with what it called "coercive" verification requirements, the Six-Party Talks stalled.

Since this stalemate also came at the end of the Bush administration, it is likely that the North Korean regime was waiting to see how the new Obama administration might deal with it. Unfortunately, after North Korea's rocket launch in April and the resulting condemnation by the international community, prospects for further constructive dialogue rapidly deteriorated. North Korea responded bitterly to criticism over its rocket launch and eventually declared that the "Six-Party Talks are dead." North Korea escalated tensions further when it conducted a second nuclear bomb test in May. This action was followed by wider condemnation, resulting in the adoption of UN Resolution 1874, which stipulated tougher sanctions on North Korea.

During this time, two American journalists had been arrested on the China-North Korean border and were sentenced to twelve years of hard labor. This situation eventually led to former President Clinton's trip to North Korea in early August to win their release. Following his meeting with Kim Jong-il, there was renewed hope that North Korea was again willing to negotiate over its nuclear program

as it made a series of conciliatory gestures to South Korea and the United States throughout August and September.

However, Six-Party Talks remained stalled as North Korea said that it would be interested only in multilateral negotiations after first meeting bilaterally with the United States and invited Special Envoy Stephen Bosworth to visit Pyongyang in an effort to begin bilateral negotiations. Washington was initially reluctant to accept this invitation and stated that it would meet bilaterally only if it had a guarantee that those meetings would eventually lead back to Six-Party negotiations.

Soon after President Obama's trip to Asia in November, Ambassador Bosworth met with North Korean officials in Pyongyang for discussions on how the Six-Party Talks might be restarted. Despite this progress, the talks remain stalled with no clear commitment to future meetings at the end of 2009.

This paper will highlight the major events over the past year that are relevant to the Six-Party Talks as well as explore how the Six-Party process has improved or reduced the chances of North Korean denuclearization in the years since its inception. Problems inherent in the framework will be discussed, and an overview of the immediate issues facing the Six-Party Talks, should they be resumed, will also be given.

II. BACKGROUND

The current nuclear crisis largely stems from a meeting in 2002 between Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly and Kang Sok-ju, the first vice foreign minister of the DPRK, in which Secretary Kelly claims that Kang admitted to a North Korean highly enriched uranium (HEU) program. While North Korea later denied any such program, the United States used this admission as a pretext to suspend shipments of heavy fuel oil (HFO) and the construction of light-water reactors (LWR) that had been promised as part of the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework. The following year the Bush administration, in an attempt to force North Korea to end its nuclear program, pushed for multilateral negotiations, arguing that these would further isolate North Korea and provide leverage in denuclearization negotiations. The Bush administration felt that the only way to verifiably and irreversibly dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons program would be through a regional security framework involving countries that would be directly impacted by North Korea's nuclear program. The administration

cited the failure of bilateral negotiations during the Clinton administration as the primary rationale for a multiparty framework.

After initial three-party talks between the United States, North Korea, and China, the format was expanded to include South Korea, Japan, and Russia. The Bush administration envisioned the Six-Party Talks not only as a way to put pressure on North Korea to end its nuclear program, but also as a way to resolve other regional issues. The first meeting took place in August of 2003, and little progress was made until the fourth round of negotiations, in 2005, when a joint agreement was reached on September 19. Since then, a mix of progress and setbacks has characterized much of the process.

The Six Parties

From the beginning of these negotiations, China often played the role of a facilitator. Unlike the other members, China has a much stronger interest in ensuring a stable regime in North Korea because of the potential for a mass refugee exodus across a porous North Korean border in the event of a regime collapse. China also has economic interests in North Korea and is the North's largest trading partner. The potential for a nuclear North Korea to lead to an East Asian nuclear arms race is also a major concern, with the prospect of a nuclear Japan particularly troubling for Chinese security concerns.

Russia has a similar interest in a long-term settlement to the nuclear dilemma because North Korea stands in the way of Russian plans for economic development and political normalization in the region. Russia is hoping to connect energy resources in its far east to markets in South Korea, Japan, and China, and an unstable North Korea will substantially retard this development. Of particular interest to Russia is a North Korea that is stable enough to allow for the connection of South Korean railways to the Trans-Siberian Railway and for a pipeline that will ultimately link Seoul to vast gas resources on Sakhalin.

South Korea, the United States, and Japan all share security concerns, with South Korea and Japan feeling directly threatened by North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs. The United States may at some point in the future feel more of a direct threat if North Korea is able to perfect its intercontinental ballistic missiles, but a larger concern for the United States at present is the risk of proliferation to such places as Syria and Iran, and the protection of its allies.

A key departure in the conceptual framework with which officials both in the United States and in South Korea view North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear program is that some see the North's nuclear program mainly as a way to address its security fears, while others see it as a bargaining tool designed to squeeze aid from the international community. Although the DPRK's program essentially serves both purposes—a bargaining tool that helps allay security fears—this conceptual divide drives different responses to the crisis because these two parties weigh these concerns somewhat differently. If the primary purpose is security, then a peace treaty and normalization of the U.S.-DPRK relationship would play a very large role in convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear program. On the other hand, if the main purpose is to extract aid, then the price of denuclearization will presumably go far beyond normalization, although it will still be a key component, as North Korea attempts to leverage its nuclear program for all that it can.

III. THE “DEATH” OF THE SIX-PARTY TALKS

In December of 2008, the last round of Six-Party Talks in Beijing largely ended in failure over disputes as to how to verify North Korea's compliance with denuclearization. This left the Six-Party Talks in a state of limbo at the end of the Bush administration, despite some major successes earlier in the year. For several months both the United States and North Korea appeared to be waiting to see how domestic political issues might play out in each other's respective country. The election of President Obama represented a potentially new tack in negotiations with America, and uncertainties over Kim Jong-il's health led to talk of a potential North Korean succession crisis. Kim Jong-il is widely believed to have suffered a stroke in the summer of 2008, which opened questions as to how a succession might affect dealings with North Korea and led to speculation that North Korea might be close to a turbulent epoch in its history as there appeared to be no clear successor to Kim Jong-il. While his third son eventually emerged as a likely candidate, Kim Jong-il's health improved throughout the year, and it soon became clear that he still wielded absolute authority.

On April 9 the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) convened and reelected Kim Jong-il as the chairman of the National Defense Commission and revised its constitution to expand his powers. The timing of this meeting is crucial because it came five days after a rocket launch that North Korea claimed had put a satellite into orbit. The launch of this rocket was seen domestically as proof of

North Korean technological prowess and a basis for the continued edification of Kim Jong-il and his regime. It was also part of a long-term drive to modernize the country and make a “great prosperous and powerful nation without fail by 2012,” the centennial of Kim Il-sung’s birthday.

However, this launch touched off the main crisis of the year and is the main reason there has been no progress in Six-Party negotiations this year. The resulting condemnation of the launch in a UN presidential statement on April 13, for what was seen by the outside world as a test of ballistic missile technology, incensed Pyongyang and led it to declare that it would withdraw from Six-Party Talks and restart its nuclear program. Later that month, Pyongyang also announced that it would pursue an HEU program—the first unambiguous admission that it would pursue such a program—and test another nuclear device.

Near the end of the following month, on May 25, North Korea tested a second nuclear device, more powerful than its previous one in 2006. This provoked a strong reaction by the UN Security Council, which, through Resolution 1874, expanded previous sanctions and notably called on member nations to inspect and detain DPRK vessels suspected of ferrying illicit materials or to deny bunkering services to these vessels if they refused inspection. The strength of this resolution was soon tested, when the *Kang Nam I*, which was suspected of carrying materials banned under this resolution, returned home after being denied access to ports on what was thought to have been a trip to Myanmar. The resolution again proved its effectiveness in December when a cargo plane carrying North Korean weapons was detained in Thailand after Thai authorities were apparently tipped off by American intelligence.

IV. A PATH BACK TO NEGOTIATIONS?

During this escalation of the nuclear crisis, another drama between the United States and the DPRK had been unfolding since the arrest of two American journalists on the China-North Korea border on March 17. On June 8 these journalists were found guilty of hostile acts and sentenced to twelve years of hard labor. The journalists’ fate soon became a bargaining chip for North Korea, which eventually led to a visit by former President William Clinton to Pyongyang in early August to seek their release. While President Clinton was not there as an official representative of the U.S. government, his visit provided fresh propaganda for North Korea, as it claimed that Clinton had “expressed words of sincere apology to Kim Jong-il for the hostile acts committed by the

two American journalists against the DPRK after illegally intruding into it” and that “the meetings had candid and in-depth discussions on the pending issues between the DPRK and the United States in a sincere atmosphere and reached a consensus of views on seeking a negotiated settlement of them.” While Pyongyang had expressed willingness for dialogue on its nuclear program (albeit outside the Six-Party framework) the week before this took place, Kim Jong-il’s meeting with president Clinton became a turning point in U.S.-DPRK relations as North Korea was now seen as conciliatory and potentially willing to deal.

Relations between North and South Korea have also been improving since August. The week after Clinton’s visit, the chairwoman of Hyundai traveled to Pyongyang to discuss business interests that had been on hold since the breakdown of relations between North and South Korea at the end of 2008. Shortly after this meeting a South Korean worker who had been held for several months was freed, and a few weeks later, on September 2, the border with South Korea was reopened. Reunions between families separated by the Korean War also resumed in September after a two-year hiatus. In October, North Korea expressed regret over the death of six South Koreans who had been killed in a flood when North Korea unexpectedly opened a dam—a rare expression for the North Korean regime.

Recent meetings with Chinese leadership also seem to confirm the view that Pyongyang is more open to dialogue. On September 19, Dai Bingguo, a visiting Chinese envoy, was reportedly told by Kim Jong-il that North Korea would be willing to return to multilateral talks. This point was reiterated the next month after a meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in which China and North Korea signed agreements on trade, tourism, and education. Premier Wen said that Kim Jong-il was willing to engage again in Six-Party Talks, but only if there was first progress in bilateral talks with the United States.

Taken together, these events suggested that North Korea was genuinely interested in renewed dialogue. It invited Special Envoy Stephen Bosworth to visit Pyongyang as part of bilateral talks aimed at resolving the nuclear problem and stated publicly that denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is its ultimate goal. This invitation was eventually accepted by the United States, with a meeting on December 8 between Bosworth and North Korea’s first vice foreign minister, Kang Sok-ju, and the North’s chief negotiator, Kim Kye-gwan. The meeting was characterized by Bosworth as “exploratory discussions aimed at restarting the six-party process” and as taking place under the framework of the Six-Party Talks.

In response to Mr. Bosworth's visit, KCNA, North Korea's government news agency, said, "Through working and frank discussion the two sides deepened the mutual understanding, narrowed their differences and found not a few common points. They also reached a series of common understandings of the need to resume the Six-Party Talks and the importance of implementing the September 19 Joint Statement. Both sides agreed to continue to cooperate with each other in the future to narrow down the remaining differences."

V. THE MOVE TOWARDS ENGAGEMENT: WHAT CHANGED?

Given this apparent shift in Pyongyang's position, the question of how effective have the United States and other countries been in influencing North Korea's behavior is important. The United States claims that the sanctions are working and that this has been a major reason why North Korea has changed its position. While these sanctions were more severe than previous ones, over the last decade North Korea has withstood withering sanctions that have been unsuccessful in diverting it from developing a functioning nuclear bomb as well as in significantly changing the course of its actions. Given that the sanctions were enacted on June 12 and North Korea expressed an interest in resuming some form of negotiations on July 27, it seems unlikely that these sanctions by themselves were enough to play a significant role in North Korea's decision making after only a month and a half. While it is certainly possible that tougher sanctions forced them to quickly reevaluate their position, an alternative explanation is that domestic politics made a bellicose response to international condemnation necessary because criticism of the "satellite" launch was seen as direct criticism of the North Korean power structure. Their long-term strategy may have always been to return to talks, but important events in North Korea in early April necessitated a strong response that the North Korean leadership calculated could be relaxed later. Having gone through several periods of increased tensions followed by reconciliation in the last two decades, it is possible they were willing to sacrifice short-term gains in negotiations for domestic political reasons.

It is also possible that while the rocket launch was designed purely as a show of strength for consumption by domestic audiences, it quickly spiraled into a situation for which the DPRK was unprepared. The launch came as no surprise to the international community since North Korea had announced its intentions in advance (unlike in 1998), so perhaps the North Korean leadership, in its own mind, was not being intentionally provocative. It was eager to use the "satellite"

launch as a sign of concrete technical achievements that had been made under Kim Jong-il's leadership so that it could in part justify impending changes that were going to be made to its constitution at the SPA meeting a few days later. For domestic political reasons, once it had announced this launch, there may have been no way for it to back down in the face of international criticism. To do so would have been a sign of weakness and a loss of face for a society that prides itself on its independence and military strength, particularly at a time when it was celebrating the anniversary of the creation of the Korean People's Army (KPA) and officially endowing Kim Jong-il with more expansive powers.

While the missile launch may have been difficult to cancel once it had been announced, Pyongyang certainly had an idea of how a second nuclear test would be received and most likely conceived of a second test as a way to reinforce its status as a country with a nuclear deterrent, given the skepticism about the effectiveness of its original nuclear test. Already on the wrong side of UN condemnations, North Korea may have seen little further downside to another nuclear test and may have capitalized on a period of poor relations to conduct a test that it had been wanting to perform, but was unable to do in an atmosphere of improving relations during the previous couple of years.

Other theories make the case that this test might also have been a signal to prospective buyers of North Korean nuclear technology. It could have been a way for North Korea to create more nuclear blast data that it could then trade to countries such as Iran for more advanced uranium enrichment technology.

Ultimately, the shift in North Korea's attitude towards further negotiations probably came as a result of domestic issues and not because of external pressure. The regime may have decided that it had proven its strength sufficiently and could now use that as leverage in further negotiations.

VI. BILATERAL VERSUS MULTILATERAL

Whether constructive negotiations with Pyongyang can truly take place is an important question as U.S. policy towards North Korea has been largely based on the view that it is an untrustworthy negotiating partner. While mistrust of North Korea is historically warranted (it is rooted in the beginning of the Korean War and North Korea's provocative actions since then), the idea that it is impossible to negotiate with North Korea because it will fail to honor its agreements is a narrative that grew out of the HEU dispute with the Bush

administration. This view of North Korea's unreliability has grown over the last several years and has become a standard characterization of its behavior, both in policy formation and in the media. Given that this line of thinking is the underpinning of the logic of the six-party framework instead of a bilateral one, it is important to know whether this characterization of North Korea is accurate.

The Geneva Agreed Framework, a bilateral agreement between the United States and North Korea, had been effective in shutting down the reactor at Yongbyon and freezing the development of a plutonium-based nuclear program. While there was evidence that North Korea was pursuing a clandestine HEU program through its attempted purchase of materials necessary for the enrichment of uranium, the difficulty of developing an HEU program large enough to produce bomb-making capabilities made North Korea's progress in this program in 2002 very much an open question.

While the intelligence on North Korea's HEU program was murky at best and openly questioned by the Chinese government and others, the Bush administration seemed eager to interpret Kang's statements in the most extreme way that it could. Because of 9/11, the Bush administration felt that it had to take a much harder line with its enemies, and it viewed North Korea as an intransigent international pariah that was bent on developing weapons of mass destruction. This view led the United States to end its agreements under the Geneva Agreed Framework before it could either verify Kang's statements or explore alternative solutions to this problem. The Bush administration's decision to abandon the 1994 agreement pushed North Korea to respond, and an escalating spiral of retaliation ensued that eventually led to the test of a nuclear device in 2006. While it can be argued that the North Koreans cheated by secretly pursuing an HEU program, there had been tangible results from a bilateral agreement in that Pyongyang had refrained from further developing a plutonium-based nuclear program and their Yongbyon reactor had remained offline up until the Bush administration declared that it would no longer honor its obligations under the Geneva Agreement.

Given that the largest breach of an agreement with North Korea may have been by the Bush administration in its rush to condemn North Korea for ideological purposes, it is not at all clear that a multilateral approach is the only way forward, and it may even be a hindrance to further progress. By insisting on this approach as the only modality for negotiation, the United States may also be delaying negotiations that could prevent further proliferation of nuclear technology. Delaying the bargaining process in the past has only served to

increase North Korea's ability to develop its nuclear capabilities and has ultimately resulted in greater bargaining power.

Problems with the Six-Party Framework

By bringing in other countries to help negotiate a settlement to this problem, the Bush administration hoped to create a more binding framework under which Pyongyang would find it difficult to renege on its agreements. While added pressure from regional players, notably China, has a strong potential to influence decision making in Pyongyang, the inclusion of other countries has also introduced variables that have complicated negotiations. Under the Six-Party process several different issues are being tackled at the same time because they are seen as linked to Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear weapons. This has led to the creation of five working groups that are tasked with solving different issues under the Six-Party process: denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, DPRK-U.S. normalization, DPRK-Japan normalization, economy and energy cooperation, and a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism.

As these other issues have become interlinked with denuclearization, they have sometimes become stumbling blocks as different members have put their own agendas ahead of the primary goal of denuclearization. In 2008 Japan lobbied the United States not to remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism because North Korea had not yet admitted to its wrongdoing on the abductee issue. This delay ultimately led to a severe slowdown and then halt of the disablement process, which was restarted only after North Korea was taken off of the list. Japan has also been reluctant to offer any aid to North Korea until this issue is resolved.

When South Korea's conservative party took power in 2008, its abrupt shift in its North Korea policy also threatened to derail Six-Party Talks. In addition, the Bush administration repeatedly linked North Korean human rights abuses to progress in its negotiations with North Korea. The point here is that by linking these issues to the main issue of denuclearization, the Bush administration created a system that required much greater coordination than bilateral discussions. This allowed for ambiguities in member commitments and greatly increased the time it took to reach any agreement because of the necessity for compromise among all members.

This multilateral system also created a difficult environment in which to police the enforcement of disincentives for continued nuclear development. Because

each member is impacted differently by North Korea's stability, there is an asymmetric interest in the stability of its regime. China and Russia both have a strong incentive to ensure that a stable North Korean regime continues to exist because they would potentially bear the brunt of a regime collapse in the form of a refugee crisis. Despite the touted success of sanctions, China recently signed new economic agreements with North Korea, a move that could undermine the effectiveness of these sanctions. Since China is North Korea's largest trading partner, their cooperation is essential in making sanctions work, but their reluctance to cooperate fully with sanctions has been a perennial problem.

At this point, the Six-Party Talks may well be the best way to move forward, but not because North Korea would be unwilling to honor agreements made in other venues. The seeds of a multilateral East Asian security framework have been sown, and there has been tangible progress made under previous Six-Party agreements. To scrap the entire system and begin anew with a bilateral framework would not appeal to any party involved (aside from the DPRK). Since all parties are now committed to pursuing negotiations under this framework, it is probably too late to consider an alternative path. However, building consensus through the Six-Party Talks should not be seen as a way to force North Korea to accept its denuclearization because there is no other way, but rather as a way to integrate it more fully into the region so that it finds cooperation and economic growth more in line with its interests than nuclear weapons and missile development.

If the various parties can agree on a consistent framework and a clear path for moving forward, as they did in 2007, then much progress can be made. However, aligning interests across multiple parties with disparate agendas will continue to be a problem that has the potential to delay further progress.

Conditions for a Bilateral Meeting

The United States had publicly stated that it would meet bilaterally with North Korea only if it had assurances that such a meeting would lead back to Six-Party Talks. A problem with this approach is that if North Korea makes the calculation that it can survive the current sanctions, then it may be a long time before the United States can create the necessary atmosphere of increased pressure through which it can induce Pyongyang back to the negotiating table in a multilateral setting. Since the meeting with Bosworth took place with no clear promise of further engagements, the United States seemed to relax this position somewhat, although it was still able to claim that this meeting took place under the Six-

Party framework—an assertion that went unchallenged by North Korea.

It is likely that the United States was hesitant to pursue bilateral discussions for several months after North Korea's invitation to Bosworth because it felt that sanctions were working and that it would be in a stronger bargaining position whenever negotiations resumed. Waiting may also allow the United States to appear in control of a situation in which it has limited options—a military option is all but unthinkable, and malign neglect will only embolden North Korea further as it did during the first half of the Bush administration. This makes dialogue and engagement the only plausible way forward.

While North Korea's energy, economic, and security needs will continue to remain an important motivation for its desire to negotiate, some recent accounts have stated that the economic situation in Pyongyang has actually been improving. If this is true, America's reliance on sanctions as an agent of change may be misguided and could lead to the squandering of an opportunity for renewed dialogue if North Korea reaches a point where it sees engagement with the United States as no longer preferable. On the other hand, it has been widely reported that North Korea may be seeing its worst harvest in several years. If, as it is widely speculated, 2010 brings a severe famine, then this could certainly hasten North Korea's desire to negotiate. In either case, China's relationship with North Korea will almost certainly guarantee that North Korea remains politically stable in the foreseeable future.

Whether the DPRK is in a position in which it needs to negotiate from desperation is unclear, but the bilateral meeting between the United States and the DPRK in December was a positive sign in that it keeps the hope of further progress alive. The Obama administration is not eager to allow North Korea much control in how negotiations move forward, and its strategy seems to be a polite indifference that is open to further dialogue, but not at the expense of previous agreements or through rewarding North Korea in any way for a return to Six-Party Talks. If the United States can maintain this position and the appearance of solidarity with the other members of the Six-Party Talks, then it may be difficult for North Korea to drive a wedge between the other parties—a consistent strategy it has employed over the years. In any case, North Korea needs to believe that negotiations will ultimately be in its long-term interest before it makes a commitment to a new round of talks.

VII. CHALLENGES TO MOVING FORWARD

If Six-Party Talks are resumed in the future, the same problem that led to the dissolution of the last round of talks still looms, namely how to verify North Korea's compliance with denuclearization. A verification plan was rejected by North Korea last year because it would have involved removing samples from Yongbyon's reactor core and sending them outside the country for processing. North Korea also felt that the United States had changed the nature of the dismantlement phase by demanding verification protocols that were not included in the original agreement.

In the short term, it may be in everyone's interest to allow this verification process to be driven by North Korea's demands. Since permanent dismantlement of the reactor in Yongbyon would represent real progress and would significantly reduce if not eliminate North Korea's ability to produce plutonium-based weapons, this could lead to an important first step in denuclearization, as compliance with this would be relatively easy to verify. After that has been completed, the focus could then shift to verifying the extent of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, its development of other nuclear programs, and the nature of any technical assistance it may have provided to nations such as Syria or Iran.

Another point of contention last year was that North Korea failed to mention an HEU program in the 18,000 pages of documents that it submitted to the United States, arguing that such a program did not exist. However, by officially declaring for the first time that they were pursuing such a program, they may have provided a sounder basis for the United States to pursue verification related to this program. Because it can be hidden underground, a clandestine uranium enrichment program would be extremely difficult to confirm unless North Korea was willing to allow inspections. Recent statements by North Korean media suggest that technology to enrich uranium is in the developmental stages, and with their admission that such a program exists, the United States will have more of pretext to demand verification in future rounds of negotiations.

A third issue will be to undo whatever moves North Korea has made over the last year to rebuild its nuclear capacity. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has stated that the United States should not "buy the same horse twice," meaning that the United States should not be willing to negotiate over concessions that North Korea has made in previous agreements. Understanding what previous agreements have been reversed over the last year will be a top priority. North Korea claims to have reprocessed the remaining spent fuel rods it had in its

possession, which analysts estimate to be enough for one or two more nuclear bombs. Any progress it has made in restarting its reactor in Yongbyon will also have to be closely scrutinized.

A final and much more difficult issue to overcome is that of distrust. Several leading Korean politicians, officials in the state department, and leading academics have all cited the trust dilemma as one of the biggest impediments to further progress, should negotiations become more amicable in the future. North Korea will be reluctant to give up anything of value, such as the ability to produce more plutonium, unless it is compensated substantially before and after it takes action. The other parties will be reluctant to reward North Korea with anything significant in advance, believing that the DPRK will only delay implementation of and ultimately renege on any promises it makes. Figuring out how to build trust when both sides perceive each other to be inconsistent and hostile will take time, but must begin with the assumption that negotiations are made in good faith and that there is at least the possibility that agreements will lead to binding commitments on both sides. If they begin with the assumption that the other side is by its very nature untrustworthy, as they have in the past, then it is difficult to see what progress will be made in the future.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The multilateral process has made some progress towards a comprehensive solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis, but has not yet accomplished it. However, if the threat of proliferation can be in some way mitigated while negotiations through the Six-Party process lumber forward, then any agreements that are forged may have a better chance of being sustained over the long term than those made under a bilateral agreement. While the risk will always remain that one of the parties will not abide by certain commitments, the goal should be to create a regional framework in which all members benefit through their cooperation.

Although some signs of progress in the prospects for renewed negotiations have appeared in recent months, many challenges await the Six-Party Talks when they resume. Since the Obama administration has held only one official meeting with the North Korean regime, it is difficult to judge how future negotiations might play out. So far, the administration has reiterated a commitment to agreements reached under the Bush administration, specifically the September 19, 2005 agreement, and has stated that it sees the Six-Party Talks as the only

path that will lead to North Korea's denuclearization. Although Bosworth's meeting in December gave renewed hope to a diplomatic solution in the future, 2009 is a year of lost opportunities that brought significant setbacks to the denuclearization process.



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