

## Reopening the Six-Party Talks: Prospects and Structural Limitations

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In this paper, we will ① summarize recent movements in international politics related to the issue of restarting the Six-Party Talks; ② diagnose the structural weaknesses and limitations of the Six-Party mechanism, and ③ on this basis, propose strategies for the ROK government in addressing the potential reopening of the Six-Party Talks.

### The Situation Following the US-China Summit

At last January's summit, Chinese Premier Hu Jintao and US President Barack Obama discussed the need to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue and ease the heightened inter-Korean military tensions as a compromise solution, they called for "meaningful progress in inter-Korean relations" as a precondition to "conditionally reopening the Six Party Talks." Thus the Six Party structure has re-emerged as a secret strategy for dealing with Korean peninsula issues. In what appears to be the result of some fine-tuning beforehand with the Chinese side, immediately following the summit North Korean Armed Forces Minister Kim Young Chun issued a directive calling for high-level military talks between the two Koreas. Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo visited North Korea in December

2010, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi visited the US on January 3rd, US Special Envoy for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth visited South Korea and China on January 4th, and US Defense Secretary Robert Gates visited China on the 9th of the same month. These exchanges indicate that considerable efforts were put into achieving a convergence of opinions ahead of the summit.<sup>1)</sup>

Ever since this year's New Year's Joint Editorial, North Korea has emphasized that "We must directly work to promote dialogue and cooperative programs" between the two Koreas and has proposed various levels of dialogue, but our side turned these proposals down, judging them to be lacking in sincerity and merely part of a propaganda offensive. North Korea has been pursuing a strategy of mixed conciliatory gestures and threats, i.e. a carrot-and stick policy, in an attempt to stir up conflict within South Korean society. Most of these are merely "proposals for the sake of making proposals," which can be viewed as part of the North's united front tactics. Considering the severity of the provocations made in 2010, there is no way that South Korea can accept the North's demands for inter-Korean dialogue without some sort of apology or expression of regret for those acts.

But from the South Korean perspective the military talks proposed after the US-China summit differed from other gestures for dialogue in that they presented a chance to confirm the North's sincerity through substantive talks. The US-China summit offered a turning point allowing for dialogue with responsible authorities with sufficient authority to issue an apology. The atmosphere hinted that North Korea might take a first step toward apologizing for the provocations of 2010.

Although expectations of renewed inter-Korean dialogue had been high ahead of the preliminary working-level military talks, the talks ended after only a brief encounter on February 8~9, before the two sides could even agree on an agenda for formal high-level talks.<sup>2)</sup> The South demanded an apology for the provocations and formal assurances that there would be no recurrence, as a token that the North was making "sincere and constructive" efforts to improve inter-Korean relations. However, the

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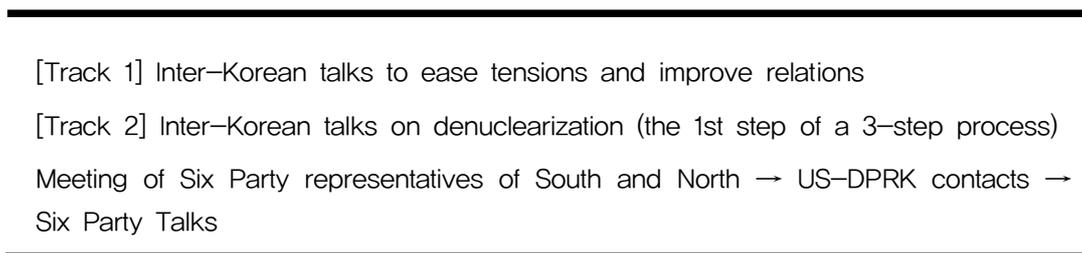
2) Aidan Foster-Carter, "South Korea-North Korea Relations: Not Getting Better," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (May 2011), pp. 85-103, <<http://csis.org/files/publication/1101q.pdf>>.

North refused to accede to this. With the breakup of the preliminary colonel-level talks in preparation for the high-level talks, South Korea's misgivings about the North's true intentions for reconciliation became even more pronounced.

As direct talks for improving relations have reached a stalemate, China has begun stepping up its mediation efforts in hopes of restarting the Six Party Talks. As the South has taken the principled stance of demanding an apology and formal assurances of no future provocations, and the North's response has been evasive, the effort to restart the Six Party Talks via improved inter-Korean relations has run up against a formidable obstacle; thus it appears that China is seeking a different path back to the Six Party Talks.<sup>3)</sup>

The Chinese Foreign Ministry presented a mediated proposal via the North Korean Foreign Ministry's First Vice Minister Kim Gye Gwan during his visit to China on April 7~12,<sup>4)</sup> and this was communicated to the South Korean side via China's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Wu Dawei. The key points of this proposal are ① to separate the nuclear issue from the stalled process of inter-Korean talks, and deal with these two issues via separate processes; ② to enter a three-step process of inter-Korean denuclearization talks followed by US-DPRK bilateral talks followed by Six Party Talks. This appears to be a compromise solution which evades the obstacle of North Korea's apology by adding renewed Six Party Talks as a new principle following the principles agreed upon at the US-China summit - easing tensions and achieving inter-Korean contacts. (Refer to Figure 1)

Figure 1: China's mediated proposal (step-by-step approach)



3) For details about China's recent diplomatic activities related to restarting the Six Party Talks, refer to: Scott Snyder, "China-Korea Relations: Can Inter-Korean Dialogue Revive the Six-Party Talks?" *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (May 2011), pp. 109-118, <<http://csis.org/files/publication/1101q.pdf>>.

4) The Chinese Foreign Ministry reported that during his visit Kim Gye Gwan held talks with various Chinese officials including Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, and Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Wu Dawei. This shows that the Chinese have been making persistent efforts to persuade the North Korean side.

In response to China's proposal, a high-level South Korean official visiting Washington for consultations on North Korea hinted at the possibility of new talks and clarified that "In our talks with North Korea, what is important is not the order or sequencing but the issue of whether or not the talks can make a real contribution to denuclearization," thus indicating that the North's sincerity toward denuclearization would be the most important yardstick in considering dialogue.<sup>5)</sup> He drew the line by stating, "We will give inter-Korean dialogue a try and then, based on the results, the ROK and the US must make an overall judgment on US-DPRK talks."<sup>6)</sup> Whether or not the Six Party Talks can be restarted will depend on the direction of the inter-Korean talks, with "sincerity" toward denuclearization as a prerequisite. Meanwhile, on May 9 that a joint press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany, Lee Myung Bak expressed his willingness to invite Kim Jong Il to the Nuclear Security Summit to be held in Seoul in March 2012. As a precondition of this, he called on the North to make a firm expression of its intention to denuclearize and apologize for the provocative actions of 2010.<sup>7)</sup>

Thus, even though inter-Korean relations continue to be stuck at an impasse, the issue of restarting the Six Party Talks has re-emerged amid active movements in international society.

### The Six Party System as a Weak International Regime<sup>8)</sup>

Whether the Six Party Talks ever functioned properly as a practical tool for achieving the goal of North Korean denuclearization is questionable. The talks were unable to prevent North Korea from developing plutonium-based nuclear weapons, they could not effectively restrain an unreliable actor such as North Korea, and they could not even prevent the North from pursuing a separate uranium enrichment program. On

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5) Yun Wan Jun, "Government Pushes for "Positive Progress" on Nuclear Talks," *Donga Ilbo*, April 16, 2011; Kim Sang Yeon, "No 6 Party Talks unless North Changes Its Behavior," April 16, 2011.

6) Kim Myeong Ho, "Inter-Korean Talks to North Korean Denuclearization," *Kukmin Ilbo*, April 16, 2011.

7) Chun Soo Young, "Kim Jong Il May Be Invited to Nuclear Summit if Denuclearization Agreement Reached," *Yonhap News*, May 10, 2011.

8) An international regime describes the tacit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and procedures by which the expectations (regarding the results of actions or policy decisions) of participating actors in a given region of international affairs (for instance, individual sovereign nations) are able to converge. Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," Stephen D. Krasner (eds.), *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

the contrary, they have served the North's purpose by giving it access to economic aid offered in exchange for denuclearization while also allowing it to buy time to develop its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems.

A more serious problem is that this low level of sincerity is not merely a strategic blunder or methodological issue; it appears to originate from "fundamental and structural" limitations. In that case a convincing argument can be made that future talks will contribute little to North Korean denuclearization.

The limitations of the Six Party Talks can be organized in two major categories: the conflicts of interest among participating parties, and the weakness of the Six Party system as an international regime.

First, the most significant factor constraining the effectiveness of the talks is that the strength of the participating countries' motivations differ from the degree of formal pledge needed to achieve the common goal, that is, North Korea's peaceful denuclearization (via negotiations and compensation). While attempting to collectively produce the common good of denuclearization by coordinating the actions of the participants in a procedural and regulated way, the talks are likely to devolve into a chaotic game of various parties pursuing their own disparate interests.

The motives and interests of each of the participants in the Six Party Talks can be described as follows.

**[North Korea's motives]** In past experience at the talks, North Korea's extreme reticence toward denuclearization has been confirmed time and time again. North Korea has distinguished itself as the only Northeast Asian nation moving in a direction contrary to the norm of nuclear non-proliferation.<sup>9)</sup> North Korea's desire for nuclear weapons is firmly rooted in its domestic political system, in which the forces in favor of the *songun* (military-first) system, including Kim Jong Il and the military, have secured a monopoly position. It is extremely difficult to change a nation's systemic character through peaceful international cooperation. Furthermore, it would be almost impossible to induce the successor government to abandon nuclear weapons when it is engaged in a wholehearted effort to promote unity among the pro-*songun* political group.<sup>10)</sup> North Korea would rather use the framework of the Six Party Talks

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9) Refer to Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

10) Jin-Ha Kim, "North Korea's Succession Plan: Stability and Future Outlook," *Korea University Iimin International Relations Institute Working Paper Series* No. 8 (December 2010), <<http://www.iiri.or.kr/>>.

to secure formal recognition of its membership in the "nuclear club" and extend that success to "establish a peace regime."

It appears that the North has been sending conciliatory signals to the US and South Korea, strengthening economic cooperation with China, and making gestures of reform and opening, while using the Six Party Talks as an expedient in order to gain economic and food aid needed to sustain its system. According to one report, even after 2008 when the food supply and demand situation had comparatively improved, a significant portion of the population has been struggling with starvation and dependent on external aid.<sup>11)</sup> In 2010 North Korean crops were adversely affected by typhoons and flooding, making the food situation even more serious.<sup>12)</sup> On top of the economic problems that had been exacerbated by the sanctions put in place by the US and the international community,<sup>13)</sup> the regime faces the problem of the declining legitimacy of the 3rd generation succession and growing pessimism about the system in the eyes of the people as well as some of the elites. Therefore it would be extremely hazardous for the succession regime to try to solve the fundamental root problem by implementing large-scale reform and opening policies which might put the regime in serious danger of collapse. Looking closely at the personnel reorganizations that emerged from the 9.28 Party Delegates' Conference and Central Committee Plenary Session and the dominant ideology revealed by the Party Charter revisions, it has become even more apparent that we can expect few fundamental reforms in the future.

Therefore the North needs to acquire the minimum material inputs necessary to operate its system from external sources, without resorting to internal reforms.<sup>14)</sup> To

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11) Dick K. Nanto and Emma Chanlett-Avery, "The North Korean Economy: Leverage and Policy Analysis," *CRS Report RL 32493* (Congressional Research Service, Updated Aug. 26 2008).

12) WFP/FAO/UNICEF, "Rapid Food Security Assessment Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," *Special Report* (24 March, 2011).

13) Among the sanctions currently being enforced by the US are UN resolutions 1695, 1718, 1874 and executive order 13382 against trade in WMDs, plus additional financial sanctions in response to the Cheonan sinking. For details on US economic sanctions against North Korea, refer to: Karin Lee and Julia Choi, "North Korea: Unilateral and Multilateral Economic Sanctions and U.S. Department of Treasury Actions 1955–April 2009," *National Committee on North Korea Working Paper* (last updated April 28, 2009).

14) North Korean Advisory Group, *Report to the Speaker, U.S. House of Representative* (Washington, DC: GOP, 1999), p. 30; Marcus Noland, *Avoiding the Apocalypse: The Future of the Two Koreas* (Washington, DC: IIE Press, 2000), p. 348; Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr., *Defiant Failed State: The North Korean Threat to International Security* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010), pp. 121–130.

achieve this it may adopt a conciliatory posture as a temporary expedient, attempting to restart the Six Party Talks, reducing inter-Korean tensions, and holding talks with the US on the nuclear issue. It has already used the nuclear negotiations as a tool to extract considerable economic aid from both South Korea and the US.<sup>15)</sup> If this conciliatory tactic succeeds in reopening the Six Party Talks, US-DPRK negotiations, or inter-Korean summit talks, not only will the North be able to obtain economic aid and large-scale food relief from the international community, the regime can also expect gain the side benefit of formal international acknowledgment and tacit approval for the Kim Jong Eun succession system.

Nevertheless we must view the North's conciliatory efforts to restart the Six Party Talks and inter-Korean dialogue as subordinate to its military adventurism. This is due to the internal political limitations faced by the succession government which must secure the absolute support of the pro-*songun* faction, and the "geopolitical paradox" which enables the North to extract aid from neighboring powers concerned about regional security. Looking back on the previous period, when North Korea was able to acquire more economic and political support from China during the contentious phase of US-China relations that unfolded after the Cheonan incident, we can easily ascertain the limited nature of this conciliatory tactic to reap some rewards in the wake of North Korea's military provocations.<sup>16)</sup>

In order to obtain aid, the North Korean leadership seems to feel the need to demonstrate to neighboring countries from time to time the fact that it is capable of disrupting the security of Northeast Asia in various ways. In a fundamental sense the North Korean leadership is hardly a group that is willing to cooperate to avoid a crisis. "In fact, they thrive on risk taking."<sup>17)</sup> If their conciliatory gestures fail to achieve the expected results, they can quickly shift back to a provocative strategy at any time. Despite the active efforts by relevant parties to restart the Six Party Talks,

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15) In addition to the aid gained from the South as part of the Sunshine Policy, during the same period the North gained US\$1 billion in economic aid from the US. Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Assistance to North Korea," *CRS Report* R40095 (Congressional Research Service, December 24, 2008).

16) As an extension of this reasoning, Cho Min has explained the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong attacks as part of Kim Jong Il's "war business" tactic of deliberately creating regional instability in order to extort aid from China. Cho Min, "North Korea's 'War Business' and the Choice for China," *KINU Online Series* CO 10-46 (Dec 1, 2010).

17) Han Sung-Joo, "The Yeonpyeong Shelling: North Korean Calculations," *Luncheon Speech at the Five-University* (Universities of Princeton, Peking, Tokyo, Korea, and National University of Singapore) Workshop on "Asia-Pacific Order and US-China Relations" (December 10, 2010, Beijing).

we cannot expect that the talks will successfully increase regional stability under the current situation.

**[China and the US: Working Together with Different Aims]** China is also more interested in maintaining the North Korean system and preserving the status quo on the peninsula than achieving denuclearization.<sup>18)</sup> China approaches the nuclear issue from the perspective of North Korean regime stability and its security rivalry with the US in Northeast Asia, and it has deep reservations about a chaotic situation that could lead to system collapse in North Korea.<sup>19)</sup> As long as it sticks to this approach, it will have no choice but to resist any development that might make the strategically important Kim regime a target of competing countries.<sup>20)</sup> China expects the North will act as an arm in pre-empting a potential encirclement or Asian-style containment from forming. Following this calculation, no matter how heinous the regime may be China will prefer to maintain a North Korea led by Kim Jong Il.

The US looks to the Six Party system as a way to dismantle the North's nuclear programs, pursue non-proliferation (of nuclear weapons and other WMDs and related technologies), and secure regional stability. However the US differs from China in the way it prioritizes these goals. As a global manager, the US sees nuclear proliferation as the most serious issue. This is doubly true for the Obama administration, which has set the goal of "a world free of nuclear weapons." Thus the US is more interested in the nuclear issue than North Korean regime stability, and in that sense its position is closer to that of South Korea than China. However, if it is able to resolve the issues of denuclearization and non-proliferation, the US will not particularly object to maintaining the North Korean regime. On this point the US shares more common interest with China than with South Korea. If it shifts its priority from North Korean denuclearization to non-proliferation, it would be a heavy blow to South Korea's national interests.

Since the interests of Six Party participants China, the US, and North Korea diverge, even in the "best case scenario" the Six Party Talks can be expected to accomplish little more than maintaining the status quo on the peninsula and slowing the rate of

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18) David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 43-56.

19) Jennifer Lind, "The Once and Future Kim: Succession and Stasis in North Korea," *Foreign Affairs Snapshot*, October 25, 2010.

20) Andrew Salmon, "China's Support of North Korea Grounded in Centuries of Conflict," CNN, November 26, 2010, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/11/26/china.north.korea.ties/index.html>>.

North Korea's nuclear development somewhat through incentives. Even though North Korea may claim to agree to the principle of denuclearization, it will continue to drag its feet on the implementation process as it has done in the past.<sup>21)</sup>

**[South Korea's dilemma]** If we are unable to take a dominant role in the Six Party Talks, in a "worst case scenario" our national security may be used as collateral in an international transaction worked out regardless of our will. In an extreme event, we cannot exclude the possibility that the US may even accept a practical trade off and give up denuclearization in exchange for its higher priority of non-proliferation. This is why we must establish North Korean denuclearization as a "firm and clear" goal. In a situation where demand for greater international cooperation is strong and no alternatives can be proposed, we may need to opt for the next best choice by taking a flexible approach to the issue, abiding by the principle of reciprocity and cost-efficiency. Of course throughout this process we will need to maintain close cooperation with the US and Japan.

Second, we must acknowledge the weaknesses of the Six Party system as a tool for regulated enforcement. Collective good tends to be under-produced. One way to overcome this is to maintain an organization that restrains the actions of the participants. Even if conflicting goals and interests among the member states are a major factor preventing them from achieving the common good of North Korean denuclearization, if the Six Party Talks system is a strong international regime with strong structural binding power as an organization then it should be able to produce this common good "regardless."

However a conspicuous weakness of the Six Party Talks as an international regime is its inability to enforce "implementation" of agreements and its lack of "penalties" for failure to implement. Its functions for monitoring, verifying, and applying sanctions against deviant actors are quite weak, so it has transferred responsibility for these operations to other international bodies like the IAEA and the UN. As a result of this divided operating method, the talks have been unable to compel North Korea to abide by its obligations or have any success in binding participating countries to implement their agreements.<sup>22)</sup> Further, North Korea's main supporter

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21) Siegfried S. Hecker, "Lessons Learned from the North Korean Nuclear Crises," *Daedalus*, Issue 44 (Winter 2010), p. 54.

22) Even the 9.19 Joint Statement included a call for North Korea's return to the NPT and IAEA among its basic principles. This created an incongruous situation in which these organs were put in charge of the issues related to North Korean nuclear programs after North Korea had already gone AWOL

China is a permanent member of the Security Council. If China does not directly consent to sanctions against North Korea's errant behavior proposed by other countries, then UNSC resolutions have no concrete substance and there is little chance that they will be strictly enforced.

As was exposed by the recent Wikileaks disclosures, China itself is suspected to have aided and abetted North Korea's circumvention of the terms of the UN resolutions against it.<sup>23)</sup> North Korea's fingerprints have been found all over the nuclear and WMD development programs of outlier regimes such as Myanmar, Syria, and Iran.<sup>24)</sup> It is hard to believe that missiles, WMDs and related technology could be exported from North Korea without at least physically passing through Chinese land, sea or air space. Without China's intentional oversight or tacit approval such transactions would not have been possible

A recent UN report, whose public release was aborted at China's insistence, raised the issue of missile production technology being shared between North Korea and Iran. At the daily press briefing on May 16th, in response to a reporter's query as to whether China had facilitated technology sharing between North Korea and Iran, US State Department Acting Deputy Spokesman Mark C. Toner reminded the press that the US has persistently raised the issue of technology transfers in the past, exposing the uncomfortable state of affairs.<sup>25)</sup>

## Reason for the Continuation of the Six Party Talks

In that case, since North Korea apparently has no great interest in denuclearization or considers it a low priority –that is, it has no genuine interest – and China prioritizes regional stability over North Korean denuclearization, why then are those countries incessantly advocating a return to the Six Party Talks? The reason is because maintaining the Six Party system coincides with their stated national interests. Let

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from both nuclear non-proliferation regimes.

23) Yoon Deok Min, "North Korea's Uranium Enrichment Program and Our Response Course," Analysis of Major International Issues, (Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, 2011).

24) Refer to Larry A. Niksch, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development and Diplomacy," CRS Report RL33590 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 30, 2009) also International Crisis Group, "North Korea's Chemical and Biological Weapons Programs," Asia Report N°167 (June 2009).

25) Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing by Mark C. Toner, Acting Deputy Department Spokesman," Washington, DC, May 16, 2011, <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2011/05/163509.htm>>.

us first examine the North Korean position.

As mentioned above, North Korea hopes to use the Six Party format to gain recognition of its status as a nuclear power, as it considers this one of the indicators of progress toward its goal of becoming a *kangsung daeguk* (strong and prosperous nation) by 2012. They are also calculating that it will contribute to stabilizing the succession system. In the long-term they hope it will lead to a US-DPRK peace treaty.

On the other hand, they may also view restarting the talks as a way to overcome their current economic distress and international isolation. North Korea has been described as "an aid-based state."<sup>26)</sup> They may view the Six Party Talks as a cash cow that can provide them with funds desperately needed for regime maintenance. The talks can be used as a "means to diversify sources of income."<sup>27)</sup> Compensation provided by the Six Party Talks can help offset the danger of economic and foreign policies that rely one-sidedly on China. Even if North Korea is unable to gain the hoped-for economic aid, they can expect to get some degree of additional aid from China in exchange for accommodating China's Northeast Asia policy.<sup>28)</sup> In addition, they can use the opportunity of inter-Korean dialogue to deploy tactics to provoke public debate in the South in order to stir up domestic discord and build a unified front. As the New Years' Editorial stressed, they may seek to stir up "a sacred patriotic struggle for justice" and thus weaken the current ROK government's governing capacity.

Both the US and China take an approach to the nuclear issue that can best be described as "buck-passing." Ever since the Geneva Agreed Framework foundered, the US has felt the need to avoid direct negotiations with North Korea and has turned to the multilateral negotiation format of the Six Party Talks as a preferred approach to the nuclear issue. This effort produced the 9.19 Agreement. However the

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26) Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Basic Books, 2001, Revised and Updated), p. 414.

27) Robert Kaplan, "Attack That May Signal a Pyongyang Implosion," *Financial Times*, November 23, 2010, <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6fcf5c14-0d3e-11e0-82ff-00144feabdc0.html#axzz18xGbjgry>>.

28) Kim Jong Il's lightning tour of China, which took off in the early morning hours of May 20th, is thought to have originated with the North's intention to seek rewards in return for going along with China's suggestion to restart the Six Party Talks. After the provocations of 2010 they expected to be able to get something from China, which has been struggling to pacify the political situation and foster regional stability by reopening the Six Party Talks.

multilateral format had obvious limitations, as described above. Within the loose multilateral framework, the US and China each deferred responsibility and blame for the North Korean nuclear problem onto the other while single-mindedly pursuing their own objectives.

China has shown a remarkable lack of diplomatic courtesy, stooping so low as to pressure South Korea about the Six Party Talks before the smoke had even cleared from the Yeonpyeong shelling. China believes that through the framework of the Six Party Talks it can construct a system for maintaining regional stability on its own terms. At the very least it expects that the talks will enable it to transfer some of the costs of maintaining the North Korean system and regional stability onto the other participating states. I.e., via the multilateral forum of the Six Party Talks China seeks to gain acceptance from the other regional actors of the goals of continuation of the North Korean regime, "peaceful" maintenance of Korea's division, and the enduring preservation of the balance of power in Northeast Asia by formally accepting these goals China expects that the other actors will have to agree to shoulder some of the costs. A similar tendency can be observed in the US' approach to the nuclear issue, even though it may be directed at a different goal. If the expenditures of one's rival can also serve to further one's own goals, so much the better.

The US, reluctant to "avoid buying the same horse twice," has adopted policies of strategic patience and intentional negligence" but these policies have failed to achieve progress toward denuclearization, while North Korea's ballistic missile development and uranium enrichment programs have continued unabated. North Korea has even carried out blatant military provocations. The threat has continuously intensified. The recent US policy may have had some effect in pressuring the North, but in the face of China's persistent calls to restart the Six Party Talks and the influence of US domestic political agendas, the US government has come under pressure to the point where it has to try something. The Obama administration can no longer exclude the North Korean nuclear issue from its policy priorities. They have reached the point where they will have to try to intervene in some way. Thus the US is beginning to see some "political" motives to retry the Six Party Talks, regardless of the question of their effectiveness.

## Strategic Considerations

The Six Party talks are structurally weak in terms of their ability to enforce agreements, monitor implementation and penalize disobedience, but they have in the

past been actively used by participating countries to play out political games serving their own national interests. For South Korea, whose national survival and security situation are directly linked to the North Korean nuclear issue, the Six Party system has many shortcomings. Therefore it would be unwise for South Korea to rely entirely on the Six Party Talks to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

The Six Party Talks have no means of enforcing compliance with agreements or international sanctions by either China or North Korea. The most recent US–China Joint Statement strongly reflected US position, repeatedly emphasizing the need for concrete and effective steps. As a condition for restarting the Six Party Talks, the ROK government needs to secure explicit formal agreement from the participating countries regarding the enforceability of sanctions while preparing proposals that can effectively systematize these agreements. The reality is that South Korea is the party likely to suffer the most from noncompliance with negotiated agreements.

The original goal of the Six Party Talks, North Korea's denuclearization, will likely be impossible to achieve for the reasons outlined above. If there is one common denominator among the objectives pursued by the Six Party member states, it is maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula.

From the South Korean perspective the Six Party Talks can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the talks are likely to further cement the division of Korea, under the political logic of the great powers which prioritize the stability of the status quo. On the other hand, if South Korea can pro-actively make use of the pro-status quo attitude of the great powers, and particularly the stabilizing calculus of the US and China, then the Six Party Talks can become a mechanism for managing regional crises in anticipation of North Korea's system collapse; that is, they can be used as a pacifying buffer mechanism. In other words, while striving to prevent a sudden loss of control in the North, the talks can also act as an international management system for preparing a soft landing for North Korea and guiding it toward peaceful unification with South Korea.

The Six Party Talks may help to maintain the North Korean system in the form of a parasitic leadership class ruling over a failed state that cannot function normally, and thus further cement the division of the peninsula. Alternatively, the talks may work to manage and stabilize the uncertain internal and external situation in the North while acting as a catalyst to facilitate the peaceful integration of the two Koreas. One of the major factors in determining this outcome will be South Korea's diplomatic capacity. It must demonstrate that it has the strength to approach the Six Party Talks from a strategic and independent standpoint. Therefore, South Korea

must devote its efforts to establishing the initiative to guide the Six Party Talks in a direction conducive to inducing change in North Korea and contributing to the larger goal of unification.