

Search for Peaceful Resolution of the North Korean Nuclear Issue

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Abstract

The Policy for Peace and Prosperity is a basic idea of the Roh Moo-hyun government comprising an overall policy for unification, foreign relations and security. Its short-term action plan is to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue peacefully. The parties to the Six-Party Talks succeeded in getting a clue to its solution by adopting the September 19th agreement. However, they failed in creating a breakthrough for its peaceful resolution largely due to the deep mistrust between the US and North Korea and the lack of a concrete timetable for phased implementation. In order to create a breakthrough to this issue, the other four countries should persuade both the US and North Korea to mutually make a concession. While the South Korean government draws up a new roadmap in collaboration with the US government, the six countries should prepare for a new approach based on the principle of “action for action.”

Key Words: North Korean nuclear issue, Six-Party Talks, Policy for Peace and Prosperity, September 19th agreement, peaceful resolution

Introduction

With the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, it seemed likely that the apparent new era of peace and cooperation would dawn and cast its light not only on the region of Northeast Asia but also on the Korean Peninsula. However, the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993-94 ensured that implementing the South-North Basic Agreement, “the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchange and Cooperation between the South and the North” concluded on December 13th, 1991, would remain an impossibility. Although it was aimed at establishing a durable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, the four-party talks among South and North Korea, the US, and China from December 1997 through August 1998 didn’t produce any positive results.

In spite of the June 15th summit talks in 2000 between President Kim Dae Jung and Chairman of the Defence Committee Kim Jong Il, the second North Korean nuclear crisis erupted in October 2002. It has become a matter of grave concern not only in the region of Northeast Asia but also in the international community. Therefore, the North Korean nuclear problem has become the most serious pending issue to the Roh Moo-hyun government which came to power in February 2003. Although this government sees a breakthrough for peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and a durable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula as one of its strategic tasks, it remains very uncertain when this important strategic task can be accomplished.

In this context, the purpose of this paper is to uncover new approaches to a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. For this purpose, chapter II examines the Roh Moo-hyun government’s strategy for establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. In chapter III, the substance of the North Korean nuclear issue is analyzed and the September 19th Joint Statement adopted at the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks in 2005 is assessed from an impartial

point of view. In conclusion, some policy tasks and a new approach for a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue are offered to the South Korean government.

Roh Moo-hyun Government's Strategy for Creation of a Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula

The Policy for Peace and Prosperity is initiated from President Roh Moo-hyun's strategic vision. It aims to lay the foundation for a peaceful unification of Korea through the promotion of peace on the Korean Peninsula and to achieve mutual prosperity of South and North Korea. The South Korean government maintains that this policy will also contribute to the development of a Northeast Asian business hub on the Korean Peninsula.¹ Therefore, it can be said that the Policy for Peace and Prosperity is a basic idea of the Roh Moo-hyun government comprising overall policy for unification, foreign relations and security and that it is a strategic principle of unification policy. It contains three action plans that are set up as follows:

- Peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue as a short-term action plan
- Establishment of a durable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula as a mid-term action plan
- Building a Northeast Asian business hub as a long-term action plan.²



The establishment of a durable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula as a mid-term action plan entails the eventual replacement of the current armistice agreement with a peace agreement between South and North Korea. International institutional arrangements safeguarding the peace regime should also be pursued. According to the South Korean government, once established, the peace regime will

¹The Policy for Peace and Prosperity," <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/index.jsp>.

²"Action Plans," <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/index.jsp>.

ensure peace and mutual prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and also lay the groundwork for the development of Korea as a business hub in Northeast Asia.³ In order to establish a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula the Roh Moo-hyun government presents an implementation strategy by stages as follows (see Table 1).

Table 1. Implementation Strategy by Stages for Establishing a Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula

Stage I : Resolution of the North Korean Nuclear Issues and Promotion of Peace
<p>South Korea will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • endeavor to create a breakthrough for peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue • continue to promote reconciliation and cooperation between South and North Korea and regularize inter-Korean military talks • provide a foundation for the firm establishment of peace through inter-Korean summits and other forums • create an environment for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia on the basis of a strengthened diplomatic capabilities • reach an agreement on peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and missile issues.

Stage II : Expansion of Inter-Korean Cooperation and Laying of the Foundation for a Durable Peace Regime
<p>South Korea will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake concrete measures for the implementation of matters agreed upon for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear and missile issues • deepen substantive cooperation and promote military confidence-building measures between the South and the North • propose and promote an initiative for a forum for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia.


³“Action Plans,” <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/index.jsp>.

Stage III: Conclusion of an Inter-Korean Peace Agreement and Creation of a Durable Peace Regime

South Korea will

- conclude a South-North Korea peace agreement and secure guarantees for it
- take the various necessary steps following the transition to a peace regime
- promote the formation of an inter-Korean economic community and the reinforcement of operational arms control
- establish a forum for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Source: http://www.unikorea.go.kr/kr/uninews/uninews_policyfocus.php; "ActionPlans," <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/index.jsp>.

Substance of Nuclear Issue and Assessment of the September 19th Joint Statement

Substance of Nuclear Issue

The second North Korean nuclear crisis, which erupted in October 2002, can be characterized as product of the conflict between these two sometimes conflicting notions: "Pax Americana (American Peace) versus North Korea's policy for survival." The US has two main goals in its foreign policy in general: enlargement of the US values such as free democracy and the market economy system; and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) counter-proliferation and the war on terror. The short-term objective in the Bush Administration's foreign policy toward Northeast Asia is estimated to develop and deploy effective missile defenses (MD) in cooperation with Japan, while the mid- and long-term objective is to contain China, rising rapidly as a political, economic, and military power by consolidating its political and military ties with Japan.⁴ In this regard, the Bush

⁴"Quadrennial Defense Review Report (February 6, 2006)," <http://www.globalsecurity.or/military/library/policy/dod/qdr-2006-report.htm>; "President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address (January 31, 2006)," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060131-10.html>; The White House, President Delivers State of the Union Address (January 29, 2002); The White House, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, July 1994).

Administration seems to make use of the North Korean nuclear issue to some extent for its strategic interest. Therefore, the North Korean nuclear issue should be understood and estimated not by itself, but within the framework of the US global and regional strategy.

Internally, North Korea now maintains its political stability on the basis of *Songun* (Military-First) politics, but it has been in severe economic difficulties since the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. Externally, North Korea has been isolated to a great extent from the international community since the transformation of the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe. In this internal and external situation, North Korea has tried every possible means in order to maintain the last Stalinist system in the world. In particular, North Korea began to develop nuclear weapons so as to maintain its socialist system and make use of them as a kind of diplomatic card in negotiating with South Korea and the West, including the US and Japan.⁵

Since the Agreed Framework adopted on October 21, 1994 in Geneva⁶ puts emphasis not on ensuring the transparency of North Korean nuclear programs conducted already in the past but on freezing those to be conducted in the future, all suspicions about North Korean nuclear development have not been dispelled.

During his visit to North Korea in early October 2002, the US “Assistant Secretary James A. Kelly and his delegation advised the North Koreans that we had recently acquired information that

⁵Oleg Bagdamyan, a professor at the Diplomatic Academy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, asserts that “in the late 1980s the DPRK lost its nuclear ally, the USSR, and faced mounting attempts by Seoul and Washington to speed up the demise of the communist regime. Reacting to these formidable circumstances Pyongyang decided to go nuclear in order to stop potential interference or even outright aggression from outside.” Oleg Bagdamyan, “Russia’s Viewpoint toward Peace Forum on the Korean Peninsula,” paper presented at KINU international conference on Peace Forum on the Korean Peninsula: Strategy and Implementation (The Seoul Plaza Hotel, June 9, 2006), pp. 105-106.

⁶“Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” <http://www.armscontro.org/document/af.asp>.

indicates that North Korea has a program to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons in violation of the Agreed Framework and other agreements. North Korean officials acknowledged that they have such a program. The North Koreans attempted to blame the United States and said that they considered the Agreed Framework nullified.”⁷ On January 10, 2003, North Korea declared its withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Since the US military operation against Iraq on March 19, 2003, North Korea has stressed the importance of possession of nuclear weapons.⁸

Assessment of the September 19th Joint Statement

President Bush searched for dialogue with North Korea through the mediation of China. As a result, in Beijing the three-party talks among the US, North Korea, and China were held in April 2003 and following that successively the four rounds of Six-Party Talks joined additionally by Japan and Russia were held from August 2003 through September 2005. During the trilateral and multilateral talks the US delegation made it very clear that there needed to be a verifiable and irreversible termination of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and that once North Korea did that, it could move on to the comprehensive approach to US-North Korea relations. However, North Korea demanded normalization of relations with the US and economic measures in exchange for giving up the nuclear and the missile programs.⁹ The consensus among the parties concerned on

⁷Richard Boucher, Spokesman, North Korean Nuclear Program, Press Statement (October 16, 2002), www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/14432.htm. However, North Korea insists that it had never acknowledged such a program.

⁸“Memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK,” prompt Report of the North Korean Broadcasting (March 3, 2005), p. 4 (Korean).

⁹Richard Boucher, Spokesman, Daily Press Briefing (April 28, 2003), www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/dpb/2003/20025.htm. For negotiating process of the Six-Party Talks, see “Hot Issue: The North Korean nuclear problem/the Six-Party Talks,” <http://www.mofat.go.kr> (Korean).

preventing the aggravation of nuclear crisis led at last to the adoption of a joint statement at the fourth round of Six-Party Talks, of which six points were released in Beijing on September 19, 2005:

- Reaffirmation of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, North Korea's abandonment of all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and its returning to NPT and to IAEA safeguards, the US affirmation not to attack or invade North Korea, respect for North Korea's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, discussion at an appropriate time on the subject of the provision of light-water reactor to North Korea
- Taking steps to normalize US-North Korea and Japan-North Korea relations
- Five countries' willingness to provide energy assistance to North Korea, South Korea's reaffirmation of its proposal to provide 2 million kilowatts of electric power to North Korea
- Negotiation for a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at a separate forum, exploration of ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia
- Implementing the afore-mentioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action"
- Holding the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing in early November.¹⁰

In terms of the September 15th agreement among the six countries, a positive assessment can be given in the respect that they got a clue to the solution of the North Korean nuclear problem by confirmation of what appeared to be the main framework, "nuke abandonment for compensation." It can be said that the US, which had adhered to a hard-line policy toward Pyongyang, made some

¹⁰"North Korea This Week No. 363 (September 22, 2005)," <http://bbs.yonhapnews.co.kr> (September 22, 2005).

concessions to North Korea since Washington agreed to the provision of light-water reactors and energy assistance.

However, the means to achieve a phased implementation of plans which could resolve the North Korean nuclear problem remained elusive for the six countries. Moreover, not only North Korea but also the US did not and until now do not have the intention to resolve the nuclear problem on the basis of “action for action.”

First, in the agreement there is no concrete timetable for provision of light-water reactors, normalization of relations, supply of energy, building of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and security cooperation in Northeast Asia. For example, regarding provision one, when is ‘an appropriate time’ to discuss the subject of provision of light-water reactors to North Korea?

The basic stance and policy of the six countries on the five points of dispute over the September 19th agreement have been put into the form of a diagram as follows (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Basic Stance and Policy of Six Countries on the Five Points of Dispute

	US	North Korea	China	South Korea	Japan	Russia
Point of Time for Provision of Light-water Reactors	Nuke abandonment and returning to NPT and IAEA safeguards first	Provision of light-water reactor first, and then returning to NPT and IAEA safeguards	Reservation of defining its position	Nuke abandonment and returning to NPT and IAEA safeguards first	Nuke abandonment and returning to NPT and IAEA safeguards first	Returning to NPT and IAEA safeguards first
Normalization of Relations	After solving issues on nuke, missile, conventional forces, human rights etc.	US-N.K. normalization first and then nuke abandonment	Support for US-N.K. and Japan-N.K. normalization	Support for US-N.K. and Japan-N.K. normalization	After solving issues on nuke, missile, and kidnapping	Support for US-N.K. and Japan-N.K. normalization

	US	North Korea	China	South Korea	Japan	Russia
Supply of Energy	Assistance in case of nuke abandonment	Light-water reactor and 2 million kilowatts of electric power first	Assistance in case of nuke abandonment	Heavy oil, 2 million kilowatts of electric power, light-water reactor in case of nuke abandonment	Assistance in case of nuke abandonment	Assistance in case of nuke abandonment, provision of its nuclear reactor
Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula	Ease of military tension and guarantee for its interest in security first	N.K.-US peace agreement	Against N.K.-US peace agreement, for S.K.-N.K. peace agreement	S.K. and N.K. as subject	Discussion at multilateral conference	Discussion at multilateral conference, support for S.K.-N.K. peace agreement
Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia	Priority on bilateral alliance	Negative	Positive	Development of Six-Party Talks	Positive	Positive

Secondly, as shown in Table 2, there are wide gaps in the basic stance and policy between Washington and Pyongyang on the issue of the North Korean nuclear program. On the North Korean side, the provision of light-water reactors is a precondition for their returning to the NPT and to IAEA safeguards. Secondly, the normalization of US-North Korea relations is a precondition for abandoning their nuclear program. On the US side, on the contrary, abandoning the nuclear program and returning to the NPT and IAEA safeguards are preconditions for the provision of light-water reactors. The basic positions of both sides are not based on the principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action.”

Pyongyang undermined the September 19th agreement a day later. Kim Kye-gwan, North Korea’s top negotiator at the Six-Party Talks, said in Beijing on September 20, 2005 that his country would not act until the US demonstrated that its hostile policy toward the North has ended. “They are telling us to give up everything but there will be no such thing as giving it up first,”¹¹ said Kim.

¹¹“North Korea This Week No. 363,” September 22, 2005, <http://bbs.yonhapnews.co.kr> (September 22, 2005).

Just as North Korea was unwilling to take action first, so was the US. Washington announced sanctions on September 20, 2005 on Banco Delta Asia SARL (BDA), a Macau-based bank, alleging it had helped Pyongyang distribute counterfeit currency and engage in other illicit activities. When a time difference between Beijing and Washington is taken into consideration, these US financial sanctions against North Korea took place at nearly same point of time, as when the agreement was adopted in Beijing. This fact demonstrates that the Bush Administration was not ready to take certain action in compliance with the agreement.

On October 21, 2005, the US also placed sanctions on eight North Korean companies for alleged participation in the proliferation of WMD. North Korea announced on January 3, 2006 that it could not return to the Six-Party Talks unless the US lifted the sanctions. The US State Department said, "US sanctions were a separate issue from the multilateral talks to end North Korea's nuclear weapons programs."¹² Although the US government briefed North Korea's representatives in New York on March 7, 2006 on the action taken against BDA and measures to protect the US financial system from illicit activities, Pyongyang's position remains unchanged. As the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks went into recess, Washington is ready to conduct talks with North Korea on financial sanctions in the context of the Six-Party Talks.¹³

Because of these wide differences in their basic position and policy, especially mistrust between the two countries, it seems very difficult for the six countries to find a solution in the near future. In the process of implementing what the six parties have agreed upon, a very great many unexpected variables could arise.

¹²"Sanctions on North Korean Companies Unrelated to Six-Party Talks," <http://usinfo.state.gov/utills/printpage.html> (January 3, 2006).

¹³"US ready to talk about N.K. financial issue at 6-way talks: Hill," <http://bbs.yonhapnews.co.kr> (April 11, 2006).

Conclusion

The second North Korean nuclear crisis, which erupted in October 2002, is a very worrisome issue for the global non-proliferation regime and regional security in Northeast Asia. North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons in order to maintain its socialist system by deterring aggression from potential enemies and make use of them as a negotiating card with South Korea and the West, including the US and Japan. Moreover, until now, it seems that North Korea will adhere to its position that it would not abandon the nuclear development program until the US demonstrates that its hostile policy toward the North has ended. On the contrary, the US, which regards WMD counter-proliferation as one of its aims of security strategy, demands that North Korea abandons their nuclear weapons program first in a verifiable manner. Nevertheless, several analyses show that to some extent the US makes use of the North Korean nuclear issue so that it may complete the development and deployment of MD with Japan in the short-term and contain China in the mid- and long-term.

The parties to the Six-Party Talks succeeded in getting a clue to the solution of the North Korean nuclear problem by adopting the September 19th agreement. However, they failed in creating a breakthrough for its peaceful resolution because of the deep mistrust between the US and North Korea and the lack of a concrete timetable for phased implementation. For the present, it is very uncertain as to how long it will take for the parties concerned to overcome the second North Korean nuclear crisis.

In order to create a breakthrough for peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, at least three of the following tasks should be implemented by the South Korean government or the other parties concerned.

First, as the US and North Korea until now are not ready to undertake action to advance the September 19th agreement, the other

four countries should make an all-out attempt to persuade the US and North Korea to mutually concede, each taking a step backward. Every series of diplomatic negotiation between states can be led to success, only when one party tries to understand the position of the other party and makes a concession to him, in the process, finding a compromise. The stalemated negotiations on the nuclear issue are ascribed to mutual mistrust between the US and North Korea. In order to rid themselves of this mutual mistrust, both sides should not adhere strictly and inflexibly to their own position and policy, forcing the other party to accept it, but they should make concessions step by step. The other four countries should also try to create a favorable atmosphere so that the US and North Korea may reach an agreement on the nuclear issue.

Secondly, the North Korean nuclear problem is an issue which is closely related to the US security strategy at the global and regional level. Therefore, the South Korean government should draw up a new roadmap in collaboration with the US government.

Thirdly, the six countries have no choice but to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue on the basis of the principle of “action for action.” The following three-stage approach might be one possible solution to the nuclear problem:

- The first stage: “North Korea’s declaration of returning to the NPT and IAEA safeguards” in exchange for “the US lifting of financial sanctions and resumption of providing heavy oil”
- The second stage: “Freezing and inspection of the North Korean nuclear facilities” in exchange for “the resumption of constructing light-water reactors”
- The third stage: “North Korea’s dismantlement of all nuclear weapons and programs” in exchange for “normalization of US-North Korea relations.”