

## Session 9: North Korea's Nuclear Program

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### Summary

Professor Kim Sung-han with Korea University assessed the current stalemate after the Six Party Talks broke down in 2008. He explained that Pyongyang faced a triangular dilemma in 2009 with the sudden deterioration of Kim Jong-il's health, a power succession to one of his sons and the need for North Korea to stick to its military-first policy to ensure a smooth leadership succession. Professor Kim explained that this triangular dilemma prevented the North from having sufficient room to accept the Obama administration's approach for direct talks. While there is no better alternative to the Six Party Talks, Professor Kim argues that the framework showed weaknesses thereby allowing North Korea to rely on salami tactics to buy time because the other five parties relied on a three-stage approach to Pyongyang's denuclearization. Such is the basis for President Lee Myung-bak's Grand Bargain as well as Seoul's demand for a display of sincerity and responsible attitude toward sinking the Cheonan and shelling Yeonpyeong Island. Professor Kim noted some examples of such sincerity include the suspension of all nuclear activities and re-invitation of IAEA inspectors as well as respect for the armistice regime by ending military provocations.

Professor Liu Ming with the Shanghai Academy of Social Science called for patience when dealing with North Korea noting that China believes it is impossible to achieve denuclearization in two to three years. He argued that Pyongyang's possession of and ambitions for nuclear weapons are not for security purposes but rather "an excuse for North Korea." Instead, Professor Liu claims that Pyongyang's objective is for equal leverage vis-à-vis China, and nuclear weapons are a symbol for prestige in the face of the North's domestic audience in order to elicit loyalty from the North Korean people. Professor Liu says the other

objective is to offset South Korea's economic superiority. He down played the gravity of Pyongyang's two nuclear tests pointing to the lack of sufficient evidence on the North's nuclear capabilities. Professor Liu stressed that Pyongyang "calculated very smartly" in engaging in military provocations and nuclear tests to threaten the outside world. He argued that Pyongyang will only "try to go to the bottom line but they will stop before going to the bottom line" to avoid US retaliation. As for China's policy toward North Korea, Professor Liu explained that Beijing lost hope for denuclearization after Pyongyang's two nuclear tests, and received criticism for investing too many resources in the Six Party Talks that have produced agreements as well as an embarrassment of no results. Professor Liu also stressed that Beijing shifted its focus from denuclearization to a North Korean leadership transition upon calculation that there may be chaos on the Korean Peninsula upon Kim Jong-il's death.

Yuki Tatsumi with the Stimson Center argued that Japan will not proactively initiate action in the Six Party Talks due to Tokyo's lack of leverage over Pyongyang, the unresolved historical issue of abductees, and anticipations that Japan will be focusing inwardly in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. She elaborated by stressing that Tokyo does not have diplomatic relations with Pyongyang, and that North Korea only chooses to engage Japan when Pyongyang perceives it will help drive a wedge between the US and Japan.

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