

[SE4-GB-2] The Six Party Talks as Viable Mechanism for Denuclearization

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Full Summary

The topic of North Korea's nuclear program often lends itself to pessimism, and it is fair to say that the panel's general tone did not stray too far from this course. Overall, there was some degree of consensus that the Six-Party Talks (6PTs), if gauged by their ability to denuclearize North Korea, have been a failure. However, one could say that, to varying degrees, the panelists see the 6PTs as a potential tool in an overall "tool belt" which can, under certain circumstances, be used in efforts to engage with North Korea.

Dr. Sue Mi Terry began her presentation by stating that the 6PTs were a dismal failure when it came to North Korea's denuclearization; however, *if* we believe that dialogue with North Korea is important, it is difficult to think of an alternative to the 6PTs. She continued that she was in agreement with the so-called "sticks" approach, which may include a variety of efforts such as economic sanctions, being vigilant in stopping counter-proliferation activities, and staunching North Korea's other illicit behaviors such as money-laundering and counterfeiting. However, she did concede that sanctions will not necessarily persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. With that being said, they could have a very important psychological impact on North Korean elites, who are critical for regime survival. Dr. Terry's key takeaway point in this regard seemed to be that current sanctions need to be kept in place and strengthened, and certain actions, like coordinated military exercises with our ally, the Republic of Korea (ROK), need to be continued. However, it is still important to leave the option of resuming a dialogue on the table because sole reliance on these so-called "sticks" is unrealistic, and the Obama administration may need to, from a tactical standpoint, show that it is interested in some sort of future dialogue with the North.

Yet Dr. Terry did not want this idea of dialogue to be conflated with a call to rush back to the Six-Party table. She agreed with the current Obama administration approach termed, "strategic patience." Before returning to the 6PTs, there needs to be improvement in North-South relations, and North Korea's uranium enrichment program must become part of the discussions. If this occurs, bilateral talks within a Six-Party framework are "the least lousy

option, and remain the best vehicle for dialogue in the land of lousy options.”

The next panelist, Dr. Bruce Klinger, began his presentation with an illustrative analogy. He stated that North Korea was like a psychiatric patient suffering from a bipolar disorder, that also had an inflated self-esteem, temper control issues, and engages in reckless behavior. However, it also exhibited almost “savant” like qualities in that it excelled in its own unique sort of foreign policy, much to the chagrin of the wider international community.

Dr. Klinger then asked the question: “Should we defibrillate the Six-Party Talks corpse?” He noted the importance of being clear about what caused their failure in the first place; it was North Korea’s failure to comply with its commitments and its continued hostile provocations. He also reinforced what is almost becoming an old adage, namely that North Korea completely misplayed the opportunity it was given when President Obama came to office in early 2009. Furthermore, by engaging in provocative and hostile activities in 2009 and 2010, North Korea had become its own worst enemy by, in essence, forcing the Obama administration to take a much harder line than it had originally intended to take. Now, the United States and our allies are far less amenable to dialogue since there is a perceived “cost” associated with keeping talks going.

Like many people who have grown frustrated or weary of the 6PTs, he stressed that they should always be viewed as a means to an end, not as an end in and of itself. Therefore, we should maintain pressure even while engaged in dialogue. He argued that allied policy has suffered from a “binary debate;” the question of *either* sticks (pressure) *or* carrots (inducements), and instead we need to recognize the necessity of doing both. Diplomacy, without pressure, is useless, and sanctions are not chips to be bargained away.

For Dr. Klinger, this also means that we need to maintain a strong defense, which includes missile defense systems, and we need to strengthen the U.S. alliances with the ROK and Japan. As he articulated, this was a “more pain and more gain” approach. On the pressure side, it is imperative to target both ends of the proliferation pipeline. The U.S. and UN should target international businesses, banks, and individuals engaged in illicit activities. His recommendation for Seoul is that it should augment what has been seen as its “post-Cheonan” economic tightening. He also called for Kaesong to be closed since he believes it is only putting money into the elites’ coffers. (Interestingly enough, this point was not picked up on again by either his fellow panelists or other participants.)

However, he too recognized that it is important to hold out prospects for dialogue since, in his mind, it is not a question of *whether* to engage, but more correctly, *how* to engage. He then enumerated some of the actions Pyongyang would need to take before the parties should

come back to the negotiating table such as: allowing International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials to come back to Yongbyon, providing a complete and accurate verification of all of its nuclear and uranium enrichment programs, and living up to its commitments as spelled out in previous agreements. And in his final analysis he, like so many others, feels that the time isn't ripe for dialogue; and regardless, he now believes that there is little optimism in Washington, DC that the 6PTs will ever be fruitful.

Next, Dr. Larry M. Wortzel framed his comments based on his extensive experience working with China. He stated that China still values stability above all else, and that it wouldn't engage in activities that could lead to North Korea's collapse. Also, in his estimation, China believes that small states should have a minimum nuclear deterrent to fend off potential aggression by larger and more powerful states. Using this as a foundation, he finds that Chinese behavior has been generally consistent, and felt that we would be "deluding ourselves" if we thought that China wants a nuclear free world. His analysis has led him to believe that China actually desires a multi-polar international system comprised of several nuclear states.

For these reasons, he believes that China doesn't have any incentive to advance the 6PTs to a final conclusion. He also echoed the refrain that China is the only country that can bring North Korea back to the negotiating table, but they won't actively do this because forcing the issue could lead to North Korea's collapse. Therefore, he suggested, it might be time to move the negotiations out of Beijing and to talk about finally replacing the armistice agreement. This may be a truly "game-changing" approach.

Lastly, he concurred with the other panelists by emphasizing the need for truly close coordination between Washington, DC, Seoul and Tokyo "to make sure we're on one sheet of music."

The final panelist, General Burwell B. Bell noted that the vision of the 6PTs was admirable, but he believes that they are not viable for achieving denuclearization. He feels that from their inception they have been hampered by three broad fundamental flaws. First, North Korea has been disingenuous throughout the process; second, the other five parties have had divergent objectives, and third, there have been instances of insincerity on all sides. Because of these flaws, there has never been a mutual agreement on process, objectives, or outcomes. Regarding the issue of divergent objectives, General Bell provided his quick assessment of each country's objectives, in turn. The core U.S. objectives, in addition to achieving North Korea's denuclearization, have been to protect our homeland from nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), to prevent North Korea's counter-proliferation activities, and to see the eventual peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula under Seoul's leadership. In contrast, he sees China's principal objectives as maintaining the status quo on the Korean

Peninsula and preventing unification. General Bell feels that Russia's objectives are compatible with China's; namely, to preserve the military status quo and to prevent unification. Interestingly, he defined Japan's objectives as first, to protect the country from any airborne North Korean attacks, but second, to maintain a divided Korean Peninsula which could potentially preserve its regional supremacy vis-à-vis South Korea. Lastly, he believes that South Korea intends to maintain the potential for a future iteration of the "Sunshine Policy," seeks to deter war, and finally wants to achieve peaceful reunification under the democratic South. Therefore, given this divergent set of objectives, there has never been a unified sense of resolve amongst the major parties. This has led to North Korea effectively controlling the negotiating process.

General Bell also surmised that during the remaining days of the Kim Jong-il regime it was unlikely that there would be a reasonable North-South dialogue. He also felt that without improvement on inter-Korean relations and without the necessary apology for the attacks on the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island, the idea of talking with North Korea should be shelved. In light of this fact, he placed a major emphasis on the U.S., ROK, and Japan effectively and aggressively engaging in economic and military containment of the DPRK, and he highlighted the need to have an integrated missile defense system which would protect against North Korean missile attacks and nuclear brinkmanship. Without it he believes the allies are extremely vulnerable.

After the panelists made their opening remarks, the question and answer period picked up on a few key threads. For example, one individual suggested that perhaps the international community should find an "outsider" to serve as a facilitator in future negotiations with North Korea. The suggestion was that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) could become a sort of "honest broker." Not only do they have a security mandate, but they have both Russia and China as major members. However, Bruce Klinger quickly answered that he didn't feel as if the answer to the North Korea nuclear situation was "to add more chairs to the table." It was not the number of participants in the dialogue that was a problem, but it was the lack of will on the part of North Korea to live up to its denuclearization commitments that was the fundamental problem.

Since several of the panelists mentioned the importance of sanctions, one participant noted sanctions' inherent complexities; namely, that while getting tougher sanctions is desirable, it is difficult to get countries to fully comply with the sanctions that are currently on the books. His question related to what could be done to enhance compliance. The panelists acknowledged these complexities and suggested that the best way to enhance compliance was to call on other countries to match the United States' actions, but there was a general recognition that the United States could also be more energetic in its implementation of

existing laws and sanctions. On the United Nations side, there was agreement that some of the existing loopholes needed to be closed.

Additionally, a large portion of the Q&A period involved a general discussion of what North Korea really wants and what the United States and its allies should be doing more of. General Bell asked, “What does the DPRK want? Why would they give up their nukes? They want regime survival; they want security guarantees; and they want a peace treaty with the U.S. They know they are highly outmatched militarily. They need a nuclear weapon for the ultimate security guarantee.” Because of this and similar sentiments, most of the panelists believe that there needs to be a strong North Korea containment strategy which stresses aggressive containment among “like-minded allies.” This concept of “like-minded allies” was followed up on specifically by Dr. Wortzel who railed against the massive pipeline of activity between China and North Korea. He stressed the need to combine containment with sanctions against specific Chinese companies that partner with the North. In his estimation, we cannot accept the “façade” that China doesn’t know what North Korea is doing.

However, another participant from the European Union picked up on this containment policy discussion and asked how in a democratic society not under an existential threat, a containment policy could be sustained until a potential North Korean collapse. Dr. Klinger cited North Korea’s hostile actions during 2009-2010 and believes that these have engendered more domestic U.S. support for containment. He thinks that “given the sense that there *is* a threat and understanding that North Korea hasn’t been *pushed* into resorting to its hostile actions, the theory of containment has gained support.”

Finally, there was consensus that we need to continue to provide the ROK and Japan with a credible nuclear deterrent since we pledge a nuclear umbrella to our allies. But when pushed by some participants about the notion of bringing tactical nuclear weapons back onto the Korean Peninsula’s shores, the panelists did not see this as necessary. The real issue is the credibility of U.S. policy and the strength of our commitment.

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