

Panel: US-China: North Korean Nuclear Dance Card (Regency Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, February 19, 2013 / 15:30-16:45

Talking Points for: Shi Yinhong, Professor of International Relations, Renmin University of China

[Abstract]

There have been four phases of the relations between China and a nuclear DPRK under Kim Jong-En up to now, characterized as those before by circled volatility from warmth to cold and vice versa, reflecting fundamental dilemmas in which both sides have involved without emancipation. After the first three phases which can be summarized most concisely as, successively, unexpected deterioration, drastic warming, and ambiguous "normalcy," the bilateral relations has entered into their present phase, one with a prospect of becoming the coldest period in a decade. North Korea launched its long-range rocket on December 2012 against China's opposition, then China almost suddenly as well as extraordinarily agreed to enact a UNSC sanction resolution against what less than nuclear test. Henceforth, N.K. Korea conducted its third nuclear test accompanied with a declaration that the test was just, among other things, a revenge against the above UNSC resolution. China will certainly agree to a fourth UNSC sanction resolution against N.K., and there might be also a possibility of China's extraordinary national sanction, i.e., reduction or withhold of *part* of economic assistance to N.K. *for a while*. Therefore, Beijing seems to be returning to the old circle of swings between "hard" and "soft" from 2003 to 2009 without any major success to influence Pyongyang.

What has been about the U.S. element? In the general context of China-U.S. relations throughout 2012 and up to now, which characterized mainly by strategic/diplomatic rivalry, one can observe the continued complexity of the China-U.S. interaction over North Korea. The most important since Kim Jong-En's reigning is, *by speculation*, the probable connection between (1) the first public statement of the U.S. through Secretary Clinton on January 18, 2013 to oppose China's actions since last September to "undermine the Japanese administration of Diaoyu/Senkaku isles" and (2) China's sudden consent to enact a UNSC sanction resolution four days later against N.K's rocket launching. China has been focusing on the confrontation with Japan, therefore may try to influence newly hardened U.S. position over that by major concession over N.K. This sort of functional cooperation over DPRK in a general China-U.S. tension will continue and even increase *for a while* after DPRK's third nuclear test. Broader geostrategic calculations, as well as dilemmas both Beijing and Washington have had in dealing with Pyongyang, are perennial in the making of complexities of China-U.S. interactions over N.K.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.