

Pursuing Peace on the Korean Peninsula

- Session:** 2
Date/Time: November 14, 2013 / 14:00-15:50
- Moderator:** Barbara Demick, The Los Angeles Times
- Speakers:** Chun Youngwoo, Former National Security Advisor to the President, ROK
Ha Taekeung, National Assembly, ROK
Jonathan Pollack, The Brookings Institution
Yang Xiyu, China Institute of International Studies
- Discussants:** Cheng Xiaohe, Renmin University of China
Cheon Seongwhun, Korea Institute for National Unification
Yamaguchi Noboru, National Defense Academy of Japan

Session Sketch

Session 2, titled “Pursuing Peace on the Korean Peninsula,” explored the opportunities and obstacles to achieving a lasting resolution to the half-century of division and tension between the two Koreas. It also looked at what role Korea’s neighbors can play in promoting peaceful dialogue and ensuring regional stability.

The moderator of the session, Barbara Demick, Beijing Bureau Chief of The Los Angeles Times, began by highlighting how the Six-Party Talks have been a long-running process last over two decades and how achieving the denuclearization of North Korea remained the key issue in pursuing peace on the Korean peninsula.

Jonathan Pollack, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy and Director of the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institution, began by noting that at its recent party plenum in March 2013, North Korea declared that it would both continue to pursue additional development of nuclear weapons alongside economic reforms. It has made clear that while it is prepared to return to the negotiations over its nuclear program, it would be as a recognized nuclear weapons state. Dr. Pollack noted that North Korea’s nuclear arsenal is already “an accomplished fact.” Consequently, China needed to make greater effort and cooperate with

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the US on removing North Korea's nuclear weapons by changing its current approach. This would be "an acid test" for President Xi Jinping's new model of China-US relations.

Yang Xiyu, Senior Fellow at the China Institute of International Studies for China Foreign Policy Research, next outlined what he called the abnormal state of peace on the Korean peninsula. A "peace based on mutual deterrence," Dr. Yang ascribed the current state of affairs to two defining features of a "state of war" and a "state of Cold War." He urged all parties to try and remove the root causes of both states by resuming the Six-Party Talks. Though they have not always been effective, he noted that "if we wait endlessly, North Korea will have endless time to develop the nuclear weapons it wants."

Chun Youngwoo, former National Security Advisor to President Lee Myung-bak, reflected that despite the best efforts of the five other parties to the Six-Party Talks, and despite their enormous resources and influence, efforts to prevent North Korea's nuclear progress had failed. He noted that the North's determination to acquire nuclear weapons was stronger than the other parties collective determination to stop it. Dr. Chun stated that while sanctions had hurt North Korea, it had managed to bear the costs in pursuit of nuclear weapons. From his experience as one of the lead negotiators during the Six-Party Talks, Dr. Chun concluded by stating that restarting the talks without expecting concrete results would be meaningless.

Ha Taekeung, a member the Saenuri Party in the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, next discussed North Korea's role as a perpetrator of state crimes, an issue often overlooked in the focus on nuclear weapons. Rep. Ha noted that North Korea had pursued criminal activities abroad, from exporting narcotics to counterfeiting currency and cigarettes, much of it through China. From such a standpoint, he suggested that it was "unpredictable, unreasonable, and untrustworthy" to expect negotiations with the North to be productive. Rep. Ha concluded by noting that North Korea was a nuclear weapons-armed country but also a criminal entity; if its neighbors could manage to help it become a more normal country, it would pave the way for progress on nuclear weapons.

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During the discussions, Cheng Xiaohe, Associate Professor in the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, noted that there was a need to re-examine the Six-Party Talks from a broader context of three key rivalries: inter-Korean rivalry, Sino-Japanese rivalry, and Sino-US rivalry. Cheon Seongwhun, President of the Korea Institute for National Unification, looked back on the history of the talks and divided the negotiations into two phases: the first part up until early 2012 and the second part under President Xi Jinping. Yamaguchi Noboru, Director for International Programs and Professor of military history and strategy at the National Defense Academy of Japan, noted that Japan had a slightly different perception of the situation on the Korean peninsula due to its distance as well as different appreciation of the short- and long-term challenges to potential instability.

During the question and answer section, the discussions focused heavily on how Chinese attitudes towards North Korea had evolved over the past two decades. As Dr. Yang emphasized, despite Chinese understanding of the North Korean strategic situation, it also remains the only country to have conducted three nuclear tests in the twenty-first century. China's economic development also makes it desire a stable regional environment which North Korea has not provided. The recent decision to ban exports of more than 900 items to North Korea should thus not be taken lightly.

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