

Same Old New North Korea

Session: Plenary Session 4

Date/Time: April 27, 2016 / 15:15-16:45

Moderator: Christopher Nelson, Samuels International Associates

Speakers: Bessho Koro, Embassy of Japan to the ROK
Chun Yungwoo, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Gary Samore, Belfer Center for Science and Int'l Affairs, Harvard University
Yang Xiyu, China Institute of International Studies

Session Sketch

Plenary Session 4, titled “Same Old New North Korea,” explored the challenges of dealing with North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, as well as larger security challenges in Northeast Asia. The moderator of the session, Christopher Nelson, Sr. Vice President & Editor at Samuels International Associates, began by asserting that the North Korean situation has persisted for many years with no substantial solutions in sight. He opened the discussion with the question of whether a freeze on North Korea’s nuclear weapons tests is possible if that means accepting them as a nuclear power.

Ambassador Bessho Koro of Japan drew a contrast with North Korea today versus where it was in the 1990s. The difference now, he argues, is that there is no ambivalence on the North Korean position, thus making it easier for the international community to respond together to any belligerent actions. Yet while some people argue for negotiations, there first needs to be a collective vision on where those negotiations should lead. Amb. Bessho also recalled the agreement between Kim Jong Il and Prime Minister Koizumi in 2002 and claimed that, while North Korea has broken nearly all of those promises, Japan still hopes to hold them to their claims.

Next, Chun Yungwoo, senior advisor for the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, stressed that North Korea’s strategic calculations must change if denuclearization is to be achieved. In

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order to do this, the sanctions regime needs to be expanded to include all state owned companies, not just ones exporting coal or minerals. The US should also use secondary boycotts to strengthen financial measures against the North in order to cut them off from the international banking system. Concerning South Korea's missile defense system, Amb. Chun argued in favor of strengthening it, claiming that a stronger missile defense system would allow South Korea to not have to depend on a preemptive strike for defense.

Gary Samore, executive director for research at the Belfer Center for Science and Int'l Affairs, emphasized that sanctions take a long time to reach their full effect. For Iran, sanctions took years before negotiations became possible. The first priority now has to be further implementation of the sanctions regime to bring North Korea to the negotiation table. Acceptable terms for negotiations cannot include accepting North Korea as a nuclear state. Dr. Samore argued that North Korea does not have the credibility to threaten the United States with an ICBM, but further deterrence is needed to prevent conventional threats against South Korea.

Finally, Yang Xiyu, senior fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, argued that China has put forth a list of restricted items banned from being exported to the DPRK. He claims that China-North Korea relations have reached a low point because North Korea has threatened the peace in Northeast Asia with their provocative actions. However, he argued against the efficacy of a missile defense system in South Korea. What North Korea really wants, he argued, is economic development.

During the question and answer session, Dr. Samore stated that any freezing of fissile material production would have to involve international inspections of secret North Korean facilities. Amb. Chun ended the session by stating that he hoped it was possible to change North Korean behavior without changing the regime, but he was not optimistic for such an outcome. If North Korea continues its current behavior, regime change may become the only viable option.

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