

## China and Nuclear North Korea

**Panel:** Session 2 (Orchid)  
**Date/Time:** December 11, 2012 / 14:15-15:30  
**Speakers:** Shin Chang-Hoon, Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Moderator)  
Thomas Plant, King's College, London  
Jonathan Pollack, The Brookings Institution  
Lora Saalman, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Teng Jianqun, China Institute of International Studies  
**Rapporteur:** Christopher Green, Daily NK

### *Panel Short Summary*

Shin began by noting that 2012 has been difficult. It started well with the February 29<sup>th</sup> US-DPRK 'Leap Day Agreement,' but proceeded to abrogation with a missile launch in early April and the decision to put the phrase "nuclear-possessing state" into the DPRK constitution in May, then the decision to launch a second "Gwangmyungsung-3" satellite in December.

He then noted the key questions: 1) how different actors have handled the nuclear issue; 2) how things may change under new Chinese leadership; and 3) how Beijing could approach the issue of restarting the Six-Party Talks.

Using China as a metric, Teng said the DPRK nuclear issue is now in its third stage. Beijing began by observing, then moved to participating, and is now playing a mediating role. While he believes that China has limited influence over DPRK, he expects a more balanced approach to nuclear programs and missiles under Xi Jinping.

Calling this "good news," Plant mused on how China might address the current situation. Noting that the DPRK has "spent more of the time since 1994 proliferating than not proliferating," he examined DPRK relations with Libya and Syria, noting that Pyongyang's proliferation stems from networks cultivated through conventional weapons proliferation and warning that if China disregards this then it will be impossible to properly address proliferation concerns. The DPRK, he said, "only proliferates to those with the money to pay

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and a long relationship with them.” Conversely, he said the DPRK is unwilling to proliferate to non-state actors; however, he warned of the risk of “second-order proliferation” to groups like Hezbollah.

Saalman took a pessimistic view of the “China to take a middle ground” hypothesis, declaring that this will not lead to cooperation with the US. China has a different mindset, she said; in a sample of 384 articles on the nuclear issue in the Chinese media, fewer than 70 discussed US-China “cooperation.” To China, the US presents an existential threat to a number of countries, and this undermines Beijing’s will to avoid proliferation; how can you cooperate with a country to stem a problem if you see that country as the root of the problem? On a related note, Pollack dismissed the China-mediated Six-Party Talks, saying that although all actors make references to it, “nobody takes it seriously at this point.” The process has been an “outright and collective failure;” North Korea has a nuclear capacity and will decide how considerable it should be.

So will China change, and how? Pollack said that Beijing has learned from its own history that if a state is determined to follow the nuclear path, it “really cannot be moved from that path without some unique forms of leverage.” Therefore, China is “making an understandable choice, since kicking the can down the road is less risky than all other courses of action.”

However, Shin remained undiminished in concluding that now is the time for China to act, not mediate, to create a breakthrough.

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