

Session 4: The Six Party Talks as Viable Mechanism for Denuclearization

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Summary

This panel focused on the Six Party Talks as a viable mechanism for denuclearization of North Korea. The panel seemed to be split with Bruce Klingner from The Heritage Foundation and Sue Mi Terry from the Council on Foreign Relations suggesting that while the Six Party Talks are not perfect and there needs to be a lot of work done to change North Korea's calculations on having nuclear weapons, the Six Party Talks are a framework for approaching denuclearization issues. Alternatively, General Burwell B. Bell, former Commander of UN Command, Combined Forces Korea, and US Forces Korea along with Dr. Larry Wortzel of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission insisted that the Six Party Talks were not helpful for denuclearization and other alternatives should be used. All panelists were skeptical that at the present time a nuclear deal would be reached, but all gave ideas on how to pressure North Korea into giving up its nuclear weapons.

For Bruce Klingner and Sue Mi Terry, talking to North Korea should be part of the policy approach to denuclearization. Sue Mi Terry argued the Six Party Talks are the least bad option in a land of lousy options. She believed the Obama administration must at least tactically demonstrate that dialogue is possible with North Korea. Bruce Klingner argued that talking to North Korea is just one tool of national power, but it must be combined with all the instruments of national power, including tougher sanctions, better military cooperation with allies, and a missile defense system with South Korea and Japan. For both Bruce Klingner and Sue Mi Terry, it seemed that talking to North Korea was permissible within the Six Party Talks framework, as long as it is combined with other forms of pressure and deterrence against North Korea provocations and actions.

For General Bell and Dr. Wortzel, the Six Party Talks are no longer helpful for denuclearization. General Bell believed a divided peninsula is in the interests of the countries in the immediate region and North Korea would not give up its weapons that it has worked hard to procure. He argued that much closer coordination and a consensus on approaching North Korea is necessary between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan. Dr. Wortzel noted Chinese military literature and thought suggests that nuclear weapons for small countries help limit superpower hegemony; thus, China would not pressure North Korea to give up its weapons. Dr. Wortzel proposed moving forward with a peace treaty on the Korean peninsula and changing the location of denuclearization talks to Geneva or New York.

This panel provided an interesting debate on true desires for denuclearization of the parties involved and whether or not the Six Party Talks framework could help accomplish those goals. While disagreeing on the viability of Six Party Talks, all panelists seemed to agree on closer coordination among allies and greater use of instruments of national power to pressure North Korea into giving up its nuclear weapons.

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