

**Panel:** China and Nuclear North Korea (Orchid Room)

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, December 11, 2012 / 14:15-15:30

**Talking Points for:** Teng Jianqun, Director, Center for Arms Control, China Institute of International Studies

### **The North Korean Nuclear Issue and China (draft and no citation)**

The North Korean nuclear was not an issue before 1990s. We can have a long list to tell why the North Koreans preferred to go nuclear as a member state of NPT. It is a political issue rather than a technical issue in Northeast Asia. Any action taken by the parties concerned would get response from the other side. In terms of the North Korean nuclear issue, China was a observer first and later a mediator, China has its own national interests and its international commitment to its neighbors in this region. At least in the past twenty years, China has tried its best to maintain the peace and stability in the Korean peninsula.

I. At the early stage China had almost no in-depth involvement in North Korean nuclear issue (late 1950s to 2003)

According to IAEA, with the help of former Soviet Union, the North Koreans launched their nuclear project in late 1950s. A nuclear reactor was constructed in 1987 in Yongbyon.

From 1958, the U.S. began to deploy nuclear weapons in ROK and the total number reached around 2600, including short-range missiles meanwhile the U.S. began to give extended nuclear deterrence to ROK. Though China and the former Soviet Union once all committed to give security assurance to North Korea but this commitment did not include the nuclear umbrella to North Korea. And after Korean War, China withdrew its troops home. So at the very beginning of North Korean nuclear issue there were no direct connections with China. The Sino-DPRK security cooperation though the two sides signed a treaty in which China committed to give security assurance to North Korea has been a declaratory one rather than a military alliance. The follow-up of this kind of security cooperation led the result that North Korea began to develop its own strategic capability by itself. And Just because of this choice, the influence of China and the former Soviet Union was much less on North Korean nuclear project.

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In 1974, North Korea entered IAEA, 10 years earlier than China, and entered NPT in December 1985, but rejected the inspection by IAEA on its nuclear facilities.

On 27 September 1991, the U.S president George Herbert Walker Bush declared that the U.S. would withdraw all its tactical nuclear weapons. North Korea gave a very active response to this announcement. By the end of that year, the North Korea and South Korea signed a no aggression treaty and South Korea announced at the same time that there was no nuclear weapons in South Korea, which meant the U.S. would withdraw its nuclear weapons from the peninsula. The year of 1992 also witnessed the active attitude of North Korea over nuclear issues by signing an agreement with IAEA. From May 1992 to February 1993, North Korea accepted 6 times of site inspection by IAEA. Though there were frictions among the parties concerned over nuclear issues after 1993, a framework agreement was signed in June 1994. And in October the same year, another agreement was signed between North Korea and the United States. According to these two agreements, North Korea promised to freeze its nuclear development project while the United States, Japan and South Korea promised to support North Korea by supplying light water reactors.

The year of 2001 marked the turning point of North Korean nuclear issues. When George Bush entered the White House, the U.S. Administration became tough on North Korea and in 2002 President Bush labeled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the Axis of Evil. In January 2003, North Korea withdrew from NPT again. All the contact and cooperation between the United States and North Korea were suspended then.

II. China has become a key player since 2003.

In April 2003, after a series of consultation and talk, the three parties, China, U.S. and North Korea talk was held in Beijing, and in August the same year, the six parties talk was held again in Beijing. This talk established the basic principles on solving nuclear issues in Peninsula. North Korean nuclear test on October 9, 2006 did give setback on the dialogues but with the hard mediation from China, the 5th round of six parties talk was held in Beijing on February 8 and on 13th the six parties also reached an agreement. In July 14th, 6200 tons of oil was sent to North Korea by South Korea. North Korea agreed to accept IAEA's

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inspection to the closed Yongbyon reactor after 5 years suspension.

The satellite and nuclear test in 2009 by North Korea completely destroyed the possibility for all the parties to go ahead and find solutions to North Korea nuclear issues. On April 13th, 2009, North Korea declared that it would withdraw from the six parties talks. North Korea declared that the six parties talks had already died.

Started from April of 2003 and ended in April of 2009, in the complete six years, China almost exhausted all its resources in trying to find peaceful solution to North Korean nuclear issues. However, China has failed, all the other 4 parties failed. All these efforts and failures just showed the difficulties to solve the nuclear issue in the Peninsula. The United States tried, China tried. Almost nothing has happened from April 2009 till now. The North Koreans continue their nuclear project and missile project.

### III. The North Korean nuclear and China

First, let's have a look at North Korea. After two rounds of nuclear tests and several rounds of so-called satellite tests, we can have a clear-cut vision on the intention of North Korea in nuclear and missile development. Their purpose is to have an operational nuclear force and effective nuclear deterrence. The launch of satellite actually is one part of this program initiated by the former Great Leader Kim Jong-il. The new Great Leader will continue his father's cause though he to some extent prefers to be more open and to carry out reform.

As for China, from a patient observer and later a key player in North Korean nuclear issue, China's policy has been adjusted step by step. There should be two aspects to explain China policy in this regard: (1) the denuclearization of Korean Peninsula, which means all the parties concerned on the Peninsula should abandon the possession of nuclear weapons. (2) international community should show respect to the sovereignty and integrity of the countries in this region.

China has its strategic interests in Korean Peninsula, that is to say, maintaining the peace and stability in the region, which is the condition for China's domestic development. The strategic interests are not the dominance of the region. As many western scholars argued in recent years, denuclearization would not be on the top agenda of Chinese leadership. I am not 100

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percent in favor of this argument but you are right at least from the approach to maintaining peace and stability in this region. Of course, a nuclear-armed North Korea is a threat to its neighbors.

For years, there has been at least one misperception towards China's influence on North Korea, that is to say, China could persuade North Korea to be a good boy. As I discussed just now, China had no direct connection with North Korean nuclear project, no nuclear commitment and no direct involvement in the R&D. There were still two important events sharply reduced China's influence on North Korea: (1) the breakup of the former Soviet Union, by which North Korea lost a big brother in military and economy; (2) the normalization of relations between China and South Korea by which North Korea lost another big brother in economy and security. China did lose its influence in recent twenty years.

There are at least three groups of views toward North Korea in the academic circle: (1) North Korea is a trouble-maker and China should abandon it, including the abandonment of the China-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, which was signed in July 1961. (2) North Korea is de facto an ally in Northeast Asia and China should continue to enhance its relations with DPRK. (3) North Korea is of no importance at all and let DPRK do what it wants to do. If you read on the website, you can find all these groups disputes over North Korea.

Our decision-makers for at least recent 30 years since our open-up and reform have been trying their best to maintain a balanced policy in Northeast Asia. It is not easy job and we can find the unstable policies. Sometime, China would attach great importance to the relations with the United States and sometime China would attach great importance to North Korea.

Since our main theme of this year's Asan China Forum is China in Transition, let me have a expectation or anticipation to our new President Xi Jinping's policy towards North Korean nuclear issue: (1) there will be no fundamental changes at least in his first one or two years, maintaining the peace and stability of the peninsula is still the number one job for China. (2) there might be some minor adjustments towards North Korea and the United States, President Xi's peninsula policy could be a more balanced one, not to against one and in favor of another.

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