

[SE4-GB-3] The Six Party Talks as a Viable Mechanism for Denuclearization

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Full Summary

The panelists basically agree on the point that the Six Party Talks (SPT) is a dismal failure. However, slight differences about whether the SPT is a viable mechanism for denuclearization emerged. Sue Mi Terry and Bruce Klingner believe that while it is not perfect, it is still a viable mechanism. While underscoring the caveats and flaws that the SPT has had in the past, based on the lessons learned from these past experiences, both argue that it is necessary to go hand-in-hand with “sticks and carrots together”. Two other panelists, Larry Wortzel and Burwell Bell had a more negative view, pointing out that the failure of the SPT means that the SPT are not a viable mechanism for denuclearization. Regardless of whether one looks at the SPT as a viable mechanism or not, panelists agreed that having effective penalty measures is necessary.

Sue Mi Terry *National intelligence fellow, Council for Foreign Relations.*

Dr. Terry basically agrees that the SPT is a failure. She pointed out that all North Korean watchers should better be aware that the issue is a land of lousy options. However, she argued that it is hard to find a viable option apart from SPT. Nevertheless, acknowledging the SPT as viable mechanism, she agreed with the necessity of having “stick approaches”: sanctions are still effective and are necessary measures to counter proliferation and to punish Pyongyang for its behavior. However, she believes that only pursuing a “sticks only approach” is unrealistic. One cannot solely pursue this policy, and the Obama administration has to present options for dialogue. As seen from the Bush administration, which was criticized for its harsh approach toward North Korea during its first term, thereby transforming into a softer stance during its second term, carrots and sticks need to go hand-in-hand. If this is the case—that Washington needs to adopt sticks and carrots together—the question becomes what the best format for that dialogue is. This is the point of the debate. Dr. Terry, therefore, put forward that in addition to process sanctions and military exercises, there is still a real need for potential prospects for negotiation with North Korea. Bilateral talk within the SPT is the least

rosy option. Regional cooperation including China is the best vehicle for creating a dialogue to solve the problem.

For the present moment, resuming the SPT does not seem like a viable option, she said. We should stay firm and need to take a principled approach. Dr. Terry further noted that the US needs to pursue the preconditions that the US laid down when the time comes for resuming talks. However, she warned that it would not be a good idea to return to talks unless North Korea meets those conditions. The bottom line she suggested is that while intensifying sanctions, other parties need to engage in more “stick options,” such as joint military exercises with the Republic Of Korea and preparing for more provocative North Korean behavior and non-stability. Moreover, she emphasized that it is necessary to have some sort of channels with North Korea, and there is a need to keep that dialogue open. In a nutshell, she concluded that multilateral talks are a better option than bilateral talks and that the SPT might be one of the options the US has as well as carrot and other stick options.

Bruce Klingner *National intelligence fellow, Council for Foreign Relations.*

Is North Korea trying to go real weaponization or is it using it as a negotiation tool? As other panelists confessed their disappointment with the SPT as a viable effective mechanism for solving the problem, Mr. Klingner also echoed the same sentiment by answering the question he raised: “how North Korea will respond to engagement?” He gave an overview of the history records of North Korea’s extremely untrustworthy behavior in denuclearization efforts. He observed that the US has engaged North Korea in many ways in the past, which has only brought about the result of North Korea’s continued brinkmanship diplomacy. As the Bush administration did, the current Obama administration also has hoped to achieve a significant breakthrough, but North Korea has not adopted any meaningful measures since President Bush left office. North Korea’s nuclear test is a deadly signal that triggers doubt about the usefulness of engagement policy. This event made North Korean watchers and the Obama administration take a firmer stance with North Korea. As a result of this belligerent behavior, Mr. Klingner explains, now the US and its allies are far less willing to engage North Korea.

Mr. Klingner believes that North Korea is very diplomatically skilled at parrying the issue of denuclearization. He quotes a senior researcher from Seoul, saying that diplomacy can be very useful in solving problems, but also does not necessarily solve problems. Mr. Klingner believes that the SPT will eventually be a viable option, but also that it is better to prepare on the diplomatic battle field and understanding the necessary caveats beforehand. He agrees with Dr. Terry that sticks and carrots must go together and pragmatic engagement is necessary to engage in a third track. As Dr. Terry suggests that additional efforts and caveats

need to be addressed, Mr. Klingner echoed this sentiment, believes just returning to the SPT does not mean success at all: the SPT has to be the means to solving the problem, not the means itself. Mr. Klingner noted it is necessary to have a third mechanism to guarantee the success of the SPT. In a nutshell, he believes the SPT should be one option, and we should be open to the carrots, but we also need to be better prepared to use sticks.

What should be the comprehensive alliance strategy or policy? Allied policy has been indecisive about whether or not to engage or pressure the North. However, in reality, these two things should go together: carrots and sticks. Rather than use them in isolation, Mr. Klingner notes we must integrate these comprehensive strategies. In that sense, sanctions are one component of a broader strategy. Stronger measures for more pain, are needed for more gain. Sanctions without strategic calculations are not good, and the current administration must focus on the North Korea issue without other international affairs distractions, according to this participant. The following efforts need to be taken: the US and its allies should pressure China to take a more assertive stance on North; and it is necessary to hold out the prospect for dialogue.

It is not a question of whether to engage North Korea, but of how to do so. Negotiations should be based on transparency and credibility. Different points need to be laid out, which will be the most difficult part. For now, the atmosphere is not conducive to negotiation, so it is time for North Korea to make a sincere effort to denuclearize the peninsula. In the past, North Korea has asked for other parties to change, but the ball is now on the North's sides to solve denuclearization.

Larry Wortzel *a commissioner on the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission*

Mr. Wortzel approached the SPT based on his experience as a military attaché to Beijing in previous years. Based on conversations with PRC high ranking officials, including top think tank researchers and officers back in the early 1990s, he believes that Chinese efforts in the SPT stems from different calculations and estimations regarding regional stability and North Korea. Back in the early 1990s, the time of the first nuclear crisis, he had heard that the US should not be overly concerned about North Korean nuclear problem. He noted that where China stands is important and suggested that China has a different interest than the other parties involved. China has been in an effort to gain a successful market economy in North Korea and to promote the latter's stability. This knowledge has emerged from the historical records of how China tried to engage North Korea to become a market economy, including inviting Kim Jong-il to look around the developed economic zones and other developed areas several times. The collapse of North Korea will not serve China's national interest. Stemming

from this strong national interest, China never cuts oil or food to North Korea, whether their relationship is sound or strained. This Chinese behavior hinders a unified voice against North Korea with regard to denuclearization, which has hardly achieved fruitful results. The main issue is that China is not serious about solving denuclearization but rather is interested in the economic development of North Korea. Because China is a partner with North Korea and even condones North Korean proliferation behavior, Mr. Wortzel opined that he is skeptical that the Chinese sincerely wish to solve denuclearization. In addition, what China believes in nuclear weaponization is a different point. A world without nuclear weapons is the US's and others' concept, not China's. Rather, he observed, China seems believe weaker states with nuclear capability can deter the hegemonic power of larger states. Thereby, he argued that there seems to be not any Chinese interest in bringing the SPT to a successful conclusion. Mr. Wortzel warned that the idea of solving the nuclear program of North Korea, based on the 1993 to 1994 framework, needs to be changed. China is the only party in this world that has the capability to bring North Korea to the negotiation table, but they hardly want to pressure North Korea because of their concern of North Korea's collapse. As a result, he further recommended close coordination among Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. In conclusion, this participant emphasized depending on China, the North Korea issue might not bring forth a fruitful conclusion, awakening and the importance of "being realistic" toward China.

Burwell B. Bell *retired four-star general from the U.S. Army in 2008.*

As skeptical as Mr. Wortzel, General (retired). Bell did not view the SPT as a viable mechanism to solve the nuclear problem. From its inception, General (retired). Bell has viewed it as having little chance of success. He pointed out three elements that the SPT has had from its inception that have hindered the successful resolution of the problem: first, the disingenuous of the North Korean attitude; second, the divergent interests of each party; and third, the insincerity of all related parties. He stressed the importance of a unified voice in dealing with the issue, as divergent interests of party members are a serious problem, hindering effective resolutions. His second assessment echoed Mr. Wortzel's sentiment of the Chinese's interest, and how to view China is an issue as China has divergent interests from the US regarding the North Korean nuclear program. China does not expect reunification of North and South Korea, due to military and economic reasons. Russia also wants military stability on the Korean peninsula, but a strong Peninsula militarily is not in their interest. When it comes to Japan, General (retired). Bell believes that Japan also has the same interests as China: believing that a divided Korea will better serve the former's national interests. Japan's main objective is to prevent future competition to maintain Japanese supremacy. In the case of Seoul, the re-emergence of the "sunshine policy" is growing, which only allowed North Korea a chance to further develop its nuclear program. In addition, Korea wants a

peacefully unified democratic peninsula, which China does not want to see.

Given how divergent these interests are, the various interests of the five party members ultimately give a strategically better position to North Korea. Because of these flaws, there have never been mutually agreed upon outcomes, objectives and processes. General (retired). Bell views the SPT as not a viable mechanism for denuclearization. To better solve the problem, he emphasized the effectiveness of economically and militarily unified allies being ready to deal with North Korea. He viewed mutually agreed upon objectives and processes have never existed; thereby, he suggested that the US and China need to agree on a common basis on the matter and that Seoul, Tokyo and Washington need to unify their view before talking to North Korea. Again, the crucial part is that Seoul, Tokyo and Washington maintain their strong alliance.

In response to a question about whether the SPT should involve other regional mechanisms, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), to facilitate further progress, Mr. Klingner noted, first, that Russia and China are already members of the SPT and therefore it is not necessary. Second, the number of participants is not significant; rather, the sincere behavior of North Korea is of more significance.

The panelists basically agreed on the failure of the SPT and agreed upon the necessity to use stick measures to make the SPT a viable mechanism. The reason for its failure can be summed up as follows: for North Korea, its brinkmanship diplomacy is to blame and for the other parties involved, divergent interests compose a significant barrier in hindering effective unified measurement. Recommended solutions included a strong alliance among the US, Japan and Korea, and though China does not share strategic interests on a significant level, it is necessary to engage and create with China a basic consensus to push North Korea.

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