

Dealing with a Nuclear North Korea

Session: Regency Room

Date/Time: February 19, 2013 / 10:15-11:30

Moderator: Hahm Chaibong, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Speakers: Choi Kang, Korea National Diplomatic Academy
Endo Tetsuya, Japan Institute of International Affairs
Robert Gallucci, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Vasily Mikheev, Institute for World Economy and International Relations
Yang Yi, National Defense University

Rapporteurs: David Santoro, Pacific Forum CSIS
Mira Rapp-Hooper, Columbia University

Session Sketch

The first Plenary Session of the Asan Nuclear Forum, titled “Dealing with a Nuclear North Korea,” opened with all panelists agreeing that North Korea’s recent provocative actions, notably its recent rocket and nuclear tests, continue to threaten regional peace and security as well as the viability of the nonproliferation regime. However, there were significant differences among the five speakers from South Korea, Japan, the United States, Russia, and China over what the ultimate goal of North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs might be. In addition, the five powers continue to disagree over how to address the problem. At issue is whether the international community should recognize that North Korea has become a de facto nuclear-armed state, and thus focus on managing the problem, or if it should continue to demand denuclearization.

Choi Kang, Director of Policy Planning at the Korea National Diplomatic Academy, Endo Tetsuya, former Ambassador and Senior Adjunct Fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs, and Robert Gallucci, President of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, all agreed that it was important to remain focused on the ultimate goal of denuclearization. Plainly, recognizing North Korea as a nuclear weapons state would be

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Nuclear Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.

detrimental to regional security and the global nuclear nonproliferation regime. They noted that such a development could not be legitimized. Nonetheless, all three also stressed the need to “deal” with the immediate reality of the problem through a variety of policy tools, including robust deterrence posture, diplomacy, and systematic activation of the Proliferation Security Initiative.

The speakers also saw the possibility for engagement with Pyongyang, but were not optimistic about the prospects for success. The key question remains whether or not North Korea would be willing to put its nuclear and missile programs on the negotiating table, which at this time appears highly improbable. Without such a prerequisite, however, opening a meaningful dialogue with the North would be impossible.

In contrast, Vasily Mikheev, Vice President of the Institute for World Economy and International Relations, argued that the focus should strictly remain on denuclearization. Recognizing that North Korea has made significant headway on its nuclear and missile programs, he stressed that Pyongyang still has a long way to go to be a full-fledged nuclear-armed state. Ultimately, Dr. Mikheev emphasized that the North Korean problem will only be solved with regime change; though it is unclear how regime change can be brought about.

On the other end of the spectrum, Yang Yi, former Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, contended that the international community should focus on engagement and dialogue with North Korea; he stressed that sanctions are not the answer. While arguing that the Six-Party Talks remain the best forum to do so, he stressed that the United States is the best positioned to influence the North and offer a packaged deal that could address its security concerns. Ambassador Yang also insisted that despite criticisms to the contrary, China has been active (mainly behind the scenes) to prevent North Korea from conducting its recent nuclear test, and it failed. Significantly, he emphasized the need for genuine great power cooperation to solve the North Korean issue.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Nuclear Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.

Wrapping up the discussions, moderator Hahm Chaibong, President of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, concluded by stressing that it is essential for South Korea, Japan, Russia, the United States, and China to first begin to agree on the history of the North Korean problem or, how we got to where we are today, to be able to produce consistent policies moving forward. Consensus on the past is needed to build a realistic policy approach for the future.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Nuclear Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.