

## **Issues and Expectations for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round of Six-Party Talks**

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Since the June 2000 inter-Korean summit, reconciliation and cooperation have continued due to the enthusiastic efforts of both North and South Korea. However, the improvements seen inter-Korean relations were overshadowed by the North Korean nuclear crisis which came to the fore in the fall of 2002. The nuclear issue aggravated relations between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and led to a halt in the light-water reactor project outlined in the 1994 Agreed Framework between Washington and Pyongyang. Internal tension has increased in the Republic of Korea (ROK), with some voices criticizing the policy of reconciliation and cooperation, and economic difficulties worsen in North Korea as Pyongyang becomes further isolated from the outside world. Under such circumstances, the situation surrounding the Korean peninsula this year is expected to see changes more rapid than ever before over the solution to the North Korean nuclear problem.

However, the United States is expected to put more pressure on North Korea to abandon its nuclear program after Libya's leader Mu'ammer al-Qadhafi announced that his country would give up its nuclear ambitions and Pakistan admitted to leaking nuclear technology to Pyongyang. Moreover, this is an even more critical time for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula as South Korea is scheduled to hold general elections and the U.S. presidential election is this year. The second round of six-party talks will be held in Beijing on February 25, six months after the first round of talks. The international community has a keen interest and high hopes as the North Korean nuclear problem is seen as an international issue. However, it is somewhat concerning to see that the participating countries are showing both positive and negative attitudes on the

issue with the talks just a few days away.

In the recent 13<sup>th</sup> ministerial-level meetings between South and North Korea, the two sides agreed that the second round of six-nation talks should be fruitful. A Japanese delegation from the Foreign Ministry visited Pyongyang, although its purpose was to discuss the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea. In a statement on the freezing of its nuclear program, North Korea stated that freezing the program is part of the process leading to full dismantlement. The United States has said that Iraq and North Korea are different, and hinted that diplomatic measures to solve the North Korean nuclear issue are showing progress. All of these are positive signs.

However, Japan recently passed a law on imposing economic sanctions on North Korea. It warned that the North Korean issue is one on the verge war, and is hinting that it may pull out of the six-party talks. The United States is demanding the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear program, urging Pyongyang to make a "strategic choice." Washington is pressuring North Korea by implying that the only chance for the country to save itself is to follow in the footsteps of Libya's Qadhafi and announce that it will abandon its nuclear program.

China has played an important role as a middleman in the formation of the multilateral framework and the opening of the second round of talks. China is also known to have played a significant part in persuading the participating countries not to exacerbate the nuclear issue and to solve it through dialogue. The international community applauded Beijing's mediation efforts as China was able to enhance its status on the international stage. In particular, Beijing was able to display to the world that the China of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is one of peace and dialogue rather than the China of the cold war associated with conflict.

During the past four years, the Vladimir Putin government of Russia has tried to recover its traditional influence over Northeast Asia including the Korean Peninsula. To

achieve this, Russia has proactively pursued the normalization of its relations with North Korea along with a balanced policy toward the peninsula. Russia is expanding the scope of its policy from priority on economic and trade interests to one that encompasses diplomacy and security. The Putin government helped achieve the opening of the six-way talks through active diplomacy with the United States and North Korea and made effort to play a role in solving the North Korean nuclear issue. Therefore, it seems that Russia will once again attempt to resolve the issue through the six-party talks based on its package proposal while maintaining its original policy of a denuclearized Korean peninsula.

As such, the countries participating in the talks seem to be using the positive and negative aspects of the issue as leverage according to their own interests. Nonetheless, thorough preparations on the part of South Korea are called for. The crucial issue during the upcoming talks is expected to be whether North Korea has developed a nuclear program using highly enriched uranium (HEU), an issue which has led to the second round of talks. The United States believes that North Korea indeed possesses a HEU nuclear program and is backing its belief with evidence such as information that nuclear technology was transferred to North Korea, North Korea's First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Suk Joo's admission to possessing a nuclear program, and the recent statement by Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan admitting that he provided nuclear expertise to North Korea.

North Korea, however, strongly denies these charges. Pyongyang argues that during the U.S. special envoy James Kelly's visit to North Korea in October 2002, Kang Suk Joo merely said "North Korea could have something worse than that (nuclear weapons using HEU)", but that this was not an acknowledgment of nuclear production. Now North Korea has gone as far as to say that such a program does not exist. It appears that North Korea will abandon its nuclear program when U.S.-DPRK ties are completely normalized, and until that time it will continue to demand compensation for the freezing of its nuclear program.

Meanwhile, there are some who predict that Washington will put heavy pressure on Pyongyang before the talks are held as a result of the statement by Qadhafi and Pakistan's admission to leaking nuclear technology. There are others who forecast that the two sides will find a lead to solving the issue based on President George W. Bush's proposal for a multilateral security guarantee and his mention that U.S. diplomacy toward North Korea is making good progress, as well as North Korea's willingness to freeze its nuclear program as a first step to complete dismantlement.

As such, the positions of the United States and North Korea are completely different. If the two sides repeat their previous arguments in the second round of talks, there is a possibility that the talks will breakdown altogether. This is clearly frustrating for South Korea. South Korea is in an uneasy position as Seoul is definitely lacking information and because inter-Korean relations and the U.S.-ROK alliance are equally important. What adds to this frustration is that nuclear development using HEU is difficult to verify without the voluntary declaration of the country in question.

The international community is also shedding doubt on both the United States and North Korea based on past experience. North Korea firmly denied abducting Japanese civilians before finally admitting to it, while Washington waged war on grounds that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The United States has still not found any evidence to back its speculation and now there is even talk of intelligence failure. Both the United States and North Korea need to understand that the international community views them with suspicion. Moreover, the two parties should not use the fact that it is difficult to verify the development of uranium-based nuclear programs to throw the international community into chaos or pressure the other party.

The six-party talks will be held tomorrow. Although the major point of contention is whether a HEU-based nuclear program actually exists or not, discussions should not be confined merely to disclosing the existence of the program. What is needed is for the

United States and North Korea to make adequate statements and concessions. North Korea needs to state that it is willing to dispel suspicions raised by the United States. In return, the United States should confirm its willingness to provide a security guarantee to North Korea. Only after statements like these can the two sides discuss detailed proposals such as a reward for the freezing and dismantlement of the nuclear program. The two parties need to make a more progressive declaration than in the first round of talks. North Korea has to state its willingness to completely dismantle its nuclear program while the United States affirms its willingness to provide a security guarantee and economic support in return.

China is expected to play a role in the statements to be made by North Korea and the United States. Not only will China act as mediator between the participants and induce cooperation, it will also undertake the important role of persuading North Korea. But China may have to go one step further this time and, as an ally, promise North Korea security assurance as well as support in overcoming its economic hardships. Instability in Northeast Asia triggered by North Korea's possession of a nuclear program is something China does not want because of the huge implications it will have for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. In addition, we cannot rule out the possibility that North Korea's nuclear program will cause a domino effect of nuclear proliferation, possibly aggravating China's relationship with Taiwan. Therefore, China is expected to play a more active role in the multilateral dialogue. Under the treaty of amity signed between China and North Korea in 1961, China can intervene in a war should North Korea be attacked. By emphasizing this treaty and promising economic assistance, it is believed that China will be able to induce North Korea to give up its nuclear development program.

The first round of talks was an opportunity for the participating nations to investigate the positions of the other parties. They were also able to create a common understanding that the North Korean nuclear crisis should not be aggravated, the Korean peninsula should be denuclearized, and the issue should be resolved peacefully through

dialogue. It is hoped that the upcoming talks will see actual progress in resolving the nuclear issue. Multilateral talks are complicated. Not only are the interests of related parties complicated, but it takes much time for each individual country to decide on their own positions because the process requires the representatives to wait for further instructions. Therefore, it would be desirable to have the formation of a working group during the talks for enhanced efficiency. The working group would have to set up an office in a particular country to facilitate continuous discussion. With such a working group in place, the six-party dialogue would be well established as a framework for discussions to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis.

With the participating countries showing such complicated interests, it is most important for the South Korean government to actively address the changes in the domestic and international situation and lay the groundwork so that progress can be made in the resolution of the nuclear issue. In addition, with the second round of talks just around the corner, Seoul should display its diplomatic abilities to the fullest and make some significant achievements.

We need to note that China has showed a remarkable role in the multilateral framework up till now, which means that it has leverage over North Korea. China provides over 60 percent of North Korea's needed materials, heavy oil, and food. North Korea also relies on China psychologically, meaning that Beijing has the ability to persuade Pyongyang. Also, it is the United States that is capable of persuading China. If U.S.-China relations sour or peace in the Northeast Asian region is disrupted, the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai will be met with huge obstacles. With this in mind, the South Korean government should persuade North Korea on the one hand and put to full use its diplomacy on the other to help increase understanding and cooperation between the United States and China, thus creating an atmosphere of strong collaboration in solving the nuclear problem.

Moreover, the Roh Moo Hyun government needs to induce the domestic media, which

is currently divided over the North Korean issue, to take a more integrated stance on the problem. The government should pursue its North Korea policy on the basis of public consensus while continuing to pursue its security-first policy. The peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas and gradual improvement in inter-Korean ties are only possible when the security of South Korea is firmly in place. The security-first policy is a national strategy that should be pursued even after Seoul succeeds in peacefully managing inter-Korean relations. Lastly, the ROK needs to continue to enhance cooperation for the creation of an inter-Korean economic community. Economic cooperation between the two Koreas is needed for the balanced economic development of North and South Korea and the recovery of the North Korean economy. South Korea should engage in such cooperation with a mind to create a flourishing inter-Korean economic community while pursuing its own interests at the same time.