



CONFERENCE ON NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY

CO-SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

AND THE DPRK INSTITUTE FOR DISARMAMENT AND PEACE

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The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) hosted a conference with a North Korean delegation led by Ambassador Ri Gun, deputy director of the DPRK Institute of Disarmament and Peace and four of his colleagues from August 9 to 11, 2004. The conference was the second in a series of Track II meetings with the North Koreans that the NCAFP is sponsoring in an effort to foster mutual understanding among the parties to the official Six-Party Talks and to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

All of the parties participating in the Six-Party Talks were represented. Several were officials who attended in their private capacities. They included: the Honorable Joseph R. DeTrani of the U.S. State Department, special envoy to the Six-Party Talks; Mitchell B. Reiss, director, policy planning, U.S. State Department; and Charles W. Jones, director for Asian affairs, National Security Council. Also attending were a number of distinguished former U.S. officials, including: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, former Secretary of State; the Honorable William J. Perry, former Secretary of Defense; the Honorable Paul A. Volcker, former chairman of the Federal Reserve Board; and Dean Robert L. Gallucci, Georgetown University, chief negotiator with the DPRK during the Clinton Administration. (A complete list of the participants and the agenda are enclosed.)

The following is a brief summary of the conference. For further information, please contact NCAFP Project Director Professor Donald S. Zagoria (dzagoria@webtv.net).

SUMMARY

Some progress has been made in the Six-Party Talks, but many obstacles to a breakthrough remain.

The most important indication of progress is that both North Korea and the United States have tabled proposals for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea's proposal involves a "freeze" for "compensation" in the first stage. The U.S. proposal, introduced at the Six-Party Talks in June 2004 and based on close cooperation with South Korea and Japan, foresees three stages. In the first stage, the DPRK would commit to dismantling all of its nuclear programs in exchange for provisional multilateral security assurances and some energy assistance from non-U.S. parties. In the second and third stages, North Korea would fully dismantle its nuclear programs. In return, it would receive enduring multilateral security assurances, broader benefits of normalization with

the international community; a study to determine the energy requirements of North Korea and how to meet them by non-nuclear energy program; steps to lift remaining economic sanctions and removal from the terrorism list; and Nunn/Lugar technical and financial assistance, including the retraining of North Korean scientists and engineers. There are, however, several significant obstacles to progress.

Impact of the U.S. Presidential Election

Some U.S. participants suggested that there could be no further progress in the Six-Party Talks until after the U.S. presidential election in November 2004, because the North Koreans are waiting to see if they can get a better deal from the Kerry Administration, if there is one, than from the Bush Administration. Most of the American participants, including some close to the Kerry campaign, stressed that a Kerry Administration would continue the broad outlines of the Bush policy for dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue. It would have as a top priority the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula by negotiation. It would continue bilateral discussions with the North Koreans within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. It would insist that any agreement lead to full dismantlement of the North Korean program, including any uranium enrichment program.

Deep Suspicions on Both Sides

Many participants pointed to the mutual lack of trust between the United States and North Korea. One participant argued the matter was even deeper than a lack of trust. He said that both North Korea and the United States harbor deep suspicions that the other side does not seek a genuine resolution of the issue.

Many Americans believe that North Korea may not be willing to give up its nuclear option under any circumstances. North Korea may find the present process useful while it continues to enrich uranium, weaponize its store of plutonium, produce more plutonium and expand its ballistic missile program. Also, North Korea has succeeded in improving its relations with Japan and South Korea while managing its relations with China. In this view, while the United States has in mind a “Libya” model for North Korea, North Korea may have in mind a “Pakistan” model — i.e., denying its intentions while pressing ahead with its nuclear weapons program.

According to the same participant, the North Koreans also harbor deep misgivings about the Bush Administration. Pyongyang may believe that this Administration is stalling until the present Middle East crisis is over, following which it will seek to overthrow the North Korean regime. In this view, the Bush Administration will not negotiate with what it regards as a “rogue regime”; instead, it will seek regime change.

The view was expressed that in order for the Six-Party Talks to make genuine progress, North Korea has to demonstrate that it is really prepared — under the right circumstances — to give up its nuclear option. For its part, the United States has to demonstrate that it is ready to normalize relations with the DPRK regime and will not seek to overthrow it, provided there is a solution to the nuclear issue.

North Korea's Uranium Enrichment Program

Many participants, not only the Americans, insisted there could be no resolution of the nuclear issue until North Korea becomes more open, transparent and credible about its suspected uranium enrichment program. Repeatedly pressed to say whether they are enriching uranium, the North Koreans limited their response to stating that they have officially denied the existence of such a program.

Scope of the Proposed North Korean Nuclear Freeze

Several participants argued that the scope of the proposed North Korean nuclear freeze is not sufficiently precise. Would it include, in addition to the plutonium program, the uranium enrichment program and existing nuclear weapons?

North Korea's Insistence on Maintaining a "Peaceful" Nuclear Energy Program

North Korean participants insisted that North Korea has a right to develop a peaceful nuclear program. Several U.S. participants responded that in their view, all nuclear programs in North Korea are related to the production of nuclear weapons.

U.S. Participation in Delivering Fuel Aid to North Korea

According to the U.S. proposal, in the first stage, if specific conditions are met — i.e., agreement is reached on the overall approach, including specific DPRK agreement to dismantle all nuclear weapons in a permanent, thorough and transparent manner subject to effective verification — non-American parties would provide heavy fuel oil to the DPRK. Only in subsequent stages would the United States participate in providing fuel to North Korea. Several North Korean and some non-North Korean participants stressed that the United States should agree to participate in the first stage by providing heavy fuel oil to the DPRK as a symbolic gesture of good faith. One participant suggested a trade-off: the United States would provide heavy fuel oil to North Korea in the first stage; in return, the North Koreans would fully expose their suspected uranium enrichment program.

U.S. Willingness to Negotiate with North Korea

North Korean participants complained that the United States is not negotiating with the DPRK in a serious manner, as demonstrated by its practice of relaying messages to the DPRK through China. They noted that the United States is no longer using the New York channel that had been active during the Clinton Administration and that there is no "quiet diplomacy" with the DPRK. While rejecting the Libyan model, the North Koreans pointed out that the United States is not engaging in the kind of quiet, bilateral negotiations that it conducted with Libya for eight months prior to reaching agreement with that country on nuclear dismantlement. Several participants from other countries agreed that the United States could do more to engage the DPRK in quiet diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

All the participants, including the North Koreans and the Americans, agreed that the NCAFP conference had been useful in clarifying differences. After the conference, the North Koreans told the press “we had interesting and frank talks.” They said also that they look forward to continuing such talks in the future. American officials told the press that the two sides had had “very good meetings.”

The NCAFP hopes to convene another such meeting immediately after the U.S. presidential election.

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