

The Korean Peninsula and the role of multilateral talks

Charles L. PRITCHARD

In the past decade there have been several instances of crisis, confrontation and negotiated resolution on the Korean Peninsula. So far, only bilateral negotiations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and either the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) or the United States have resulted in a satisfactory conclusion to the objectives of the talks. This is in contrast to the unsuccessful attempts at multilateral talks. Of course, critics of bilateral engagement with the DPRK are quick to point out that ultimately Pyongyang has failed to implement or uphold its obligations under the terms of bilaterally negotiated settlements and therefore those talks should not be described as successful. This is the rationale belatedly used by the Bush Administration in refusing to negotiate directly with Pyongyang in resolving the current nuclear crisis.¹

Bilateral talks

One of the most notable bilateral negotiations between the North and South took place at the end of 1991. The result of intense talks was the "Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchanges and Cooperation between the South and the North". The accord, while never implemented, was an impressive achievement. Among other things, it called for economic, cultural and scientific exchanges, free correspondence between divided families, and the reopening of roads and railroads that had been severed at the North-South dividing line.² This agreement was followed shortly by the 20 January 1992 "Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" designed "to eliminate the danger of nuclear war through denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and thus to create an environment and conditions favorable for peace and peaceful unification of our country and contribute to peace and security in Asia and the world."³ Likewise, this agreement was never implemented.

The one bilateral agreement that was implemented and resulted in tangible, although temporary, non-proliferation results was the 1994 US-DPRK Agreed Framework. The accord froze Pyongyang's known nuclear weapons programme and placed key facilities and dangerous spent fuel rods under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring until December 2002. Following a confrontation concerning highly enriched uranium (HEU) in October 2002 between the United States and North Korea over suspected North Korean violations of the spirit and letter of the framework agreement, Pyongyang ejected IAEA inspectors, pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and restarted

Ambassador Charles L. (Jack) Pritchard is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. He has served as a top aide to President Bush in the administration's negotiations with North Korea and the US Representative to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization.

its 5-megawatt nuclear reactor. It later announced that it had reprocessed all of the previously safeguarded spent fuel rods at Yongbyon, extracting enough plutonium to build perhaps six nuclear weapons. This confrontation, of course, is what led to the current nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula and the resultant Six-Party Talks.

The Agreed Framework negotiations, along with others such as the June 2000 Summit between ROK President Kim Dae Jung and DPRK leader Kim Jong Il, are aptly described in strategic terms. Other bilateral negotiations between North and South Korea as a result of the 2000 Summit and specific instances of US-DPRK negotiations are more limited and “tactical” in nature. However, it is important in discussing the efficacy of talks on the peninsula to mention a few of these bilateral successes.

There are three US-DPRK tactical negotiations worth reviewing. The first occurred in September 1996 as a result of a bloody North Korean submarine incursion into South Korean territory that threatened to lead to even greater military tension on the peninsula. The United States took upon itself, with ROK concurrence, talks with North Korea designed to end the potential escalation of tension and provide an opportunity to realize a joint US-ROK call for strategic-level multilateral talks with North Korea. Over a period of three months following the submarine incident, the United States and North Korea engaged in serious and prolonged talks that ultimately ended in a North Korean public apology to the ROK. Throughout the talks, Washington was in continuous consultations with Seoul to make sure that the end result of the negotiations would be satisfactory to South Korea.

Following two events in August 1998, the United States again entered into bilateral negotiations with North Korea that resulted in specific agreements that avoided the potential for more serious confrontation. The first incident was the revelation in the US press that North Korea was recreating its plutonium-based nuclear weapons programme at a secret underground facility at Kumchang-ri in violation of the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework. The United States had been following intelligence developments regarding these concerns, but was forced by the news leak to confront Pyongyang prematurely. However, these talks ultimately produced an agreement that allowed the United States to send multiple inspection teams (referred to as “visits”) to the suspected site to satisfy its concerns. Those inspections took place in May 1999 and again in May 2000 and, to the detriment of US intelligence credibility, revealed that Pyongyang was not involved in the recreation of its plutonium programme as was feared.

During the initial round of the Kumchang-ri talks, Pyongyang, without appropriate international warning, test fired a multi-stage Taepo Dong missile that it claimed was for scientific purposes to place a small satellite into orbit. The missile crossed over Northern Japan, producing outrage from the Japanese and others. Japan was an essential partner and financier in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) that was charged with building the light-water reactors and providing heavy fuel oil as part of the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework. The missile launch threatened to derail implementation of the framework. Once again, the United States entered into negotiations that produced an agreement in September 1999 by North Korea to end its long-range missile tests. This moratorium is still being observed by Pyongyang.

Multilateral talks

In April 1996, US President Bill Clinton and ROK President Kim Young Sam jointly called for four-nation (the United States, the Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of Korea and China) peace talks designed to move beyond the Armistice Agreement that ended active hostilities on the Korean Peninsula and to establish a more permanent peace mechanism. Following the resolution of

the submarine incursion, Pyongyang agreed to “listen” to a joint US-ROK briefing of the Four-Party Peace Talks concept. That briefing occurred in April 1997 and was followed by three preliminary rounds of talks involving the four nations. While the preliminary talks did not achieve their goal of establishing a consensus for an agenda for the talks as a whole or the precise work of the two subcommittees, it did offer an opportunity for each of the parties to meet collectively and in groupings to discuss other issues of importance. The United States took the leadership role and reached an early consensus that the parties could meet bilaterally or in any combination that all agreed upon between or during full meetings of the four nations. Under this concept, at a time when North Korea would not meet bilaterally with South Korea, the United States organized a three-party meeting involving the US, ROK and DPRK. After establishing the precedent and at a time when all three were comfortable with the arrangements, the United States abruptly withdrew from one of the three-party meetings while it was in progress—leaving the North and South Korean delegations to continue meeting bilaterally for the first time in a long time.

Formal Four-Party Talks began in earnest in December 1997 in Geneva. While the four-party process eventually failed, it was intensive and far more frequent than the current six-party process, having met for three preliminary sessions at Columbia University and six formal plenary sessions in Geneva over twenty-one months in contrast to the three sessions of the Six-Party Talks over the same length of time. Two subcommittees were formed and met as part of the overarching plenary meetings. The deputies chaired the subcommittees and reported back to delegation chairmen during plenary sessions. The four parties continued the precedent established during the preliminary sessions of meeting bilaterally and in other groupings before and during the weeklong Geneva sessions. This robust bilateral element to the multilateral process led to a series of other bilateral successes such as the June 2000 ROK-DPRK Summit and the exchange of visits by DPRK Marshal Jo Myong Rok and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in October 2000.

In the end, Pyongyang failed to see much benefit in the multilateral process and simply refused to continue to participate. From an American perspective, Pyongyang entered the four-party process reluctantly and with the primary objective of satisfying the request of and improving ties with the United States. Pyongyang maintained an open dialogue with the United States in the months that followed the demise of the four-party process, agreeing to a missile moratorium, allowing inspections of Kumchang-ri and engaging in the “Perry Process”.

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Origin of the current Six-Party Talks⁴

The current Six-Party Talks has as its origin a negative rationale. That is, in response to North Korea’s demand to resolve the emerging HEU crisis bilaterally with the United States, the United States opted to broaden the field of players while refusing to deal directly with Pyongyang. Objectively that was the right decision, but it was based more on a desire not to be seen as repeating the “failure” of the Clinton’s Administration’s Agreed Framework.

The initial United States proposal called for a “P5 plus 5” meeting, meaning the United Nations Security Council Permanent Five plus the Republic of Korea, Japan, Australia, the European Union and the DPRK. That proposal was transmitted through the “New York channel”⁵ on 22 January 2003 to Pyongyang. Three days later the North Koreans rejected the proposal outright, saying that they would never agree to any kind of multilateral meeting to discuss the “DPRK-US nuclear issue”.

During Secretary Powell's stop in China enroute to the inauguration of ROK President Roh Moo Hyun in February 2003, he suggested that Beijing would be well positioned to organize and host multilateral talks involving the United States, China, Japan, and North and South Korea. The Chinese did not respond directly to the Secretary, but did pursue the suggestion in early March when former Foreign Minister and Vice Premier Qian Qichen went to Pyongyang. When the North Koreans rejected the Chinese offer of five-party talks, Qian revised his suggestion on the spot and offered three-party talks instead. However, Pyongyang continued to request bilateral talks through the US-DPRK New York channel. By the second week of April, the back and forth in both the New York channel and in the Beijing-Pyongyang channel had ended with the agreement to meet trilaterally in Beijing later in April 2003.

Officially unknown to the United States at the time trilateral talks were agreed upon, but suspected by many, was the diplomatic slight-of-hand that Beijing had been engaged in to get all parties to the talks. Beijing had quietly promised Pyongyang that if it participated in the talks, Pyongyang would have an opportunity to have direct, bilateral discussions with the United States during the session. Concurrently, Beijing was assuring Washington that the talks truly would be trilateral in every sense of the word and not simply an excuse for the DPRK and the United States to meet bilaterally. Given the fact that Pyongyang and Washington were exchanging information through the New York channel, Beijing needed to take control of any conversation dealing with the trilateral talks to preserve their benign deception. Beijing requested of Washington that it be the official and only channel of communications with Pyongyang regarding the trilateral talks. This arrangement was more than satisfactory with Washington and marked the beginning of the end of the New York channel at a senior level. When Pyongyang sent comments or questions through its UN Mission in New York, Washington replied through Beijing.

This arrangement of communications concerning trilateral talks served Beijing's purposes well. It brought the DPRK and United States together in Beijing in April 2003 for an initial round of talks aimed at resolving the emerging second nuclear crisis. What Beijing did not bargain on was that the United States would continue to use Beijing as a substitute for talking directly with Pyongyang on issues not directly related to the mechanism or logistics of multilateral talks. The process that led to trilateral talks soon became an impediment to meaningful diplomacy.

In the end, what Beijing had hoped for did not occur. When the three parties met in late April 2003 in Beijing, the DPRK head of delegation asked to meet bilaterally with the United States delegation, as Pyongyang had been led to believe would occur. The United States delegation, on strict instructions, refused to meet the North Koreans. Based on that refusal, the North Koreans ended their participation and returned to Pyongyang after a hastily arranged closing trilateral meeting.

The Six-Party Talks

Almost immediately after the failure of the April session, the Chinese sought to resurrect the process, seeking to repeat the three-party formula. By this time, the United States was insisting that any future rounds include the ROK and Japan. Washington had previously received approval from Seoul and Tokyo for the first trilateral session that excluded them, but with the understanding that talks would be expanded to include the ROK and Japan as soon as possible. Upon Moscow's insistence, the United States quickly added Russia to the list of future participants in any multilateral talks. In consultations with Secretary Powell in late July 2003, Chinese Vice Minister Dai Bingguo pushed for Washington's acceptance of another round of three-party talks in view of Pyongyang's insistence that it would not attend five- or six-party talks. In a compromise and in consideration of Beijing's efforts,

the United States suggested that it could attend an initial three-party session if it were followed immediately by a full six-party round of talks.

By this time, Secretary Powell had gained the President's approval for the American delegation to have direct contact with North Korea in the context of a multilateral setting. On 1 August, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) responded publicly to the various formulas that had been proposed to restart talks in Beijing:

Some time ago the US informed the DPRK through a third party that the DPRK-US bilateral talks may be held within the framework of multilateral talks. At the recent DPRK-US talks the DPRK put forward a new proposal to have six party talks without going through the three party talks and to have the DPRK-US bilateral talks there. The DPRK's proposal is now under discussion.⁶

During the late August 2003 first round of Six-Party Talks, the US and DPRK delegations did meet for approximately thirty minutes in a corner of the room used for plenary talks. However, the plenary talks did not go well and, unable to reach agreement on a joint statement, Chinese Vice Minister Wang Yi was forced to issue a chairman's statement:

The major result coming out of the talks is that all parties share a consensus with the following main points:

- All parties are willing to work for peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula through dialog, and to safeguard peace and stability and bring about lasting peace on the Peninsula;
- All parties maintain that while a nuclear-free Peninsula should be realized, the DPRK's security concerns and other areas should be considered and solved;
- All parties agree, in principle, to explore and decide on an overall plan for solving the nuclear issue in stages and through synchronous or parallel implementation in a just and reasonable manner;
- All parties agree that in the process of peace talks, any action and word that may escalate or intensify the situation should be avoided;
- All parties agree that dialog should continue to establish trust, reduce differences, and broaden common ground;
- All parties agree that the six-party talks should continue, and the date and venue for the next round of talks should be decided through diplomatic channels as soon as possible.⁷

A couple of days later Wang was asked by reporters in Manila what he thought the biggest obstacle to achieving a next round of Beijing talks was. He said, "The American policy towards DPRK—this is the main problem we are facing."⁸ Continuing its active shuttle diplomacy, Beijing attempted to send its number two, Wu Bangguo, to Pyongyang to convince the North Koreans to continue the multilateral process but was twice asked to postpone his visit until after 20 October 2003. Pyongyang did not want to be pressured by Beijing before it knew the results of President Bush's Asia trip associated with the Bangkok Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting.

On 19 October, President Bush said that he was willing to put in writing the things that he had been saying about not invading North Korea, or, in other words, he was willing to examine a possible

multilateral, written security guarantee. The predictable, but not authoritative response from Pyongyang came on 21 October in the form of a KCNA broadcast commentary stating, “It would be a laughing matter, which isn’t worth even a glance, if the United States gives us a certain security assurance within the multilateral framework in return for an end to our nuclear weapons program.”⁹

By 25 October, KCNA carried the authoritative response of the DPRK foreign ministry to a question regarding President Bush’s intentions. The spokesman said, “We are ready to consider Bush’s remarks on the ‘written assurances of non-aggression’ if they are based on the intention to co-exist with the DPRK and aimed to play a positive role in realizing the proposal for a package solution on the principle of simultaneous action.”¹⁰

That North Korean statement put Pyongyang in a position to accept Wu Bangguo’s request to accede to another round of Six-Party Talks in Beijing without being seen as giving in to Chinese pressure. Beijing began a new round of shuttle diplomacy in November in an attempt to create consensus for a joint statement that would be issued at the conclusion of the next round of talks. After failing to get consensus for a joint statement at the conclusion of the August talks, Beijing wanted to ensure success in advance of the next round. The process came to an abrupt halt on 12 December when Vice President Cheney is said to have intervened to insist specific language be inserted in the text of the draft joint statement. He is purported to have said, “I have been charged by the president with making sure that none of the tyrannies in the world are negotiated with. We don’t negotiate with evil; we defeat it,” effectively killing any chance that a statement could be agreed upon.¹¹ It took another two months before Pyongyang agreed to participate in the 25–28 February 2004 talks.

Six-Party Talks—round two

The first two days of the February round of talks appeared to take on a more positive tone, but on the third day talks again began to break down over the specifics of a new Chinese proposal for a joint statement. The plenary session on day three broke up after an hour and a half, with the remainder of Friday and Saturday devoted to trying to salvage a statement that could highlight the success of the talks. In the end, there was no agreement on a joint statement and Beijing had to, once again, issue a Chairman’s Statement, which included the following elements:

3. The Parties agreed that the second round of the six-party talks had launched the discussion on substantive issues, which was beneficial and positive, and that the attitudes of all parties were serious in the discussion. While differences remained, the Parties enhanced their understanding of each other’s position through the talks.
4. The Parties expressed their commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free Korean Peninsula, and to resolving the nuclear issue peacefully through dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and consultation on an equal basis, so as to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and the region at large.
5. The Parties expressed their willingness to coexist peacefully. They agreed to take coordinated steps to address the nuclear issue and the related concerns.
6. The Parties agreed to continue the process of the talks and agreed in principle to hold the third round of the six-party talks in Beijing no later than the end of the second quarter of 2004. They agreed to set up a working group in preparation for the plenary session. The terms of reference of the working group will be established through diplomatic channels.¹²

After the conclusion of the February 2004 round of talks, the Russian head of delegation said, “If the negotiations run idly—there has been no practical movement forward so far—the situation will assume a dangerous nature,” and “if the negotiating process is stalled, a number of countries could take certain measures against North Korea, for example, a blockade, which could further exacerbate the political and even military atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula.”¹³

In an article in the 4 March 2004 edition of the *Washington Post*, President Bush is cited as having “instructed the US delegation to say the administration’s continued support of the six-party process rested on North Korea’s commitment to completely, verifiably and irreversibly dismantle its program.” The article went on to highlight the implication that all options were still on the table—a not so subtle threat that military action was possible if Pyongyang did not admit to its HEU programme and commit to dismantling both its plutonium and HEU nuclear weapons programmes.

In an apparent effort to keep the prospects alive, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, head of the Chinese delegation, said all parties should make concerted efforts in three areas:

First, they should carefully study key standpoints of substantial issues and solutions proposed during the talks, from which they could summarize positive factors.

Second, a working group should be formed as soon as possible to prepare for the third round talks.

Third, the parties should maintain a peaceful environment for the process of talks and avoid words or actions that might intensify differences or provoke other parties.¹⁴

Six-Party Talk—round three

The third round of Six-Party Talks in late June 2004 were shaping up as a critical session. The South Koreans were making progress in their own talks with Pyongyang, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi had made a second trip to Pyongyang and the Chinese had made public comments about the need for additional US flexibility in dealing with North Korea. Had the June round of talks followed the pattern of the previous two sessions many observers believed it could have been the end of the multilateral process. However, concerns within the US administration over continued critical world opinion, the prospect that North Korea could become an election year issue and, most importantly, the personal intervention by Prime Minister Koizumi with President Bush during the G8 meeting in early June 2004 at Sea Island, Georgia, led the United States to make its first concrete proposal to resolve the nuclear crisis during the third round of talks.

While Pyongyang eventually rejected the specifics of the US proposal, it initially declared that positive progress had been made. In testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly described the US proposal as one in which the United States envisioned a short preparatory period of three months to prepare for the dismantlement and removal of the DPRK’s nuclear programmes. In this initial period, according to Kelly, the DPRK would provide a complete listing of all its nuclear activities, and cease operations of all its nuclear activities; permit the securing of all fissile material and the monitoring of all fuel rods; and permit the publicly disclosed and observable disablement of all nuclear weapons/weapon components and key centrifuge parts. Kelly emphasized that North Korea’s declaration would need to include its uranium enrichment programme and existing weapons. Under this proposal, other parties would take corresponding steps as the DPRK carried out its commitments. One of the provisions of the US proposal

that Pyongyang found troubling (among many) was the exclusion of the United States from taking part in the provision of heavy fuel oil to North Korea once Pyongyang had agreed to the approach outlined by Kelly.¹⁵

For its part, Pyongyang, through its spokesman, said, “clearly expressing once again that the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is our ultimate goal, we once again made it clear that if the United States gives up its hostile policy against us through action, we will transparently renounce all our nuclear weapons-related programs. We presented a concrete plan on nuclear freeze, on the premise that if [sic] the United States withdraws the CVID [Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Dismantlement] demand and accepts our demand for reward.”¹⁶ The third round ended with both the United States and the DPRK having made proposals, but without a serious discussion of either.

Six-Party Talks—the future

The relatively positive response from other members of the talks that the United States received for tabling a proposal, along with an uncertain outcome of the US presidential election, probably led Pyongyang to rebuff attempts by other participants to convene the fourth round of talks by the end of September 2004 as agreed upon during the third round of talks.

But according to Pyongyang the single biggest obstacle that needed to be overcome in order for Pyongyang to return to Six-Party Talks was “rectifying Washington’s broken promise coming out of the June talks”. Pyongyang believed that Washington had deliberately stopped using the term “Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Dismantlement” during the third round in favour of a different formulation that Pyongyang interpreted as a deliberate signal which, in turn, prompted it to initially declare the talks positive. When the terminology was publicly reiterated by US officials after the third round of talks, Pyongyang claimed that the foundation for agreeing to the September round no longer existed.¹⁷

In December 2004, Pyongyang announced, “the DPRK intends to follow with patience the course of policy-shaping by the second-term of the Bush Administration. It is useless to hold talks, even a hundred times, without producing any substantial results. If the United States persist in this wrong stance, it would be hard to resume the talks. The United States should take a confidence-building attitude to making a policy switchover, which is the key to the settlement of the nuclear issue.”¹⁸ It appears that Pyongyang is wary of the multilateral process in general and is focused instead almost exclusively on the policies, actions and declarations of the United States.

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DPRK participation in the multilateral process seems designed to placate Beijing and prevent Washington from taking a more aggressive and unilateral approach to North Korea. As long as Pyongyang continues to pronounce its willingness to participate in the Chinese-hosted process and a willingness to reach a peacefully negotiated settlement of the nuclear crisis, it is unlikely that many, if any, of the other participants would be prepared to side with the United States in a confrontational approach toward the DPRK—regardless of the lack of actual progress in the talks. As bleak as it may seem because of the unconstrained public rhetoric and the length of time between sessions, all indications point to the convening of a fourth round of talks. Pyongyang’s clearest signal that it was ready to return to talks came 14 January when KCNA announced that North Korea was willing to resume the Six-Party Talks, explaining that Pyongyang was stressing the need to take a future-oriented approach toward improving bilateral relations with Washington, instead of repeating “the unpleasant past”.¹⁹

Things took a sharp turn for the worse on 10 February 2005 when the DPRK Foreign Ministry released a statement²⁰ saying that it had closely followed the development of President Bush’s second

term cabinet, along with the remarks by the President and Secretary of State Rice, and determined that the true intention of the administration was aimed at regime change in North Korea. The statement went on to announce that the DPRK was suspending participation in the Six-Party Talks for an indefinite period and that it had manufactured nuclear weapons.

The announcement caught most North Korea watchers off-guard. One interpretation of the move by Pyongyang to temporarily withdraw from multilateral talks suggests that the recent public disclosure that the DPRK was the source of a shipment of uranium hexafluoride to Libya and the briefing of that information to Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo by a senior White House staffer caused Pyongyang to assess that the next round of multilateral talks would be potentially embarrassing and therefore postponed. The declaration that it had manufactured nuclear weapons was seen in the context of the recent increase in strong US rhetoric towards Iran—the other member of the original axis of evil. Pyongyang had to calculate the risk of angering the Chinese against what they saw as a need to eliminate any ambiguity about their nuclear weapons programme and the benefit they believed it would bring them as a potential deterrent against US military action.

Conclusion

The lack of a permanent multilateral structure for security dialogue in North-East Asia and the lack of a successful precedent involving the DPRK in multilateral talks contribute to the likelihood that this iteration of multilateral talks may well fail. The period of time between sessions of the Six-Party Talks and the lack of progress suggest that there is insufficient common ground or commitment by the key participants (the United States and the DPRK) for resolution of the crisis in the foreseeable future.

If the talks resume, there exists the strong possibility that either the DPRK or the United States will become frustrated by ‘talks for the sake of talks’ without meaningful progress and the process will collapse. Either the DPRK will simply refuse to meet, thus effectively ending the process (as it did with the Four-Party Talks in 1999) or the United States will grow weary and attempt to force a deadline for progress that will have the effect of terminating the talks. The most likely US deadline at this point appears to coincide with KEDO’s suspension of the light-water reactor project. The Executive Board of KEDO suspended work on the project in 2003 and extended the suspension in late 2004 until December 2005. If the Six-Party Talks have not produced a breakthrough by then, the United States most likely would seek formal termination of the project, KEDO and the Agreed Framework.

Failure of the Six-Party Talks risks the emergence of a new status quo in North-East Asia: a permanent nuclear (declared or otherwise) North Korea. The longer-term reaction by Japan, the Republic of Korea and the United States is speculative at this point, but unlikely to result in a consensus confrontational approach toward Pyongyang. The ramifications for the US–ROK alliance should Washington attempt to enlist the cooperation of Seoul for a more aggressive policy and be rebuffed is profound.

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In the face of likely failure of the multilateral process currently underway, it would seem prudent for the participants to review the substantial track record of DPRK participation and accommodation in bilateral negotiations with both the United States and the Republic of Korea and modify the Six-Party Talks accordingly.

One way to do this would be for the United States to enter into a serious and sustained bilateral dialogue with Pyongyang as a complementary component of the six-party process. All of the other six-party participants have urged the United States to do so for the past two years. In this scenario, as the United States begins to shape what may ultimately result in a resolution to the crisis in its complementary

negotiations with North Korea under the auspices of the six-party process, it would continue to consult with its close allies South Korea and Japan. Washington's coordinated policy approach to North Korea would be enhanced by Tokyo and Seoul's own bilateral meetings with Pyongyang. To ensure the multilateral nature of the end result remains viable, actual decisions reached on a tentative basis between the United States and North Korea would be fully vetted and approved in final form in a six-party setting. This arrangement would maintain the active participation by all parties and ensure an international component in the dismantlement and verification of the North's nuclear programme. It would also create international ownership in the implementation of security guarantees and economic assistance that might be agreed upon as part of the final settlement.

This two-pronged approach has the best chance of forging a near-term negotiated settlement through an extensive and mutually supportive bilateral component and the best chance to ensure its implementation through a multilateral component of guarantees and monitoring.

Given the track record of the past two years, the prognosis for successful resolution of the nuclear crisis through the current framework of multilateral talks is not very bright. However, the appointment of Ambassador Chris R. Hill to replace James A. Kelly as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs and US chief negotiator to the Six-Party Talks offers a glimmer of hope. Hill is an experienced negotiator who brings with him a level of credibility and trust from the White House and the new US Secretary of State that will be invaluable if a peaceful negotiated resolution to the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula is possible.

Notes

1. It was US policy under the Bush Administration from June 2001 when its North Korea policy review was announced until the confrontation over highly enriched uranium in October 2002 to seek serious (bilateral) talks with the DPRK.
2. D. Oberdoerfer, 1997, *The Two Koreas: a Contemporary History*, Addison-Wesley, p. 262.
3. *Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula*, 20 January 1992, at < www.ceip.org/files/projects/npp/resources/koreadenuclearization.htm > .
4. Portions of this section have been previously published by the author in R.C. Bush, S. Yanagi and K. Scott (eds), *Brookings Northeast Asia Survey 2003–2004*, Washington, Brookings.
5. The New York channel originally referred to business-like communications between the US Department of State's Director of Korean Affairs and the DPRK's Deputy Permanent Representative at its UN Mission in New York. This channel was later upgraded and involved the passage of government communications between the DPRK's UN Ambassador and the US Special Envoy for Negotiations with the DPRK.
6. *Korean Central News Agency*, Pyongyang, 1 August 2003.
7. Press Briefing following the conclusion of the first round of Six-Party Talks, Beijing, 29 August 2003.
8. *Manila Chinese Commercial News*, 2 September 2003.
9. *Yonhap News*, 22 October 2003 report of a Korean Central News Agency broadcast of 21 October 2003.
10. *Korean Central News Agency*, Pyongyang, 25 October 2003.
11. *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 20 December 2003.
12. *Xinhua News Agency*, Beijing, 28 February 2004.
13. *ITAR-TASS*, Moscow, 29 February 2004.
14. *Xinhua News Agency*, Beijing, 5 March 2004, at < www.china.org.cn/english/international/89318.htm > .
15. Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate's Hearing on a Report on the Latest Round of Six-Way Talks Regarding Nuclear Weapons in North Korea, 15 July 2004.
16. DPRK Spokesman's 25 June news conference at Six-Way Talks in Beijing, at < www.xignite.com/xWorldNews.aspx?count=100&category=Korean%20&criteria=5&articleid=KPP20040625000125 > .
17. Conversation between the author and a senior DPRK official, 24 September 2004.
18. *Xinhuanet*, 14 December 2004, citing a *Rodong Sinmun* commentary.
19. *Korean Central News Agency*, Pyongyang, 14 January 2005.
20. *Korean Central News Agency*, Pyongyang, 10 February 2005.