

NEW APPROACH TO SECURITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA: BREAKING THE GRIDLOCK WORKSHOP, Washington DC, Oct 9-10, 2012

Session 2: Regional Framework for Comprehensive Security Settlement: Does it Work?

Dealing with North Korea – A possible alternative approach

Steve Bosworth

Current Situation -- For the past several years, our strategy for dealing with the North Korean nuclear threat centered on CVID (Comprehensive, Verifiable, Irreversible, Denuclearization). When North Korea broke out of the Six Party negotiated nuclear arrangements in 2009, we learned that what we had believed to be irreversible was in fact not. North Korea was able to reprocess nuclear fuel rods and add to their plutonium inventory.

In November 2010, we learned that North Korea was far along the path of uranium enrichment as an alternative to the plutonium program which we believed – rightly – had been ended with the shut down of the nuclear reactor at Yongbion in 2007-08. The reality is not only that North Korea can credibly claim an enrichment capability, but also that by its very nature enrichment, in contrast to a plutonium program, is very difficult if not impossible to verify in terms of denuclearization commitments.

For the US as well as for South Korea and Japan, an inability to verify a halt to enrichment activities means that it will be difficult if not completely impossible to obtain legislative branch support for an agreement.

CVID therefore has now become a largely unattainable goal.

Alternative Strategy

There are currently now negotiations or even discussions underway with North Korea. Once the upcoming elections in South Korea and the United States have taken place, those two governments and the Six Party partners are going to have to decide whether and how to reengage with Pyongyang. North Korea itself needs to engage with the outside world. They desperately need the economic benefit they believe will accompany engagement, and while there will be some on the outside who counsel just ignoring Pyongyang, in fact this is not a viable strategy. They have ways of demanding our attention through provocations of all kinds. Moreover, while CVID may no longer be an achievable goal, we will have a strong interest in at least constraining the North's nuclear programs.

First, we should attempt to gain Pyongyang's adherence to a renewed commitment not to conduct further nuclear or missile tests. Such a commitment was of course the core of the ill-fated agreement of February 29, 2012. There will be a cost to such an agreement.

<http://nautilus.org/projects/by-name/korea-japan-nwfz/workshops/new-approach-to-security-in-northeast-asia-breaking-the-gridlock/>