


Discussion of “Dealing With the North Korean Nuclear Threat”

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Discussion of "Dealing With the North Korean Nuclear Threat"

by Don Oberdorfer

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I. Introduction

The following are comments on the essay "Dealing with the North Korean Nuclear Threat" an by Don Oberdorfer, Distinguished Journalist in Residence and adjunct professor of international relations at the Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, which appeared as Policy Forum Online 05-49A: June 15th, 2005.

This includes comments by Niall Michelsen, member of the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs at Western Carolina University, and Sung Chul Jung, Masters student at Dep. of International Relations of Seoul National University an associate editor of Korea Journal at Korean National Commission for UNESCO.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on contentious topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Comments on "Dealing with the North Korean Nuclear Threat"

A. Comments by Niall Michelsen

I enjoyed reading Prof. Oberdorfer's article. One element of the Bush Administration's policy has me puzzled. The six-party talks have an intuitive appeal as it brings all the major regional players to the table to resolve a regional issue. However, since the talks have a specific goal from the US perspective, i.e., elimination of the North Korean nuclear weapons programs, it seems essential to coordinate the negotiating positions of the other 4 parties. I have not heard of any joint talks between the US, South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. Without such talks and a resulting agreement, every party has an incentive to pass-the-buck to another party in order to avoid the costs of taking a hard line. Sure, each of the 5 want to avoid a nuclear North Korea but that only begins the negotiations among them as to who will bear the costs.

B. Comments by Sung Chul JUNG

I agree with the Oberdorfer's view on the North Korea nuclear crises, especially on emphasizing the complicated history regarding the Korean Peninsula after the 19th century. What interests me most is the two Koreas' development of nuclear weapons in the 1970s (South Korea), in the 1990s, and now (North Korea). In other words, North Korea replicated South Korea's actions of 30 years ago to some extent. Thus, we can get a lesson from the history.

After the Nixon doctrine and the withdrawal of the 7th division from the Korean peninsula, South Korea was afraid of the full-fledged disengagement of the U.S. from Asia and started to develop nuclear weapons in a secret way. As in the case of South Korea, North Korea has perceived a serious threat since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communist Parties in Eastern Europe and started to develop nuclear weapons. However, South Korea could get some security insurance from the U.S. who was worried about Asian allies' suspicions of the U.S. though an outsider in Washington politics, President Carter initiated the U.S. ground force withdrawal policy from South Korea which, at last, was suspended in 1979.

How can we resolve North Korea's nuclear crisis? I think that we have to lower the threat perceived by North Korea for last 20 years and this job can be achieved by engaging Kim Jong-Il and North

Korean leaders in international society as Oberdorfer suggested. We can find a clue for how to engage North Korean leaders in the cases of two North Korean cities, Sinuiju and Gaesung. In 2002, North Korea disclosed its plan of the capitalist investment zone in Sinuiju, but its plan failed after the chief of the zone, Yang Bin had been arrested for corruption by the Chinese government. Two years later, North Korea accepted South Korea's plan, setting up factories in Gaesung and now South Koreans use products made in Gaesung in their daily lives. North Korean leaders have to accept capitalist system for revitalizing economy, but this change can lead to the collapse of their regime. They solve this dilemma by opening the small zones such as Sinuiju and Gaesung, but they cannot manage this open policy without other countries' help. Other countries, including the U.S., have to help North Korea's get out of their cave by giving security assurance and economic aid. This will be our first, but meaningful step in engaging North Korea as well as resolving North Korea's nuclear crises.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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Nautilus Institute

2342 Shattuck Ave. #300, Berkeley, CA 94704 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org