

Policy Forum 05-83A: Meeting the North's Demands

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Recommended Citation

"Policy Forum 05-83A: Meeting the North's Demands", NAPSNet Policy Forum, October 13, 2005, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/meeting-the-norths-demands/>

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Policy Forum Online 05-83A: October 13th, 2005

"Meeting the North's Demands"

By Ha Young-sun

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I. Introduction

Ha Young-sun, Professor of International Relations at Seoul National University, writes, "If we were to have progress in the discussions on implementing the joint statement in the fifth round of the six-party talks ... the key challenge is to make the contradictory relationship between the pillar of nuclear abandonment, which Washington prioritizes, and the pillar of safeguarding the regime,

which Pyongyang ultimately wants, complementary."

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II. Essay by Ha Young-sun

- Meeting the North's Demands
by Ha Young-sun

Ten years ago, I visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum with "Hiroshima Notes" by Kenzaburo Oe, the second Japanese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, in my hands. The purpose of the visit was not sightseeing. On Oct. 21, 1994, Pyongyang and Washington had signed the Geneva Agreed Framework to resolve the North Korean nuclear threat.

I was rather excited at the prospect that I would be freed from my 20-year-long research on the nuclear tensions on the Korean Peninsula that began in 1975. The trip to Hiroshima at the beginning of 1995 was a farewell to the research on the North Korean nuclear project. However, I was mistaken. I have not yet parted with the North Korean nuclear issue; the relationship has continued steadily for the last 10 years.

On Sept. 19 of this year, the participants in the six-party talks in Beijing issued a joint statement for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem. Rather than rejoicing that I would finally be freed from the nuclear issue, I was more concerned about what we should do to prevent the joint statement from repeating the fate of the 1994 Agreed Framework. Why did the hard-earned Agreed Framework turn into a mere scrap of paper 10 years ago? I looked up the old document and reviewed it carefully. What was noticeable was the surprising structural similarity between the 1994 Agreed Framework and the Beijing six-party joint statement.

The four pillars of abandonment of the nuclear program, economic assistance, relationship normalization and establishment of a peace system, which were the basic structure of the joint statement of the fourth round of the six-party talks, could be found in the 1994 Agreed Framework as well. As soon as a document that guaranteed the offer of light water reactors and alternative energy was submitted, Pyongyang was to freeze its graphite-moderated reactors and related facilities, and by the time the light water reactors were completed, Pyongyang was to completely give up its nuclear program, pursue full normalization of economic and political relationships, and work together for the peace and security of the denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

The dream agreement was never realized and ended up as a daydream. The first step for a realistic implementation of the 2005 joint statement should begin from a comprehensive analysis on the causes of the collapse of the 1994 Agreed Framework. Heavy oil aid had begun and the construction of the light water reactor was underway under the supervision of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization. Many efforts to normalize the diplomatic relationship were made, and opening liaison offices between the United States and North Korea was considered. However, Pyongyang still could not give up the last card of its nuclear program. From Pyongyang's perspective, it could not secure its foremost purpose of safeguarding its political system under the leadership of Kim Jong-il with a passive, written guarantee of security according to the Agreed Framework.

The historic lesson from the nuclear issue is clear. To build the denuclearized Korean Peninsula, economic assistance and diplomatic normalization are important. However, Pyongyang will

ultimately provide the pillar of nuclear abandonment only if the pillar of a peace system is prepared as a solid material guarantee to safeguard its political leadership. The core of the problem is the basic content of a material guarantee for a peace system that Pyongyang has proposed for the last 10 years. The direct threat to the North Korean leadership is not the South but the United States. Therefore, the focus of a peace system on the Korean Peninsula is not the inter-Korean relationship, but the dynamics between Pyongyang and Washington. What Pyongyang considers threats are the U.S. policy aimed at overthrowing the North Korean regime, the U.S. forces stationed in Korea and the South Korea-U.S. military alliance. It is hard to find a realistic way to provide what Pyongyang demands as a material guarantee of a peace system.

While the basic stance of North Korea has not changed much for the last 10 years from the 1994 Agreed Framework to the 2005 joint statement, the United States is approaching the North Korean nuclear issue from a completely new point of view after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. While Washington had viewed the North Korean nuclear issue from the perspective of nuclear nonproliferation policy in the past, it is now tackling the matter as an extension of its domestic security to prevent realistic threats from weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. The Bush administration is, in effect, considering the pillar of nuclear abandonment as a foundation for the other three pillars. Therefore, it is not likely that the plan of pursuing the freezing and abandoning of the nuclear program while constructing a light water reactor will be accepted.

If we were to have progress in the discussions on implementing the joint statement in the fifth round of the six-party talks scheduled in November, the discussion of economic assistance and relationship normalization is certainly important. However, the key challenge is to make the contradictory relationship between the pillar of nuclear abandonment, which Washington prioritizes, and the pillar of safeguarding the regime, which Pyongyang ultimately wants, complementary. I am taking my students on a field trip to Nagasaki in December.

I wonder if I can finally say goodbye to my study of the North Korean nuclear issue with the trip to the other Japanese city where an atomic bomb was dropped.

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.

Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
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