



Policy Forum 07-049: Process of Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula and the Challenges



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By An Song Nam

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I. Introduction

An Song Nam, the Executive Director at the DPRK's Institute of Disarmament and Peace in Pyongyang, delivered this presentation at the annual Asia-Pacific Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur in early June, with only minor edits. While presented prior to the recent "breakthrough," it still

provides a useful North Korean perspective on the broader Korean Peninsula denuclearization issue and some of the challenges that may lie ahead.

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. Article by An Song Nam

- "Process of Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula and the Challenges"

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1. The nature and origin of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula

The U.S. hostile policy against the DPRK, lasting more than half a century, is directly responsible for triggering the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.

The U.S. had planned to launch nuclear strikes several times targeting the DPRK during the Korean War and in the post-war period. It is a well-known fact that the U.S. has threatened and blackmailed the DPRK with tactical nuclear weapons which the U.S. massively deployed in South Korea after the Korean War, violating the Armistice Agreement.

The nuclear issue between the DPRK and the U.S. was aggravated in early 1990's when the U.S. intensified military attempts to stifle the DPRK under the pretext of the alleged "nuclear suspicion" which did not exist at all. Especially, since the advent of the Bush administration, the nuclear issue between to DPRK and U.S. took a more difficult and complicated dimension.

2. Process of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula

The Six-Part Talks and "Sept. 19 Joint Statement"

The Six-Party Talks that started on the DPRK's positive initiative in August 2003 were held several times for more than two years, repeatedly going through twists and turns. The talks, however, proved fruitless and unproductive due to the conflicting stands among the parties concerned, contrary to the unanimous expectation of the international community toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Pyongyang has approached the talks with magnanimity, proceeding from the principled, fair, and aboveboard stand to achieve the general goal of the denuclearization of the Peninsula at any cost. As a result, the Sept. 19 Joint Statement was adopted at the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing in 2005.

The joint statement reflects the consistent stand of the DPRK on the settlement of the nuclear issue between the DPRK and the U.S. and, at the same time, the commitments of the U.S., South Korea, and other concerned countries responsible for denuclearizing the whole of the Peninsula. [note: in the DPRK version, the ROK is referred to as south Korea with a small "s."]

The six parties agreed to take steps to implement phase by phase the points agreed on in the joint statement in accordance with the principle of "action for action" in the days ahead.

The financial sanction imposed by the U.S. and the Feb. 13 Agreement

We can't say that the talks went without any hitch even after the Sept. 19 Joint Statement was

adopted. In the Joint Statement, the DPRK committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs if the U.S. switches over its hostile policy against the DPRK to a policy of peaceful coexistence with the latter.

But the U.S. applied financial sanctions against the DPRK within three days after the Joint Statement was made public to seek a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. We can say the U.S. sanctions against the DPRK are a miniature of its hostile policy. This practice has clearly proved that the U.S. has no will of giving up its hostile policy against the DPRK.

The confrontation between the DPRK and the U.S. over the issue of financial sanctions has brought the Six-Party Talks aimed at a peaceful solution to the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula to a standstill again.

The third phase of the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks took place in Beijing from Feb. 8-13, 2007. At the talks the parties agreed to take steps for "initial actions for the implementation of the Joint Statement." The Feb. 13 agreement means that the process of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula turned its course from the "word for word" commitment to the phase of "action for action."

The DPRK, for its part, faithfully implemented its obligations under the Feb. 13 agreement. It allowed the visit of the director general of the IAEA to the DPRK last March and participated in the meetings of five working groups to be held within 30 days after its publication.

We are now finding that the step for the next phased action is delayed because the U.S. has not kept its commitment to unfreeze the DPRK's fund in Banco Delta Asia in Macao within 30 days after the publication of the Feb. 13 Agreement.

Pyongyang attaches so much importance to the lifting of the financial sanctions against the DPRK because this issue serves as a yardstick showing whether the U.S. is willing to drop its hostile policy toward the DPRK or not.

3. What stands in the way of the denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula?

This process of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula is embroiled with several challenges.

What stands most is the U.S. hostile policy against the DRRK

It has been so far considered that the U.S. has not shown its consistency in its stand toward the process.

The U.S. made it difficult to resolve the issue by throwing a wet blanket over the process and by inviting a new controversial issue in the talks at a time when the Six-Party Talks were going smoothly and were about to make a new agreement. All told, this shows that the U.S. has no political will to switch over from its hostile policy to a policy of peaceful coexistence.

Such a military threat as large-scale joint military exercises conducted by the U.S. on the Korean Peninsula is another challenge aggravating the situation on the Korean Peninsula, and puts a fifth wheel in the denuclearization process.

Large-scale joint military exercises such as Reception, State, On-Moving Integrated Exercise (RSOI) and Foal Eagle joint military exercises conducted annually by the U.S. and South Korea are very dangerous provocations which cast a shadow over the implementation of an agreement adopted with much effort at the Six-Party Talks.

This makes Pyongyang suspect an ulterior aim sought by the U.S. in talking about "reconciliation and improved relations" and "peace and stability." Dialogue and war exercises cannot go together.

The armistice mechanism existing between the DPRK and U.S is yet another challenge threatening a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

The U.S. hostile policy and its nuclear threat against the DPRK, a cause for the nuclear issue between the DPRK and U.S., come out from the armistice mechanism, the structure of confrontation of the Cold War era. As long as this mechanism remains unchecked, we can't root out the cause of the nuclear issue.

The ceasefire mechanism stands as a stumbling block on the road of making the Korean Peninsula nuclear free. Thus, replacing the fragile ceasefire mechanism with a lasting peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula is an urgent issue which brooks no further delay.

Sanctions are only harmful to achieving the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

The U.S. sanctions are aimed at tarnishing the image of the DPRK and hindering its effort to deal with external economic relations. In essence, this is an act of gravely infringing upon the sovereignty and dignity of a dialogue partner.

This can be proved with fact that the U.S. has not come up with any hard evidence or smoking guns though it had enforced financial sanctions against the DPRK for over a one year period by invoking its domestic law rather than relevant international law. Lifting financial sanctions is not simply a technical issue of withdrawing some amounts of frozen fund.

This assumes a political character directly linking not only with the Six-Party Talks but also with the implementation of the Sept. 19 Joint Statement, and this becomes an acid test of weighing up any change of the U.S. policy toward the DPRK.

Sanctions and pressure can never be a solution. This is a serious lesson we had summed up in the past process of resolving the nuclear issue. What holds a key to speeding up the nuclear-free Korean Peninsula is for the U.S. to drop its hostile policy against the DPRK.

Through the Sept. 19, 2005 Joint Statement, the DPRK committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and the U.S. side, for its part, committed to peaceful coexistence with the DPRK. If the U.S. reneges on its commitment to peaceful coexistence with the DPRK, the Korean Peninsula will hold no prospect for denuclearization for an indefinite period.

4. DPRK's stand on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Pyongyang has a clear stand regarding a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. The denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula was President Kim Il-sung's last instruction and an ultimate goal of the DPRK. The DPRK remains unchanged in its will to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through dialogue and negotiations.

The DPRK clarified more than once that it would feel no need to possess even a single nuke when it is no longer exposed to the U.S. threat, after it has dropped its hostile policy toward the DPRK and confidence has been built between the two countries.

It may be remembered that the DPRK foreign ministry, through a statement by its spokesman on May 15, said that the work is now underway to remit the fund in Banco Delta Asia in Macao to DPRK's account in a third country. He also made it clear that the DPRK is ready to move to suspend

the operation of its nuclear facility pursuant to the Feb. 13 Agreement once the fund is remitted, immediately invite a working-level delegation of the IAEA, and have an in-depth discussion with the U.S. side on the measures to be taken after the suspension of the operation of the nuclear facility.

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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