

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR TO COMMEMORATE
**THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SEPTEMBER 19 JOINT STATEMENT
OF THE SIX-PARTY TALKS**

BEIJING 18/19 SEPTEMBER 2015

PRESENTATION FOR SESSION TWO:

The September 19 Joint Statement and the Lasting Peace and Stability of the Korean Peninsula

The comprehensive Joint Statement of September 19 2005 issued on the conclusion of the fourth round of Six-Party Talks, was regarded as being transformative to the cause of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. But those aspirations were dashed. No talks have taken place for seven years, North Korea's nuclear capability has been enhanced, and the DPRK has proved impervious to the ever-tougher sanctions imposed by the international community.

Some analysts have speculated that the agreement recently reached with Iran that would impose significant restrictions on that country's nuclear programme in return for the lifting of a range of sanctions, could open the door to negotiations with North Korea presumably through the vehicle of a resumed Six-Party Talks process. I am sceptical.

North Korea, unlike Iran, already has a nuclear weapon capability. And the sanctions imposed on North Korea appear not to have had at least to the same degree, the stifling effect on that country's economy, as they had on Iran's. What impact the Iran agreement may have on reported sharing of technical information on nuclear capability between the two countries is yet to be determined, and this could conceivably contribute to the further isolation of North Korea, but isolation seems not to have unduly concerned Pyongyang. Indeed it could be said that helps to keep at bay external influences that might be considered detrimental.

How then can we break through what seems an impenetrable impasse? I would argue that there is a way forward but that it would require a radical change in approach.

The DPRK's bottom line is regime survival. Pyongyang appears convinced that a nuclear weapons capability is intrinsic to deterring the United States from trying to orchestrate the toppling of the regime, even though Washington has emphatically ruled that out.

So how do we move forward firstly to ease tensions across the DMZ, and ultimately to realise the goal of elevating the Armistice to a peace treaty?

It is difficult to envisage a resumption of the Six-Party Talks process should other Parties continue to insist that the DPRK must commit to the

abandonment of its nuclear weapons programme before another round of talks takes place. That is a desirable stipulation. Many members of the international community including my own country are keen to see a complete ban on nuclear weapons. But desirable or not it takes us no further forward. It does not break the cycle of recrimination characterised by periods of escalating tension. And unless very carefully managed tensions can quickly turn into crises.

I suggest that if talks are to have any chance of succeeding it will be necessary to alleviate the DPRK's security concerns, however misguided they may appear to others. What is needed is to find a creative means of appealing to the DPRK's self-reliance philosophy that is the country's driving force.

The main impediment to resuming the Six-Party Talks is the pre-condition that the DPRK commit to abandoning its nuclear weapons programme. Resuming the talks without that pre-condition would provide an opportunity for the United States once again to reaffirm that it has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK and that it is certainly not the intention of the pivot to Asia.

The United States might then offer to provide a security guarantee to that effect and work to normalise ties as it was prepared to during the 2005 talks. But that concession should be matched by Pyongyang which should be required to agree to develop and maintain a constructive dialogue with the ROK and to stop threatening to use its nuclear capability against other Six Party members.

Either within the framework of the Six-Party Talks, or jointly, the United States and China might convene a meeting to examine ways of helping the DPRK rebuild its economy through carefully targeted investment and economic assistance.

It would be necessary to do this in such a way that it does not carry the heavy baggage of dependency in the North Korean mind-set. The aim would be to give the DPRK confidence that it can build an economic model that would improve the welfare of its citizens and over time diminish the importance to the North of reliance on its nuclear weapons capability. It would have another very important consequence of reducing the overall cost of eventual unification.

Given the many complex issues confronting the North-east Asian region, a case could also be made once the Six-Party Talks have resumed for re-shaping those talks into a North-east Asia security dialogue. It is a concept much discussed but never implemented. Encouraging the DPRK to participate in such a dialogue would give it a stake in attempts to resolve strategic issues. That would require a sea change in Pyongyang's approach to the region, but it is a goal worth considering.

I acknowledge that there can be no guarantees that the ideas I have suggested would work in practice, that there will be significant discomfort

about parking the nuclear issue for the time being, and that they have inherent risks. But there are mounting risks from adhering to the status quo.

Unless we help North Korea to help itself the risk is that tension could quickly escalate to conflict whether the result of calculation or miscalculation. That could have profound consequences for the whole Asia-Pacific community.

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