

Dismantling North Korea of its Nuclear Capability: When It Is Happening?

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Abstract

With the growing flexibility of America's stance, the window of opportunity has never opened up more widely than nowadays. But is that leading to North Korea's nuclear dismantlement? The author argues it is much likely that we still have to come the long way before the DPRK could give up its nuclear capability. This paper firstly offers a brief view on the recent progress of the 6 party talks and then reveals the uncertainty of DPRK's real intention which exposes the vulnerability of the multi-national talks. Thus, it is suggested that the most important task for the U.S., China, Japan, South Korea and Russia to address is how to press the DPRK hard for making the full clarity of its intention and nuclear activities including the alleged nuclear proliferation to Syria. Such clarity will be able to substantiate the "rewarding" plan and help paving the way toward nuclear dismantlement.

By far, 2007 has witnessed a productive headway with the 6 party talks. DPRK's nuclear disablement in Yongbyun complex is almost through, and its nuclear declaration will be due by 31 December, 2007. A couple of notable events, among which are February 13 document, October 3 agreement, Christopher Hill's visit to the DPRK in June and his second visit in December, broke the impasse created by Pyongyang's dangerous brinkmanship strategy of testing nuclear bomb in October of 2006, and its erratic refusal to abandoning its nuclear capability in the exchange of a package of deals with regards to economic aids, peace treaty and normalized relationship. There is no doubt that the tradeoff is still very high so long as DPRK can dramatically change the mind and make the decision for a sound direction. With the growing flexibility of America's stance, the window of opportunity has never been opened up more widely than now. But the amount at stake remains terribly high because no one knows the real intentions of Kim Jong Il. Will he continue to use the "salami approach"

to play with other parties, or just attempt to maximize his gains from his nuclear leverage alone? This question remains unanswered. The uncertainty of DPRK's real intention explicitly exposes the vulnerability of current proceedings in the 6 party talks. Though the disablement is going successfully thus far, the multi-national talks could be stalled or even deadly if Kim Jong Il loses his temper once again. Therefore, while the international society should feel encouraged for nuclear disablement, it can hardly envision that the nuclear disarming of DPRK will happen accordingly. To be honest, the 2007 establishment for the Yongbyon shutdown and disablement did not lay down a keystone for the roadmap of the future. There remains no room for us to cherish optimism for the success of *nuclear* dismantlement in the foreseeable future. Ongoing nuclear disabling process in Yongbyon does not automatically mean that DPRK will resort to nuclear disablement quickly and steadfastly, following nuclear dismantlement in 2008. Conversely, other events, paralleling the 6 parties talks, might add to Pyongyang's hesitation to embrace denuclearization even if nuclear disablement is to be successfully achieved soon. It is more likely that we still have a long way to go before the DPRK will give up its nuclear capability.

At the moment, the most important task that the U.S., China, Japan, South Korea and Russia are envisaging is not how to revel in nuclear disablement and following "rewarding" to the North, but how to strongly press DPRK to express with full clarity about its suspected HEU program and nuclear proliferation to Syria. The abduction issue should also be properly addressed. Such clarity is completely necessary to unveil DPRK's real intentions, to substantiate the future rewarding plan, and to help pave the way for bridging nuclear disablement and nuclear dismantlement.

What has been done in 2007: A Quick Review

On February 13, 2007, after 17 months of deadlock at the 6 party talks on ending North Korean nuclear weapons, China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea and the United States adopted an "action plan" for the implementation of the September 2005 "Joint Statement" among the parties.¹ This was not a small step

¹ The February 13 Action Plan establishes a 60 day initial phase during which DPRK is to shut down and seal its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, invite inspectors from the IAEA to verify and monitor the status of the facilities, and "discuss with other parties a list of all its nuclear programs as described in the Joint Statement, including plutonium extracted from used fuel rods, that would be abandoned pursuant to the Joint Statement." See U.S. Department of State, North Korea: February 13 Denuclearization Action Plan, at www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2007/February/80479.html.

forward given that the four years stalemate stymieing the multilateral negotiation, and an astonishing starting point, where further efforts to resolve the standoff can arise from. Since then, the gradual debacle of diplomatic deadlock followed, and the U.S. illustrated a rare flexibility, dramatically coupled with DPRK's scant obligation to work on its promise. On October 3, 2007, the second phase action plan concluded to set forth a new operable step characterized as "disablement." By all standards, the notion of "disablement" is a creation of the 6 party talks. By its definition, it is not dismantlement; it only refers specifically to the defunct processing or even the malfunctioning of nuclear facilities. It is much better than "freezing," but still falls short of the meaning of "dismantling."²

The theme of the action plan is some sort of "grand bargaining" that the U.S. is contemplating: energy aid and unfrozen money for the shutting of Yongbyon, the blacklist removal for nuclear disablement, and the normalization and peace treaty for nuclear dismantlement. For that part, Washington conducted a series of bilateral talks with DPRK counterparts in Berlin (January 2007), New York (March 2007), Geneva (September 2007), and New York (November 2007), articulating their own concerns and hammering out some details. July 2007 has seen DPRK's shutdown of its Yongbyon nuclear complex, and Pyongyang's disablement of its plutonium-based nuclear facilities by the end of 2007. So far, the disablement process is going well in three sections of the Yongbyon complex: the fuel fabrication facility, the reactor, and the reprocessing center. Despite the differences remaining on the DPRK's declaration of its atomic programs, a year-end deadline is likely to be met.³ Under February 13 agreement, DPRK is required to hand over a list of all its nuclear facilities, materials and programs by December 31, 2007. The United States and North Korea cannot agree on what items need to be on the list yet. Christopher Hill, assistant secretary of state and chief U.S. negotiator, insists that the North's declaration should come with no surprises or omissions. He personally expressed cautious optimism to DPRK for DPRK's full declaration after he wrapped up his latest visit to Pyongyang and Yongbyon early December of 2007.⁴

Obviously, the 2007 breakthrough with the 6 party talks is a result of two parts: one is the changed approach of United States towards the DPRK, and the other is

² For the critical account of "disablement," please see David Albright and Paul Brannan, *Disabling DPRK Nuclear Facilities*, US Institute of Peace, October 23, 2007.

³ Dan Martin, "US Envoy: North Korea Declaration Deadline Likely to Be Met," *AP*, December 5, 2007.

⁴ Zain Verjee and Charley Keyes, "U.S.: Cautious Optimism with North Korea," *CNN*, December 6, 2007.

Pyongyang's increased desire to improve ties with Washington.

The Bush Administration is looking to North Korea disarmament as a way to burnish its diplomatic legacy, which has been beleaguered by daunting violence in Iraq. Faced with the 2008 presidential and congressional elections, President Bush is eager to rid himself of much diplomatic mess, ranging from a chaotic Afghanistan to the constantly bloody Iraq and to the stalled situation over dismantling DPRK nuclear facilities. On the other hand, resolving the standoff in the 6 party talks will also tremendously help rectify international nonproliferation regime which has been shaky, considering the formidable challenges imposed by Iran and North Korea. Finally, the reality of nuclear DPRK will certainly raise the specter of new proliferation in East Asia, and irritate a new wave of nuclear aspiration in the region. Japan can hardly withstand always having to wait and see. Any prospects of Japan going nuclear will tragically hamper the regional security order and negate the stability of power relations in East Asia. The Iraq issue is destined to be one that President Bush will feel the pinch of for a long while into the future. In comparison, the nuclear issue of North Korea remains reasonably manageable if he chooses to move differently. The action plan centered by "disablement" and "declaration" contradicts the North's commitment to nuclear abandonment that Pyongyang explicitly announces in the Joint Statement,⁵ but serves constructively as a tentative device to crank up the nuclear dismantlement in the days to come. Even if the action plan fails to quickly lead to the full dismantlement of DPRK's nuclear capability, the U.S. and other parties can partially fulfill their goal though disablement: that is North Korea cannot make a nuclear bomb easily.

DPRK's Willingness to Make the Deal: What it looks like?

It is fair to say that the DPRK shows the surprising flexibility to march at a pace in compliance with what its American counterpart has set in 2007. The frequent bilateral contacts between the two sides and sequentially their positive impacts reflect on some sort of "paradigm change." The U.S. navy dispatched a navy helicopter to succor a North Korean cargo ship, hijacked by Somali pirates and even treated the wounded North Korean crew on an American destroyer early November 2007. An American

⁵ Under the September 2005 Joint Statement, DPRK has "committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and exiting nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards."

journalist questioned the event asking the DoD for the explanation of this seemingly odd act of helping an enemy nation. So far, we have to say that America's constant push to DPRK works well to melt the ice caps of their bilateral relationship. The reaction from the North is also conceivably positive. It seems that the U.S.-North Korea tango is beginning.⁶

Technically, DPRK's turnaround from its daunting insistence to Light Water Reactors (LWR) provision for the nuclear freezing in 2005 is clearly big. It agrees that the shutting and disablement of Yongbyon can be verified by inviting the IAEA delegation, American experts group and multi-national delegates. Such verification and inspection came through in December 2007. The U.S. also dispatched its own inspectors to check the shutting and disabling, also exemplified in Hill's tour to Yongbyun. The multi-layered verification illustrates Pyongyang's "new thinking" on how to make international society feel safe on its traditionally bizarre behaviors. Politically, DPRK displays a rare seriousness to move simultaneously with the others to keep up with February 13 Document. When BDA frozen money was successfully transferred in July, they promptly shut Yongbyon as requested. Signing the October 3 Agreement was also a quick move. There was a short interval between the finished "initial phase of action" and the running of "second phase of action." That transition proves to be smooth and expeditious. The irony is that Pyongyang has not considerably increased the confidence of the international society to believe that the most reclusive country in the world would heartily strike a package of deals to genuinely abandon its nuclear capability. Strategically, what DPRK's message has disclosed so far remains quite unclear.

First of all, the definition of disablement is rather ambiguous. October 3 Agreement is emphatic to the nuclear disablement under the condition of verification but does not strictly make clear whether after disablement its nuclear facilities could be restored or not. The unclear definition in that document stipulates the pulling out of key components out of disabling targets, but leaves speculation of their re-assembling and re-fixation if necessary. This is to say that DPRK still has the grand illusion that even disabled nuclear facilities can be restored one day. The worst part of the story is that by deliberately garbling disablement, DPRK might preset their leverage to re-open those facilities as an effort to gain new negotiating chips. Ambiguity of the defined disablement might be a reminder of why the Framework Agreement collapsed early

⁶ Sunny Lee, "The US, North Korea Tango Has Begun," *Asia Times*, November 16, 2007.

2003. It was just because the Agreement did not desire the abolishment of DPRK's nuclear facilities, but only its temporary freezing or sealing. When DPRK wants to be about-face concerning the agreement, such ambiguity always leaves them the option to fight back. Nonetheless, the notion of "disabling" is more specific than "freezing" or "sealing." However similarly, they do not opt for the accurate abolishment. DPRK could play in a tricky manner, so it would like to preserve the possibility of making October 3 agreement to be another failed Framework Agreement.

Second, DPRK's steady rebuff of confessing its secret HEU program generates the residential suspicion of whether Pyongyang has made up its mind to give up all its atomic material. Pyongyang has reiterated, secretly and openly, that it has no HEU. DPRK defends its stance of buying aluminum tubes and centrifuges from Pakistan's A Bomb smuggler A. Q. Khan for the purpose of producing missiles.⁷ It is not persuasive. Assistant Secretary of State Hill said, "there is 'credible evidence' of North Korean equipment and material which could be used for the HEU."⁸ Now it is almost the time for DPRK to submit a declaration of all nuclear programs and material. But there is no sign that the U.S. has achieved decisive compromise from Pyongyang. It has already been reported that the United States has lifted the threshold to its alleged removal of DPRK from the blacklist of state sponsor of terrorism, an act in compliance with Pyongyang's disabling commitment. Washington may decide to impose three new conditions for removing North Korea from its list.⁹ The new conditions call for DPRK to reveal the amount of plutonium, clarify details of its uranium enrichment program and proliferation of its nuclear technology and materials to other countries such as Syria. There is a lack of clarity about whether DPRK has provided nuclear cooperation to Syria.¹⁰ Faced with America's domestic opposition, particularly strong skepticism from conservative Republicans, the Bush Administration is finding it quite difficult to take the North off the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. Christopher Hill's credibility is really tied to DPRK's coming clear on some type of uranium program and Syrian proliferation. Regardless of Hill's desirability to move the 6 party talks forward, the lack of clarity has sparked a bigger concern. The reasonable level of

⁷ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "U.S. Had Doubts on North Korean Uranium Drive," *New York Times*, March 1, 2007; Mark Mazzetti, "Latest reports on Iran and North Korea Show a New Found Caution Among Analysts," *New York Times*, March 2, 2007.

⁸ Jack Kim, "U.S. Says Has Proof of North Korea Uranium Program," *AP*, December 1, 2007.

⁹ "US to Add Conditions for North Korea Terrorism Delisting: Report," *AP*, December 1, 2007.

¹⁰ Israel warplanes struck a target in Syria on September 6, 2007. According to media reports quoting unidentified source, the target was a Syrian nuclear facility linked to North Korea.

transparency is absolutely necessary for the Bush Administration avoid new political dilemma vis-à-vis DPRK. U.S. congressmen wary of the North Korean negotiation have seized on the Syrian issue to urge caution.¹¹ However, DPRK has rebutted U.S. accusation of its leaking nuclear know-how to Syria. Predictably DPRK will not admit its nuclear leaking. The clarity would be equally hard to make; the reason being that U.S. will not easily trust DPRK.

Is there any likelihood of DPRK's honest admission or confession? The likelihood appears to be very small. Pyongyang should know that any admission could ignite the fierce backlash from the domestic America and disastrously derail the course that Assistant Secretary Hill and his counterpart Kim Guiguan have set. As long as Kim Jong Il wants some gains back home from the negotiating table, it is out of question that he should be very clear of where the "red line" is as drawn by the Bush Administration. Any convincing evidence of the North's proliferation to Syria will definitely equate with the "crossing" of that red line. In return, the Bush Administration will lose the ground to continuously pursue a "Hill approach," which has been adequately depending on "rewarding tactics" to encourage DPRK to give up nuclear capability. The suspicion of nuclear cooperation between DPRK and Syria raises the specter of a country that boasts nuclear weapons by providing atomic material or technology to the nations Washington considers hostile and a sponsor of terrorism. In that sense, alleged nuclear declaration will be a watershed event. Whether DPRK spells out what it has had to hide, decides if the nuclear issue goes to a smooth and stable phase or undergoes a squeaky and bumpy phase.

America's HEU claim, along with the expectable clarity of Syria proliferation, has become the litmus paper to test whether Pyongyang has a real intention to cooperate through negotiation. We could bravely assume that DPRK did not assist Syria with anything substantial. The only way that assumption can be justified is by not DPRK's verbal whitewashing, but its proven resolve. If the DPRK takes into reconsideration "the Libya Model" and discloses its all nuclear programs and activities, American hardliners will bite their tongues. Otherwise, DPRK's self-preserving denial will not work well to keep them shut up. Consequently, American domestic skeptics may not allow President Bush to move forward. DPRK's requests for removal from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and its normalization with the U.S. will be a mirage only.

¹¹ Foster Klug, "Obstacles Loom in North Korea Nuclear Talks," *AP*, December 1, 2007.

Perhaps most importantly, some of knotty issues remain intact despite of the new agreements to resolve BDA money handover and nuclear disablement. In fact, neither February 13 document nor October 3 agreement displays any new commonalities concerning DPRK's assumed right of peaceful nuclear energy development, which had been a longstanding allegation of Pyongyang, and the LWR issue, which recklessly stalled the proceeding of the 6 parties talks shortly after the Joint Statement concluded on September 19, 2006. The DPRK will not be conceivably regarded as full-hearted or trustable in term of its denuclearization claim unless it clearly and firmly declares its obsolescence of such the traditional demands. Likewise, DPRK should lay out its schemes on how the normalization will help salvage its impoverished economy and incorporate the reclusive country into international community. Without economic integration and political reforms, which could be easily and surely identified with that country, no one knows what sort of justifiable and legitimate purposes would be served through the removal and lifting of economic sanctions and political rapprochement. The reality is that economic reform and opening-up will be only reliable way for DPRK to revitalize its bankrupted economy, feed its starved people, and eliminate its terrible shortage of energy and electricity. Providing LWR or favoring peaceful nuclear energy development could happen when DPRK shows its huge momentum of conducting the economic reform and opening-up. That will be a safe way for other parties to take into account the offering of LWR or the alternative way to aid DPRK with energy. Its claim of LWR has proven to be an escape from the real request of denuclearization in the 90s. International society should not allow DPRK to excuse its drag-on tactic to refrain from nuclear abandonment once again.

Nuclear Dismantlement: Under what Circumstances?

Basically, there are two theories to explain why DPRK may perhaps accept nuclear disarmament deal. One is that DPRK has no choice but to abandon its nuclear capability in the exchange for all the benefits it has been hungry for: removal from the blacklist, lifting of economic sanctions, aids, normalization, and even monetary aid. It's a profitable deal as long as DPRK is concerned with its abashed situations. The United States has primarily agreed on the quick removal of North Korea from the blacklist and negotiation for diplomatic relationship. DPRK cannot receive anything until its actual nuclear abandonment. North Korean observers' view on Kim Jong Il is that he is not crazy, but smart and shrewd. He was even called "most flexible" guy in

the North by South Korean President Roh.¹² Presumably, he can hardly resist giving into the incentives of such a package of deals, which could certainly change the fate of his country and project heroic clout to his government and people, particularly seeing as the starvation in the country seems to getting worse. The UN's World Food Program estimates that up to four million people are chronically short of food in addition to the 1.9 million it tries to feed on a regular basis.¹³ This theory assumes that a reasonable offer will always drive an equally reasonable return. Therefore, the nature of nuclear dismantlement is a game of "give and take." Kim Jong Il is seen now to have chosen a path of nuclear renouncement and economic resuscitation of the country.

The other theory assumes that DPRK has been struggling to net the United States in its favor, and use America's great influence to counterbalance other powers in the region. Thus, nuclear dismantlement could be accomplished only if the U.S. plays down its traditionally hostile tone against the North and indicate a willingness to "give them a warm hug" so to speak. To secure the regime survival, the North wants to pull closer to Washington, and then it will be able to conduct "equidistance diplomacy" between China and the United States as it skillfully employed during the Cold War period. Insecurity of DPRK comes from its status as a weak country perching in a tree full of powers. Striving to play among giants is the routine tactic for the small countries to assure their survival. DPRK has been skillful in applying such the stratagem.¹⁴ New York talks between the U.S. and DPRK in March of 2007 manifested the strength of their anxiety to devote itself to the U.S. for reigning in China.¹⁵ Certainly, DPRK wants to take full advantage of its presumable quality as a counterweight vis-à-vis surrounding powers one way or another. It is even believed that Pyongyang will create conflicts between China and the United States once it improves its relationship with Washington, and take revenge on Beijing for China's vote to impose sanctions on DPRK at the UN Security Council in October of 2006.¹⁶

¹² "Kim Jong Il Most Flexible Man," *CNN*, December 2, 2007. <http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=kim+Jong+Il+%27most...>

¹³ "South Korea Completes 400,000-tonne Rice Aid to North Korea: Mystery," *AP*, December 4, 2007.

¹⁴ Mitchell B. Reiss, "A Nuclear Armed North Korea: Accepting the Unacceptable?" *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2006/07), pp. 89-104; Jonathan D. Pollack, ed., *Korea: The East Asia Pivot*, Newport: Naval War College Press, 2006; Jacques AE. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss, eds., *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

¹⁵ John Lewis, "Why Nuclear Program Matters," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2007.

¹⁶ Ting-I Tsai, "China Casting Wary Eye on North Korea," *Asia Times*, December 5, 2007.

Against the backdrop of China-DPRK relationship dynamic, some delicate changes have dramatically occurred to U.S.-DPRK ties. Previously, U.S. naval involvement with North Korean cargo ships was almost exclusively to monitor, inspect and even intercept them when they were suspected of carrying materials for arms proliferation. America's navy's help to North Koreans against Somali pirates undoubtedly reflects the improvement in the recent North Korean disarming talks, and will help improve the unlikely bonding between the member of the "axis of evil" and the "hostile imperialist empire." But perhaps from the North Korean perspective, *this is the trend that they wished for.*

The two theories are both relevant in interpreting what motivates Pyongyang to cooperate this far. But to what extent it could keep cooperating at the cost of nuclear give-up is quite a different thing. DPRK has been traumatized by its isolation since the demise of former Soviet Union, and thereby longed for the remarkable improvement of its international surroundings as to obtain respect, assistance and security. Establishing the diplomatic relations with the U.S. could at least, give Kim Jong Il the credit of having the North's No. 1 enemy bow out, under his leadership. Furthermore, its diplomatic relations with Washington could become a significant tool to press the South for necessarily bowing in for the sake of the powerful illumination of the North's might and wisdom, and add a lot to the North's appeal to the South. In fact, struggling for the leadership in the unification of two Koreas has never faded from Kim Jong Il's conviction. Perceivably, in the eyes of Kim Jong Il, the fulfillment of such North-led reunification is the essential way that DPRK is able to aptly overcome its current hardship and perpetuate its political system.¹⁷

However, each of the two theories has many holes. Neither of them can underpin the optimism that DPRK will be denuclearized eventually. The premise of such assumptions, if their feasibility will turn out to be real one day, should rest largely on the hypothesis that the Libya model could be desirable and attainable in the case of DPRK. That is to say that the North Korean leader has the determination to win the graces of the West, and in his view, that cause would be worth the cost of disarming its nuclear capability. However, Kim Jong Il is not Muammar Qaddafi. The peculiarity of the North, in the terms of "Military First" doctrine, the oligarchic political system, self-defeating mentality, the "personable" geopolitical landscapes in

¹⁷ Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002; Kongdan Oh, and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea: Through the Looking Glass*, Washington, D.C.: the Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

Northeast Asia — power constellation in the world — all these may enable the North Korean leader to grope for a different approach towards their concerns. Since the end of Cold War, DPRK have had many chances to exercise “two theories” to get out of the hellish plights in that country. But all those chances have slipped away from him, and nowadays, will he wake up to the new reality and soberly try again? The possibility is miniscule unless DPRK’s most militarized economy can be reformed and re-configured.¹⁸

One reason that Kim will not follow in the footsteps of Qaddafi is simply because as Qaddafi easily “ratted out” A. Q. Khan, the head of Pakistani underground nuclear network, but Kim cannot “rat out” his team. Whether the nuclear device the North exploded last October was successful or not, it was a Korean creation and not an object they plagiarized from the outside. Kim Jong Il has no mandate at all to hand over nuclear capability. Of course, Kim did and is going to reconcile with the call from the U.S. on clarity. So far, there is indication that he tends to bring something out to persuade Washington of his sincerity of collaboration. There is the speculation that Kim Jong Il has offered the U.S. the list of the buyers of its nuclear technology, including Syria. The Bush Administration gave the info to Jerusalem, which scrambled quickly to bomb the alleged nuclear site in Syria on September 6, 2007.¹⁹ Obviously, it is a logical speculation. Otherwise, it is hard to explain why Washington has been surprisingly mum on the nature of the attack. So long as DPRK dearly wants to weave a closer diplomatic relationship, it will continuously provide useful info and cooperation as expected. But this still does not necessarily lead to the nuclear dismantlement.

It remains questioned how much the DPRK desires aids and foreign currency to salvage its bankrupt economy, or how such economic incentive will mysteriously water down North Korea’s nuclear ambition in the reliable manner. As South Korea has been increasingly generous to assisting and investing the North under the name of “Peace and Prosperity Policy,” the incentives to press the DPRK for collaborating with the 6 party talks have decreased. The offer that Kim Jong Il appeases to gain from the nationalistic South will enormously surpass what he is supposed to catch by adopting the substantiated reconciliation from multi-national negotiation. February

¹⁸ Andrew Scobell, “Making Sense of North Korea: Pyongyang and Comparative Communism,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (December 2005), pp. 245-266.

¹⁹ Tim Johnson, “Ratting Out One’s Nuclear Customers.” www.yahoo.com/s/mcb_chian/20071001/wl_mcb_china/ratting_outonesnuclearcu---

13 agreement proclaims 1 million tons of oil aid for the North as the first wave of “redress,” nearly amounting to 2.4 million dollars. But President Roh Moo Hyun declared impressively much bigger plan of investment from the South to help revitalizing its infrastructure and economy. South Korea completed shipping its annual 400,000 tons of rice aid to the North early December 2007. December 19 presidential election may make the conservatives to grasp power at ROK. It appears that Mr. Lee Min Buk, the former Seoul Mayor, is most promising to win out the presidential campaign. But under the domestic climate of swelling nationalism, it is also out of the question that Lee’s winning out will thoroughly overhaul the pro-DPRK course of ROK’s policy and redirect it to the harsh turnaround. In that regard, South Korea will likely and continuously chase the North as the policy priority. As a result, Kim Jong Il will reap all he wants simply through signaling to the South that he is a Korean nationalist.

Additionally, balancing China and Japan can hardly compel DPRK to give up its nuclear capability to compromise. Judging from the history of DPRK, we have to say that it will not entirely stop over only one strategic ally, China. It would be more than happy to play China and the United States off each other. Nevertheless, DPRK can afford to turn the back on China? It will overlook its porous border and turn on antagonism completely against Beijing? The answer is that it is possible, but with low probability. What is more likely to appear is that DPRK is struggling for more room to maneuver in Northeast Asia, but there is no need that Pyongyang hang absolutely on its “new ties” with Washington to insulate its own from China and Japan. The irony is that nuclear capability would be the most reliable “wild card” in the calculation of Kim Jong Il and his colleagues.

Kim Jong Il has seen the light on collaborating with the West. But he does not assume that the things will go in his favor or in his terms. He is concerned with how to guarantee the availability of what he dearly seeks for, and the only credible leverage at hand is nuclear capability. He might be indulging in his “conspiracy” by the nuclear device testing. It is that testing that spurred the United States to change its tone. There is the convincing evidence that the mystery will hit him all the times so long as he holds the nuclear capability tightly. It is a poor proposition, but unfortunately it is the most possible disposal endorsed by Kim Jong Il and DPRK. What strikes his fancy the most is not the “Libya model” completely, but the “Pakistani model,” which means he will be able to recognize two-end goal: preserving nuclear capability while normalizing its ties with the West.

If that is true, the squeaky and bumpy “phase” in 2008 seems inevitable. Will the 6 party talks break down again in the coming year? And what other parties do in order to flesh out the action plan more effectively? Will we return to the “pressure and isolation” approach, or reconcile over the North’s relentless stubbornness? Those challenges still loom ahead if the “clarity” falls short of expectation.

Conclusion

The 6 party talks basically is a consensus-driven process. The lack of legalization and following enforcement often allows the multi-national mechanism to perform poorly when the barriers come and cannot be hurdled. The U.S. and DPRK, the mismatched couple, have started to warm to each other in 2007. Accordingly, the barriers blockading the nuclear dismantlement dramatically budged, along with the advancement with “disabling” fares. But is the warming up of ties between the U.S.-DPRK enough to bring about nuclear dismantlement? It’s much too early to say. Likewise, the real intention of Kim Jong Il also needs to pass the litmus test and be clarified. For that part, job assignment among China, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the United States, is completely necessary. If someone plays “good cop,” the other should choose to stay as “bad cop.” Given the North as the “hardest nut” in the world politics, the most effective “walnut cracker” to smash its nuclear fantasy is not only trying to be nice only, but also trying to be harsh as well. As of now, there is no hope that nuclear dismantlement will be stepped on very quickly.