

THE SIX-PARTY REGIME IN ADDRESSING THE KOREAN NUCLEAR CRISIS: GAINS, MERITS AND LIMITATIONS

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Abstract:

In the prevailing international relations, multilateral conflict-managing regimes provide a primary framework for both securing a more balanced setting to reduce enmity and suspicion between the conflicting sides and amplifying a binding power of implementing any reached agreement. As a sense-making case, the Six-Party Talks have worked properly so far in dealing with the nuclear-related crises on the Korean Peninsula and prove to be an inspiring model of addressing major regional and even global hot issues. On the other hand, however, it is widely believed that only tangible progress in future bilateral negotiations, especially between North Korea and the United States, could justify the multi-sided arrangement's effectiveness to achieve the aim of denuclearizing the Peninsula and seeing a conflict-free Northeast Asia.

To be cautiously optimistic, technical facets of the negotiation would be more deterministic than generally converging willingness in validating the effort for defusing the sustained tension on the Peninsula. There are many thorny specifics over the much-talked nuclear issue needed to be clarified. Then remain other interrelated factors relevant to both securing permanent peace on the Peninsula and optimizing the security relations in Northeast Asia at large, including Pyongyang's demand for security and aid guarantee and its normalized relations with Washington and Tokyo; and North Korea's ambitious missile programme and human rights and refugee concerns. More importantly, the subsequent issue-centered negotiations mean no room for ambiguity of rhetoric and commitment and are expected to submit a fully clear-cut road-map as well as policy options. This will take the risk of abrupt showdown and unexpected reversal in the following phases in view of deficient trust and confidence between North Korea and the United States. It also demands the other involved parties to take their respective obligations more unambiguously. Thus the significance of any achieved consensus so far should not be overestimated. And compared by a general agreement on mutually addressing the crisis of the Peninsula's going nuclear, the forthcoming step of substantive negotiations and phased implementations will prove much more difficult and challenging. Even the correlation of interests of all participating parties could, as reasonably believed, become more complicated and more incompatible. Strongly impressed by the "commitment for

commitment and action for action” formula, one seems not to expect any substantive breakthrough on this front in the foreseeable future.

In terms of the endurance of the crisis and intensity of the potential conflict in Northeast, multiple means and elasticity of tackling it have to be readily used by the concerned parties. What deserve being tried repeatedly are patience, persuasion, promise, favor-delivery and mutual compromise rather than coercive undertakings such as threat, provocation, bluffing and even use of force. Most probably, this moderate approach, which has actually saved the flammable situation from going beyond control, will continue to make the current crisis manageable and reinforce the regional peace without formidable negative consequences. Moreover, the current multi-party arrangement would find itself increasingly constrained and a number of issue-centered negotiations have to be conducted at a bilateral level among other tough problems. Thus in the time to come, smooth coordination of multi- and bilateral track negotiations would be welcome. While keeping the current six-party channel active and having the emerging difficulties in mind, the concerned parties have to be prepared to fathom other regimes and arrangements as its complements or even substitutes.