

NHK Interview December 8, 2008
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1. What is behind the decision to start the talks?

It appears that both the United States and North Korea have softened their positions to allow the Six Party Talks to resume after a 5 month pause. Washington previously said it would not go forward with the talks until it was certain that North Korea would agree to a written verification protocol. North Korea on the other hand urged that Japan be excluded from the talks. China's announcement that the talks will proceed suggests that Washington and Pyongyang have dropped their preconditions and agreed with China to return to the talks.

2. Should we expect any break through in persuading North Korea to agree to allowing sampling and to put this in writing?

No, I do not believe a breakthrough will be possible at this round. North Korea has opposed allowing sampling at its most sensitive nuclear sight, the reprocessing plant where plutonium is made. Sampling there would confirm how much plutonium North Korea has made since it began making plutonium in the early 1990s.

3. How will the five countries proceed with the talks in the future given the slim prospects for progress now?

I would expect a recess in the talks until the new US Obama administration has taken office. This must await Congressional confirmation of new cabinet members such as the Secretary of State. Then there must be a period for policy review. I believe the United States will pursue a two prong "carrot and stick" strategy. It will continue to work within the Six Party talks and emphasize diplomatic collaboration with Japan and South Korea. At the same time, the US quite likely will demonstrate greater flexibility toward North Korea by allowing its officials to visit Washington, provide more humanitarian and economic aid, and even suggest the possibility that the US will provide North Korea two LWR if it cooperates with sampling. At the same time Washington and Seoul could emphasize to Tokyo and Pyongyang that they need to deal with their bilateral problems outside the Six Party Talks.