

**The Six Party Talks -
Prospects for the November 2005 Round**

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China, Japan, South and North Korea, Russia and the United States gather again in Beijing on November 8, 2005, for the fifth round of Six Party Talks aimed at achieving a peaceful end to North Korea's nuclear programs. Despite the participants' acceptance of the September 19 Joint Statement at the September 2005 round, Washington and Pyongyang are again squabbling over several significant issues. Expectations are therefore low that progress can be achieved at the November round.

Most journalists and some political observers believe that the main impediment to further progress is the Light Water Reactor (LWR) issue. Actually, the reality is more complicated. Since July, North Korea has insisted that the United States must provide an LWR as "reward" for Pyongyang's agreement to phase out its nuclear weapons arsenal and programs. North Korea cites as support for its stance the provision of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) which states that all NPT member states have the "inalienable right" to maintain their own "peaceful nuclear programs" so long as they are in compliance with the nuclear safeguards that the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) deems mandatory. Also, the member nation is required to cooperate fully with the IAEA's regular and routine inspections of all nuclear facilities within the concerned nation as specified in a separate safeguards agreement.

At the present time, North Korea is not a member of either the NPT or the IAEA, but it pledged in the Six Party Talks' Joint Statement to rejoin both the treaty and the IAEA at an appropriate time, but without specifying when. This points to the second impediment to progress - the Joint Statement's ambiguity regarding "sequencing," or the timing for implementation of the various promises made in the Joint Statement. North Korea insisted in its authoritative Foreign Ministry statement of September 20, 2005, that it will not return to the NPT and the IAEA until the United States has not only promised, but also actually initiated construction of the LWR that Pyongyang demands Washington must provide it.

Washington, however, rejects both of Pyongyang's assertions. First, the United States continues to insist upon "CVID," or "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement" of all of North Korea's nuclear programs, both peaceful and weapons related, plutonium and uranium. Chief US negotiator Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific

Affairs (A/S EAP) at his October 6, 2005, testimony to the US House of Representatives Committee on International Affairs reaffirmed that the United States basic goal remains CVID. Additionally, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has recently asserted that North Korea must first return to the NPT and the IAEA before there can be further discussion of whether North Korea can acquire an LWR.

However, even more fundamental to Washington's stance are the Bush Administration's basic principles for dealing with North Korea. These include:

- Pyongyang must first make the "strategic decision to completely get out of the nuclear business," and
- the Bush Administration refuses to "reward" North Korea for having broken its previous promises not to develop nuclear weapons.

More recently, senior Bush Administration officials, speaking off the record, have explained that the United States will not even consider discussing the LWR issue until after North Korea has completed the process of "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement" of all its nuclear programs, peaceful and other wise.

Obviously, neither side now seems willing to demonstrate any flexibility to resolve these impediments. On the contrary, Washington has demonstrated increasing impatience with Pyongyang's intransigence regarding these issues. A/S Hill has dropped plans to visit Pyongyang in the hope of seeking a compromise with his North Korean counterparts prior to the next round of Six Party Talks. The Bush Administration granted DPRK Ambassador Han Song-ryol, the DPRK's liaison to the US State Department who is assigned to the DPRK Mission to the United Nations in New York, permission to visit Washington, D.C. October 26-28, and to make a speech at the US Capital Building. Originally, this was designed to be a token of good will since no North Korean diplomat had been allowed to travel for more than one year outside New York to another place within the United States. But there was no contact between the DPRK official and any American counterpart during his brief visit. Despite the apparent minor thaw in relations, the trip indicated that Washington's attitude toward Pyongyang has again turned very chilly.

More problematic is the resurgence of the Bush Administration's hardliners: National Security Council chief Stephen Hadley and State Department Under Secretary for International Security Affairs and Disarmament Robert Joseph. Ever since the Six Party Talks resumed in July, and John Bolton assumed his new duties as the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Washington's hardliners have been quiet. But since early October, they have displayed keen displeasure with the terms of the Joint Statement, Hill's conciliatory posture toward Pyongyang, and Pyongyang's persistent intransigence regarding the LWR and related issues. Meanwhile, Ambassador Hill has become noticeably quiet.

Hadley and Joseph have since traveled to Moscow and several Central Asian nations in the hope that they will intensify collaboration with the United States regarding its Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). This initiative, launched by Ambassador Bolton

while still at the Department of State, is designed to deter, and if Washington deems necessary, interdict any and all Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) related shipments to or from North Korea.

Also in October, the Bush Administration, alleging involvement in WMD transactions, froze the dollar assets of several key North Korean trading companies. This denies North Korea access to its US dollar accounts of the designated firms' overseas bank accounts, which adds up to substantial sums of hard currency.

Near term prospects for progress at the next round of talks is very bleak. Washington and Pyongyang appear equally adamant not to compromise over the LWR issue. At the same time, Washington's hard liners have become much more assertive although one of their most influential members, Vice President Cheney's chief adviser "Scooter" Libby has had to resign in the face of very serious criminal charges against him.