

**The Six Party Talks –
Agreed Goals, Conflicting Solutions**

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Forging a durable peace in Northeast Asia is the foremost challenge facing the people of East Asia in the 21st Century. This summer we commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice. But still the threat of war looms over the region. Soon we will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Agreed Framework which the United States and North Korea signed in October 1994. It aimed to halt North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and to set the stage for a durable peace in Northeast Asia. But North Korea broke the agreement and resumed its nuclear weapons program.

From August 27 to 29, the world's four most powerful nations plus the two Korean governments met in Beijing for the Six Party Talks. Their immediate goal was to create an atmosphere conducive to diplomatic dialogue. They achieved this. But they failed to make progress toward a "peaceful diplomatic resolution" of the current impasse between the United States and North Korea over Pyongyang's renewed nuclear ambitions.

The six nations agreed on their goals. China's vice minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, at the end of the meeting, issued a statement that contained six points of agreement. The six nations agreed that the Korean Peninsula must be free of nuclear weapons and that the current crisis must be resolved peacefully.

But they disagreed over how to achieve these goals. North Korea demands that the United States give up its "hostile policy" and engage in bilateral negotiations. The United States adamantly rejects this. It insists that Pyongyang first dismantle its nuclear weapons program and allow international inspections to verify that this has been completed. Only then will the United States consider engaging in negotiations with North Korea.

Two outcomes are possible. Either there will be a peaceful diplomatic resolution or war. Some believe that the best solution is for the Kim Jong Il regime to collapse. But this scenario has two problems. North Korea is not on the verge of collapse. Leaders of its most powerful groups, the army and the communist party, support Kim. Also, Chinese, South Korea and European Union aid have helped the economy improve gradually since 2000. Even if Kim's regime collapsed tomorrow, North Korea's generals probably would take control of the regime. Regime collapse, in short, would not necessarily produce peace. The impasse with the United States most likely would persist, which would perpetuate the possibility of a second Korean War.

In the event of war, Japan could not escape severe damage. International commerce throughout Northeast Asia would be disrupted. Japan's economy would be adversely affected. North Korea would launch its ballistic missiles at US military installations in Japan. Some of these missiles probably would fall into Japanese cities. For Japan, like South Korea, the best solution is for the United States to contribute to a durable peace on a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula by agreeing to negotiate with North Korea. Only then could the risk of war be reduced, possibly even eliminated.

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