

**Will Washington Soon Give Up  
the Six Party Talks?**

**By**

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Once again the Six Party Talks are stalled. Unless the talks soon resume, the Bush Administration could give up on diplomacy and instead pursue “other options.” Since March, the Bush Administration has followed a dual track approach to North Korea. The Administration’s primary policy makers - President Bush, Vice President Chaney, Secretaries of State and Defense Rice and Rumsfeld, plus chief National Security Council adviser Stephen Hadley – are agreed on two options best summarized as Plan A and Plan B. Since mid-May, President Bush has pursued Plan A, but all the while has kept Plan B as his “other option.”

Plan A emphasizes diplomacy centered in the Six Party Talks. His goal is to rally and concentrate multilateral pressure from China, Japan, South Korea and Russia on North Korea to compel it to submit to CVID, the complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of all nuclear programs (plutonium, highly enriched uranium and peaceful nuclear power plants.) Frustration in Washington with Plan A and the Six Party Talks, however, has intensified since the most recent round failed to accomplish any significant progress toward a peaceful solution, and because North Korea once again is delaying the talks’ resumption.

If Plan A fails, President Bush is prepared to launch Plan B. This is a three phase escalation of multilateral pressure on North Korea to compel its acceptance of CVID. In phase one, the US would give up on the Six Party Talks and shift the North Korea nuclear issue to the United Nations. The initial purpose would be to focus broader multilateral diplomatic pressure on North Korea. If North Korea remains intransigent, Bush could next activate the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) by calling on allies, particularly Japan, to deploy their naval forces to obstruct ships entering and leaving North Korea. This would compound diplomatic pressure with economic pressure. Should this also fail, Plan B’s final phase could encompass political, possibly even military action, against the Kim Jong Il regime and the DPRK.

Obviously, Plan A is preferable because prospects of a peaceful diplomatic solution would seem much better than Plan B. The Six Party Talks’ inability to achieve substantive progress toward a peaceful diplomatic solution, however, keeps Plan B lurking as a possible “other option.”

Three weeks ago, all the parties reportedly agreed to return to Beijing the week of August 29, 2005. Now no one expects this will happen. Nevertheless, prospects look fairly good

that the talks will resume before the end of September. Otherwise, the Six Party Talks will collapse and President Bush quite likely will revert to Plan B. Should this happen, North Korea would feel compelled to declare implementation of Plan B an act of war. Tensions would promptly spiral upward.

But it is still very possible that cooler heads will prevail, and the talks will resume fairly soon. North Korea has said or done nothing to suggest that it does not intend to return to the Six Party Talks. On August 24, its Foreign Ministry issued a brief statement that severely criticized the US-South Korea annual joint military exercise Ulji Focus Lens-05. In the Foreign Ministry's statement, Pyongyang complained that the "provocative war maneuvers" are "targeted against the dialogue partner" (i.e. North Korea). Consequently, the statement points out, "Dialogue and confrontation can never go together." Then the statement concludes on the very mild note, "The DPRK is closely following all the developments." Obviously absent is any threat to quit the talks, or to do anything that might intensify tensions.

Meanwhile, Washington has similarly remained calm. No one in the Bush Administration has publicly expressed concern that the US will soon despair with the Six Party Talks. Nor has the Administration again warned that it could soon raise the North Korea nuclear issue at the United Nations when it convenes in September. Even newly appointed US ambassador to the UN John Bolton has been quiet on the North Korea issue. On the other hand, the US chief negotiator to the Six Party Talks, Ambassador Christopher Hill, on August 18 publicly stated that diplomatic dialogue continues between the US and North Korea via the so-called "New York Channel." Also, Hill added, that he remains ready to respond to any concerns Pyongyang may have.

The on-going US-South Korea military exercise could be a temporary impediment to the Six Party Talks' resumption. Once the exercise ends on September 2, prospects for the Six Party Talks' resumption should brighten significantly because of the following reasons. Foremost, Pyongyang cannot afford to alienate all the other nations involved in the Six Party Talks, particularly China and South Korea because of their extensive continuing economic assistance. Already Pyongyang's stalling of the talks' resumption has undoubtedly excited frustration with North Korea in Beijing, Seoul, and Moscow.

Also, Chinese leader Hu Jin Dao will meet President Bush in Washington, DC on September 7. Pyongyang most likely does not want China and the United States to agree that North Korea is the main obstacle to the talks' resumption. Finally, Plan A better matches Pyongyang's priority goal of regime survival. Risking President Bush's activation of Plan B, especially without China's support, certainly would not improve prospects for the Kim Jong Il regime's survival.