

**Mini Six Party Gathering in Tokyo –
Good Guy Kim verse Bad Cop Hill**

By

**C. Kenneth Quinones, Ph.D.
Former U.S. North Korea Affairs Officer
And Professor of Korean Studies
Akita International University**

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Representatives of the six nations trying to negotiate an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program gathered in Tokyo April 9-13, 2006. This "mini" version of the Chinese hosted Six Party Talks caused a frenzy of press speculation. U.S. Chief Negotiator and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill had it half correct when he told the press upon his arrival in Tokyo that the problem is not the need to meet with North Korea. He was wrong, however, to imply that all would be fine only if North Korea returned "without precondition" to the Six Party Talks.

The Tokyo gathering added up to little more than a cloud of diplomatic smoke, but it still was a valuable exercise that taught some important lessons. First, it demonstrated that so-called "track II" meetings hosted by well intended private organizations like the University of California cannot achieve what governments refuse to do. The Tokyo meeting, the 17th session of the University of California's efforts to reduce tensions in Northeast Asia, neither reduced tensions nor moved the concerned governments closer to resuming the Six Party Talks.

On the contrary, Pyongyang successfully used the forum to project itself as ready to go back to the Six Party Talks but the United States is blocking the way with its economic pressure. The mass media in Washington, Japan and South Korea inadvertently contributed to Pyongyang's successful manipulation of the situation.

Pyongyang sent a high powered delegation of nine diplomats headed by Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Kwan to Tokyo to cast the United States as the "bad cop" in the Six Party Talks process. Kim, Hill's counterpart at the talks, promptly told journalists upon arriving in Tokyo that he was ready and able to meet his American counterpart. During his visit, Kim convincingly projected himself as a congenial fellow who represents a cool headed government intent upon forging a negotiated end to its nuclear weapons program, but only if the United States would stop threatening it. The Japanese and Korean press helped Kim achieve his mission by broadcasting his broad smile and friendly hand wave during virtually every news broadcast.

Meanwhile, a stern looking Christopher Hill, obviously following National Security Council (NSC) instructions as NSC East Asia Adviser Victor Cha watched closely, repeatedly told journalists that he had not come to Tokyo to meet his North Korean counterpart. His remarks seemed to dismiss diplomatic dialogue as insignificance and repeated Washington's demand, without clarification or elaboration, that Pyongyang

return without precondition to the Six Party Talks. Hill was a mere shadow of the friendly and chatty image he had cultivated in Beijing during the Six Party Talks in 2005. In Tokyo, Hill looked and played the role of the loyal “bad cop” intent upon getting Pyongyang to stop its illegal activities. Hill quickly lost the press’ interest because he had no story for them, giving Kim greater visibility on television on the front page.

Kim Gye Kwan manipulated the press until the very end of his stay. Having captured its attention, at the end of his stay he seized the opportunity to explain his government’s stance regarding its nuclear program. He again pointed to Hill’s refusal to engage in diplomatic dialogue and Washington’s recent reiteration of its “pre-emptive” nuclear counter proliferation strategy. Kim concluded that these circumstances compelled his government to continue enhancing its “deterrent nuclear capability.”

The Tokyo gathering further confirmed that the mass media’s coverage of the Six Party Talks and related developments has been extensive but surprisingly superficial. For example, South Korea’s press in 2005 cast Christopher Hill as the Six Party Talks’ savior and the central voice in determining US strategy toward North Korea. Obviously this was incorrect. Hill never had such authority. As a career diplomat, his job is to represent the Bush Administration and its policies, nothing more or less. In Tokyo, Hill played the role Washington had assigned him.

The Japanese and Korean mass media created the frenzy of speculation that greeted the North Koreans in Tokyo. This aroused public interest but also fostered groundless expectations that a major breakthrough in ending North Korea’s nuclear program might be imminent. North Korea adroitly exploited the situation to project itself as a reasonable participant in the Six Party Talks and the hapless target of United States’ arrogance and military might. Hill’s impotency and Pyongyang’s successful manipulation of the press may well have been the most important stories at the Tokyo gathering, but the mass media missed these developments.