

The North Korean nuclear crisis:

Four-plus-two—
An idea whose time has come

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INTRODUCTION: COMPETING PARADIGMS IN THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

The six-party negotiations on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear programs, held in Beijing in August 2003, concluded with nothing more than the expectation that the six participating nations would meet again—no time or place was announced. Meanwhile, North Korea threatened to escalate tensions further by testing a nuclear device, while the US remained undecided about how to proceed.

Was anything achieved in the August meetings? Is a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis possible? If so, what is most needed to produce a mutually acceptable conclusion to the crisis?

First, to have any hope for a successful multilateral negotiation, especially on a topic as sensitive as nuclear weapons, it is vitally important to have the right parties at the table: not too many, not too few. All of those states whose core interests are most directly involved must be included, but, at the same time, it is equally important to include as few parties as possible because each additional state creates one more hurdle to achieving a viable consensus among the participants. This important first step was accomplished in Beijing in August. The six-country meetings brought together what has been labelled the 'four-plus-two' (the four major powers, the US, China, Russia, and Japan, plus North and South Korea), a formula that has been widely discussed in the region ever since Nakayama Taro was Japan's foreign minister in the early 1990s.

Among the six countries, however, there are deep disagreements about what a solution to the North Korean nuclear problem might be and how it could best be achieved. Both the United States Administration and the North Korean regime have taken such extreme positions that a peaceful resolution of the standoff is not possible without outside pressure to convince both governments to modify their irreconcilable positions.

But the conceptual divisions among the six are not what one might expect. Strangely enough, North Korea and the US tend to understand security issues in a similar 'realist' way, while the other four, especially South Korea and China, are arguing for a very different 'cooperative security' design. Both the US and the DPRK see the world as in a state of anarchy, self-help as the only reliable strategy, and negotiated

outcomes as inevitably zero-sum (i.e., I can only gain at your expense). By contrast, the other four are proposing an ‘everybody benefits’, win-win solution. They emphasise the importance of avoiding military conflict, and stress the need to maintain existing trade, aid, and investment ties—a network of mutual benefit which the DPRK would be invited to join.

Yet, North Korea seems far from considering such a proposal as attractive. The DPRK has become convinced that it is now target number one on the George W. Bush Administration’s hit list, after having been marked as a member of the ‘axis of evil’ in the President’s 2002 State of the Union address, and identified by name in the US Nuclear Posture Review as a potential target for US nuclear attack. The US declaration of a right to engage in preemptive war,¹ plus its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have only confirmed the DPRK in their strategic judgements. As a result, the DPRK leadership has determined that a nuclear capability is its best and perhaps only defence against a possible US attack.² Some analysts believe that the DPRK would not willingly give up its nuclear capability under any conditions.

Within the Bush Administration, there is a parallel, realist debate on what to do about the North Korean nuclear programs and the continuing DPRK escalation of the confrontation. Should Bush opt for preemption, coercive diplomacy, or engagement?

At present, US policy is a combination of the latter two, focused on what is called the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a strategy designed to pressure North Korea by cutting off any exports of missile components or nuclear materials to other countries. Ten other countries have signed up in support of the PSI after two meetings, first in Madrid

¹ Long before the US invasion of Iraq, David Hendrickson argued that what the US was proposing to do was not preemption but ‘preventive war’. The United Nations Charter does provide for war-making in self-defence, but only in the face of an imminent threat. However, the Bush Administration had explicitly shifted US strategic calculations, as articulated by Donald Rumsfeld, from a ‘threat-based’ concept to a ‘capabilities-based’ understanding of threat. Rumsfeld’s argument was that the US should be prepared to make war against any state with the capabilities to do serious harm to the US. This would be ‘preventive war’ not ‘preemption’. David C. Hendrickson, ‘Toward universal empire: The dangerous quest for absolute security’, *World Policy Journal*, 19(3) 2002, pp. 1–10. Noam Chomsky later entered the debate, arguing that what the Bush Administration was doing should not be understood as either ‘preemption’ or ‘preventive war’, but rather as what he calls ‘preventative war’—‘the use of force to eliminate a contrived threat’. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29–30 March 2003, p. 2.

² See, for example, Don Kirk, ‘North Korea says publicly it needs a “nuclear deterrence”’, *International Herald Tribune*, 10 June 2003, p. 1. Presumably, Iran is making similar calculations. See Anatol Lieven, ‘Dangers of an aggressive US approach to Iran’, *Financial Times*, 8 June 2003; Ray Takeyh, ‘Iran’s nuclear calculations’, *World Policy Journal*, 20(2) 2003, pp. 21–8; and David Albright and Corey Hinderstein, ‘Iran, player or rogue?’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 59(5) 2003, pp. 52–8.

and then in Australia, hosted by the John Howard Government.³ The problem with PSI is that none of the three countries that border the DPRK (South Korea, China and Russia) have agreed to join, and the operational difficulties and international legal implications of trying to intercept DPRK flights and to stop North Korean ships in international waters are very serious. Nuclear material, which is the greatest concern, could easily be transported in a backpack and walked across North Korea's 800 km border with China, as a Japanese diplomat described to me recently in Tokyo. That kind of material would be virtually impossible to interdict by US and allied military forces without close Chinese cooperation.

A further problem on the US side that must be resolved is that, despite occasional assurances given by officials that the US would not invade North Korea, at least some of the Bush hardliners are as committed to 'regime change' in North Korea as they are to dismantling the DPRK nuclear programs. If there is to be a peaceful resolution of this confrontation, the US cannot have both regime change and a non-nuclear North Korea. As long as North Korea is convinced that Bush is determined to overthrow the DPRK government, they will see their nuclear capability as their best defence and probably their only deterrent.

The task of finding a peaceful solution is further complicated by the fact that some US leaders conceive of the confrontation with North Korea as a struggle between good and evil, and continue to make personal attacks on Kim Jong Il. The US president's personal contempt for Kim Jong Il is well known—'I loathe Kim Jong Il', he told Bob Woodward during interviews for Woodward's book on the invasion of Afghanistan.⁴ More recently, US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control, John Bolton, denounced Kim Jong Il by name 41 times in a 25-minute speech in Seoul in July, just when other diplomats were working overtime to bring the six countries together for the August six-party negotiations.⁵ Clearly, strong emotions like these, on both sides, contribute to the danger of misperception and miscalculation.

This is where multilateral diplomacy becomes essential. To achieve a peaceful outcome, both the US and the DPRK have got to be moved

³ Paul O'Sullivan, 'Chairman's statement: From Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) meeting in Brisbane on 9–10 July', Special Report, Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, Berkeley, 16 July 2003, <www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0336_Sullivan.html>.

⁴ Bob Woodward, *Bush at war* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 340. Bush described his responsibility to Woodward to 'rid the world of evil', p. 67.

⁵ James Brooke, 'Kim Jong Il called a tyrant by US', *International Herald Tribune*, 1 August 2003, p. 1.

away from their extreme positions. China and Russia must convince North Korea that they are prepared, together with the United States, to provide the DPRK with credible security commitments to guarantee the DPRK regime against foreign military attack and to help in the economic modernisation of the country, in return for a verified dismantling of their nuclear programs. At the same time, Japan and South Korea, as America's closest allies in the region, will have to convince the Bush Administration that they must leave regime change to the Korean people.

Nonetheless, there will also be myriad bilateral problems to overcome. Somehow these issues in dispute between two countries must be put aside while the six parties seek agreement on how to deal with the Korean crisis. For one example, China and Japan disagree about a whole range of problems: how to interpret their Second World War history, territorial claims over islands in the East China Sea, which side will win a pipeline agreement with Moscow to bring much needed Russian energy exports their way, American-Japanese cooperation on missile defence, Japanese sex tourism in South China, compensation for Chinese workers injured when they unearthed Japanese wartime chemical weapons left in China, and more. Meanwhile, however, they enjoy a close and cooperative relationship with respect to trade, investment and foreign aid.

Each of the six participating countries also has domestic problems that might prove to be obstacles to a successful negotiation. One of the most serious is the situation facing South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun, in office for less than a year, who has suffered a slump in his public approval ratings from 70 per cent to just 20 per cent. He has called for an unprecedented referendum on his presidential leadership to be held in December. How this problem might be resolved will obviously have a big impact on Seoul's role in the six-party negotiations.

Another serious problem which may have a direct impact on the negotiations is the abduction of Japanese citizens in the past by North Korea. With respect to this issue, however, China, which has taken the lead in hosting the multilateral meetings, has perhaps already set an important precedent. During the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit meetings in October, China's President Hu Jintao reportedly told Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi that the kidnap issue was a bilateral matter that should be resolved separately by Japan and North Korea.⁶ If China, as convenor and host of six-party negotiations, can insist on keeping bilateral problems off the agenda at

⁶ 'China rejects helping Japan on kidnappings', *International Herald Tribune*, 21 October 2003, p. 3.

these meetings, that would increase the chances for their success by a wide margin.

Despite the many difficulties facing the six participants, a four-plus-two security consortium would be the best way both to resolve the current crisis and to provide a long-term institutional structure to support the strategic stability of Northeast Asia. The participants have an opportunity to take advantage of the immediate crisis to create new security institutions capable of providing long-term security for a historically volatile region.

THE FOUR-PLUS-TWO CONCEPT

Four-plus-two is a cooperative security concept that has been discussed by analysts in Asia and implemented in so-called Track Two dialogues for over a decade. The idea is that *the four* major powers of Northeast Asia (China, Japan, Russia and the United States) should commit themselves jointly to guarantee the security of the region and to support a peaceful reconciliation between *the two* states (North and South Korea). Four-plus-two is particularly appropriate today both as a basis for peacefully resolving the current crisis over the DPRK's nuclear programs and as a foundation for building mutually beneficial economic and political cooperation in the future.

The idea of 'cooperative security' arrangements among major powers is not new. The US arms control agreements with the former Soviet Union are the best example to date of cooperative security in practice. The 'nuclear age' created new imperatives for the major nuclear weapons adversaries to cooperate in order to enhance their own security and, most importantly, to avoid a suicidal nuclear war. Once the governments of both superpowers realised that their combined nuclear arsenals constituted a ticking time-bomb capable of destroying human civilisation, a new way of thinking became essential. That realisation, sharpened by dangerous confrontations like the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, led both governments to conclude that it was in their fundamental interests to cooperate across their many ideological and material differences to reach agreements to control the nuclear arms race and to minimise the probability of military confrontations between the two nuclear superpowers.

The 'cooperative security' design of a consortium like this is unfamiliar to many of the decision-makers who presumably would have to be involved to make a four-plus-two institution work. Nevertheless, they should be able to identify the very substantial mutual benefits to be had for all parties from such an arrangement. The history of Northeast Asia shows just how necessary it is to build new security institutions in the region.

The geopolitics of this area (where China, Russia, Korea and Japan come together) has been one of the most volatile in the world. For more than 100 years, the countries of the region have been in conflict with each other. Today, more than 50 years after the end of the Second World War, Russia and Japan still have not concluded a peace agreement, and the Korean peninsula remains divided into two states, North and South, confronting each other across the demilitarised zone (DMZ) that marks the 1953 truce at the end of the Korean War. It is the most militarised frontier in the world.

The current crisis began with North Korea's reported admission in October 2002 to US Assistant Secretary James Kelly that it did indeed have a program for enriching uranium which might be used to make nuclear weapons. This, in turn, threw Bush Administration plans for dealing with the 'axis of evil' into a tailspin. Ever since Pyongyang's revelation became public, Washington has been on the defensive, trying to explain why it insisted on making war with Iraq, where no evidence to date has been brought forward to show that Saddam Hussein had any weapons of mass destruction, meanwhile insisting that diplomacy is the right way to deal with North Korea. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) estimates that North Korea probably already has one or two nuclear weapons, and at the trilateral meeting in Beijing in April 2003 (US, DPRK and China), the DPRK representative reportedly told the US that indeed it did have nuclear weapons.

The United States has demanded that the DPRK give up its nuclear programs and accept international inspection, while Pyongyang has declared that it first wants to negotiate a bilateral security pact with the US. While the US refused to negotiate before there was evidence that North Korea had moved toward denuclearisation, the DPRK increased the pressure through a series of unilateral escalations, including the expelling of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

By a year later, however, it appeared that pressure from the other four parties had begun to work on both the DPRK and the US. Pyongyang, having earlier refused to meet in a multilateral setting, later agreed, first, to participate in the three-party meeting in Beijing in April, and then, more important, joined the six-party negotiation in Beijing in August. For its part, the United States won its point about insisting on a multilateral meeting, but also began to change its position to meet the North Korean demand for a security guarantee in return for giving up its nuclear weapons programs. At the APEC summit meetings in Bangkok in October 2003, President Bush still rejected the idea of a bilateral

security treaty with the DPRK, but proposed instead a five-nation security commitment to the DPRK.⁷

To describe the four-plus-two idea in more detail, I will first discuss *the four*, and then *the two* Koreas.

THE FOUR MAJOR POWERS

The first steps toward constructing a four-plus-two consortium might be the most difficult. Each of the four powers is very different: two Asian states, one communist and one capitalist; a former communist superpower; and the US hegemon. They each have their own vital national priorities. Moreover, they have no previous experience in working together in a foursome like this. In the region, their previous relationships have typically been confrontational, not cooperative. Most often, they have fought wars against each other rather than sought opportunities to work together for mutual benefit.

Yet, what is not widely understood is the fact that the four major powers of Northeast Asia (China, Japan, Russia and the US), despite their many differences, actually agree on a number of key strategic priorities in the region. Moreover, they are now more in agreement on these fundamental issues than they have ever been before. There are good reasons for this.

First, all four have a substantial stake in maintaining the strategic stability of the region. None would benefit from a major destabilising crisis. For example, it would not serve any of their interests if military conflict broke out again in the region as it did during the Korean War of 1950–53. Moreover, all four major powers especially value their relations with South Korea (trade, investment, and so on). More important, all four have an even more substantial interest in maintaining and developing mutually beneficial relationships with each other—so they do not want a Korean problem to pit them against each other.

With regard to relations between North and South Korea, all four powers would probably prefer that Korea remained divided (the status quo) because of a variety of different concerns about what a reunified Korea might become (for example, for China, a concern that Korea might become a US ally; for Japan, that Korea might become a nuclear-armed, independent state harbouring hostile memories of its colonial past under Japanese rule). But a gradually reunifying Korea within a regional strategic consortium dominated by the four powers would potentially alleviate many of those fears. Moreover, the status quo that

⁷ John Aglionby, 'Bush offers deal to end N Korea crisis', *Guardian Weekly*, 23–29 October 2003, p. 2.

the four preferred was the one *before* North Korea revealed its nuclear programs to Secretary Kelly. Now, they have a potential nuclear weapons power to deal with.

Second, all four are strongly opposed to either Korean state (North or South) becoming a nuclear weapons power. Three of the four powers (the US, China and Russia) are of course already established nuclear weapons powers. None of the three favours nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia, nor would they like to see a nuclear DPRK ignite a nuclear arms race. Most particularly, if Japan were to respond by deciding to arm itself with nuclear weapons, many analysts believe South Korea, Taiwan, and perhaps other Asian countries would follow suit. Such a regional nuclear arms race would be likely to destroy the global nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Finally, apart from those important issues about which they all agree, only three of the four major powers (all except the US) are opposed to a collapse of the North Korean regime. This is principally because it might undermine the strategic stability of the region, but also neighbouring countries fear that tens of thousands of refugees might want to seek protection in their countries. Although the US has spoken of favouring 'regime change' in North Korea, once Washington realised what strategic instability a collapse might bring, perhaps the US would also prefer maintaining regime stability in the North as part of a transitional arrangement for the peninsula.

One of the major obstacles for the four powers in identifying their common interests and acting upon them is the history of the region. Northeast Asia has been the cockpit of battles among the powers and the two Koreas, time and time again. The Cold War in particular divided the region into two competing camps. Moreover, there is a long list of earlier conflicts beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910, the Manchurian Incident of 1931 and the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, war between Japan and China 1937-45, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and war with the US (and in the final days of the war with the Soviet Union as well), the Korean War 1950-53, the Sino-Soviet dispute 1963-76, and the Cold War 1950-89. The Korean peninsula today remains divided along Cold War lines, one-half century after the end of the Korean War in which more than three million Koreans died.

THE TWO KOREAN STATES

The design proposes that the two existing Korean states would be full participants in the process of establishing a security consortium, and that upon reunification, the united Korea would become a fifth member of a Northeast Asia five-power consortium. Divided since the end of the Second World War when American and Soviet forces occupied separate

parts of the peninsula, the two Korean states have developed in markedly different ways. The DPRK, the last truly Stalinist state, has less than half the population of the Democratic Republic of Korea in the South, and its per capita GDP is only about seven per cent that of South Korea's, but it maintains the third largest standing army in the world.

The truce negotiated to end the Korean War in 1953 still marks the dividing line between the two Korean states. China withdrew its 'volunteers' from the North years ago, but 37,000 American troops remain in the South. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld wants to relocate US troops further south on the peninsula, or possibly entirely out of Korea. The reasons presumably are two: to limit US casualties in the event of North Korean military response to a US attack on North Korean nuclear facilities; and to increase the pressure on President Roh to agree to a hardline US position on the DPRK.

The United States and North Korea each blame the other for violating commitments made under the so-called Agreed Framework, the bilateral agreement concluded in 1994 with Bill Clinton's Administration to halt the DPRK's nuclear program and to keep North Korea within the NPT. The Agreed Framework called for the IAEA to verify the shutting down of the DPRK's plutonium-producing Yongbyon reactor in exchange for 500,000 metric tons of fuel oil a year until two light-water power reactors, to be built by Japan and South Korea, came on line to replace the energy that could be produced by the Yongbyon facility. Economic and political relations were also to be formalised, and the US pledged itself to 'provide formal assurances to the DPRK against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the United States.'⁸

During the last months of the Clinton Administration, accommodation with the DPRK had reached new levels. Former President Kim Dae Jung's 'sunshine policy' of engaging the North had led to a historic summit meeting with Kim Jong-Il in June 2000, and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had visited Pyongyang, opening the possibility that President Clinton might also visit North Korea. But all of this came to an end in March 2001 when President Kim met the newly-elected President George W. Bush, who indicated his deep distrust of engaging with the DPRK. President Bush's State of the Union speech the following January included the infamous 'axis of evil' charge against Iraq, Iran and North Korea; and the Administration's Nuclear Posture Review, leaked to the press two months later, listed North Korea by name as a potential target for US nuclear attack. The Administration's declaration of its strategic doctrine in September 2002,

⁸ Quoted in 'North Korea's nuclear program, 2003', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 59(2) 2003, p. 74.

and most importantly its commitment to preemptive war against 'rogue states', explicitly detailed Washington's hostile intent.⁹

North Korea, however, remained in engagement mode, inviting Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi for an unprecedented meeting in Pyongyang in September 2002 at which both sides made new concessions in what appeared to be a major step toward DPRK–Japan reconciliation and normalisation of relations. From North Korea's perspective, the visit by Kelly the following month appeared to be planned within a similar frame of mind. However, when Kelly provided evidence to his hosts of a DPRK uranium enrichment program (quite separate from the plutonium facility secured by the IAEA) and the North Koreans reportedly acknowledged its existence, charges and counter-charges began to fly, each government attacking the other with allegations of violations of their earlier agreements.

The DPRK then escalated the tension while Washington prepared to make preemptive war against Iraq, another member of the 'axis of evil'. North Korea expelled the IAEA inspectors and re-started its Yongbyon reactor; they withdrew from the NPT and even threatened to withdraw from the 1953 Korean War truce agreement; and they confronted a US spy plane in international airspace and tested short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan.

Following US military success in overthrowing the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, North Korea apparently now believes, as mentioned earlier, that it is the next target for US preemptive war, and that having nuclear weapons (unlike Iraq) is their best deterrent. At a second meeting with Kelly under Chinese auspices in April 2003, North Korea told Kelly that it had nuclear weapons, but in the same meeting, surprisingly offered to do all of the things of greatest concern to the United States: abandon its nuclear weapons programs and accept independent verification, stop missile exports, and work within a multi-lateral framework to reach an accommodation. North Korea put all of the key issues on the negotiating table. In return, Pyongyang wants a formal non-aggression treaty with the US and other substantial economic and political concessions.¹⁰

The Bush Administration has said time and again that the DPRK has violated the Agreed Framework, and that it will not reward 'bad

⁹ Excerpts from the version of the Nuclear Posture Review that was leaked to the press on 15 March 2002 can be found at <www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>. The full text of 'The National Security Strategy of the United States' is available at <www.nytimes.com>, 20 September 2002.

¹⁰ Julian Borger and Jonathan Watts, 'North Korea offers to lift nuclear threat', *Guardian Weekly*, 1–7 May 2003, p. 1.

behaviour' with concessions. They insist that they will not give in to 'nuclear blackmail' or 'appease' North Korea, as they charge Clinton did. The Administration says that it seeks a peaceful, diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis, but at the same time it is keeping the military option open. The Administration is conflicted: triumphant in its military victory over Saddam Hussein, but mindful of the potential pitfalls of the upcoming presidential election year—and especially the failure in 1992 of Bush senior to win re-election after his own success in the first Gulf War.

Negotiating a multilateral solution to the Korean crisis would benefit the Administration by showing the world that preemptive war was not its only strategic alternative, and that Washington could negotiate peace as well as make war against its adversaries. This might be especially important as events in Afghanistan and Iraq play back into the North Korean negotiations. The failure of the US to consolidate its victories in either country or to capture the top leaders, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, means that the military option for the US against North Korea has become increasingly untenable. The aircraft that the US would need to make air strikes against the DPRK's nuclear facilities have long been in place, but the United States is now unable to move sufficient troops into the region to deal with the kind of counter-attack that Pyongyang might launch in response.

Moreover, the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or evidence of a pre-war operational link between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein; the body bags coming home as a result of ten to twenty attacks on US forces a day; the sabotage of Iraqi oil pipelines, power systems, and water supplies; and the unwillingness of the other major powers to provide troops or major financial contributions without UN control, taken together, put the Bush Administration on the defensive with respect to considering any new military adventures. In addition, escalating costs for both the troops in Iraq and the rebuilding of the country have contributed to unprecedented government budget deficits while the US economy is experiencing a 'jobless recovery'. And candidates for the Democratic Party nomination for the presidency in the 2004 election, like Howard Dean and Wesley Clark, have begun to challenge the Administration's wisdom in their 'war on terror'.

A SECURITY CONSORTIUM FOR NORTHEAST ASIA

What would a security consortium for Northeast Asia actually do, and how would it work?

Four key commitments

To begin, the member-states of the consortium would have to commit to four key points. *First*, the four major powers would individually and jointly agree not to commit aggression against the existing states of

North and South Korea (and a reunified Korea once that has been achieved). There is no model for such an agreement that I am aware of, but the four-power commitments would provide the security that has been so lacking for both Korean states since the end of the Second World War. It would also meet the highest priority concern of the DPRK, as reflected in the demands that it has been making on the United States for more than a decade, for a formal non-aggression pact.

Second, in return, the four major powers would insist on international verification to affirm and to sustain the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, i.e., the joint pledge by North and South Korea to maintain themselves nuclear weapons free. Assurances that both Korean states remain non-nuclear is the highest shared priority among the four major powers. This would require an institutionalised inspection regime, to be operated by an international organisation like the IAEA. Rose Gottemoeller, an architect of the arrangement with the Ukraine to give up their 1,900 nuclear warheads after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has suggested that the Ukrainian experience might serve as a model for how to denuclearise the DPRK.¹¹

Third, the member-states of the consortium would commit themselves jointly to maintain the strategic stability of the Northeast Asian region—in a way similar to how the United States has served as guarantor of stability in East Asia since the end of the Cold War. In turn, this strategic cooperation could serve as a foundation for joint development projects in the region, like the exploitation of Russian natural gas and its transmission through the region.

Fourth and finally, the four major powers would agree to assist in the economic development of North Korea and to support a process of gradual reconciliation between North and South as determined by those two states. If the major powers could agree on these four points, that would suffice to meet the crucial external needs of the two Korean states and the region.

How would the consortium operate?

In order to adequately guarantee the security of the two Korean states, formal institutions would be required: four-plus-two must be much more than just 'a talking shop'. For the first time in the history of the region, multilateral security institutions would have to be constructed for Northeast Asia: a security consortium or a formal concert of powers. It would have one feature in common with the idea of a post-Cold War NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), the objective of using a

¹¹ Rose Gottemoeller, 'North Korean nuclear arms: Take Ukraine as a model', *International Herald Tribune*, 28 April 2003, p. 8.

security agreement to stabilise a potentially volatile region; but a key difference would be that all the major powers in the region would be included—this would not be a pact against any other state. It would help to stabilise a region that has been traumatised repeatedly by military conflict. A dialogue mechanism alone would not suffice.

Agreement would first be sought among the four major powers, with both South and North Korea invited to participate in the institution-building. Presumably, South Korea would support the idea with enthusiasm. Former President Kim Dae Jung officially endorsed such strategic thinking as a part of his ‘sunshine policy’ to the North, and the new President Roh has himself called for a ‘structure of peace’ in the region. Moon Hayong, Director-General for Policy Planning in the Republic of Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, also emphasised the importance of a multilateral approach in a paper presented to a Berkeley meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) on 13 March 2003.¹²

North Korea may at first oppose the idea, but its opposition should not stand as an obstacle to continued negotiations among the four major powers. North Korea should at every stage be invited to participate, but its possible boycott should not stop forward progress. The DPRK should not be permitted to sabotage the process. Once the consortium is in place, North Korea would not really have an option to oppose the arrangement for two main reasons: first, because the consortium would include as members all of its outside supporters; and, second, the commitments made by the consortium would meet the principal security and developmental objectives declared by Pyongyang.

The US is currently trying to pressure each of the other powers, especially China, to force North Korea to agree to the US unilateral demands. But a cooperative security consortium of all of the relevant powers is much more likely to win Pyongyang’s compliance. As Hendrik Hertzberg writes in the *New Yorker*, Washington’s only viable option is to rely on the help of the other powers.¹³ China has emerged as the key player in shaping a multilateral solution.

Even if North Korea were to comply with the present US demands, which I think is most unlikely, what about the next time? Because of the deep distrust on both sides, it would be very difficult to conclude a bilateral US–North Korea agreement to resolve the current crisis. Equally important, even if such a deal were concluded, it is very

¹² Moon Hayong, ‘Korean nuclear crisis: Benefits of a multilateral approach’, Special Report, Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, Berkeley, 20 March 2003, <www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0322a%5Fhayong.html>.

¹³ *New Yorker*, 13 January 2003.

unlikely that it would be honoured because of the continuing mutual distrust. In the end, such a bilateral agreement probably would once again come unstuck, like the 1994 Agreed Framework before it.

What if the four powers disagree?

Of course, they will often disagree, but once the four states decide to join together to build a security institution that can provide substantial benefits for all parties, it is very likely that the bases for agreement listed above (plus others that they may become aware of in the future) will serve as a solid foundation for sustained cooperation. Meanwhile, quite separately from their common interests in Northeast Asia, all of the four major powers are becoming increasingly interdependent in their worldwide economic and political relationships.

Meetings of the four focused directly on identifying areas of mutual agreement also could help to dispel mutual mistrust. For example, Japanese distrust of China's willingness to participate in such a co-operative venture should prove unwarranted, because the Chinese know that a nuclear-armed North Korea would sharply increase the domestic pressure in Japan to go nuclear, and as a result, China is likely to be more helpful in working for a nuclear-free Korea than many analysts in Japan expect.

When attempting to design a successful multilateral arrangement, especially on sensitive security issues, it is vital, as I have argued, to include all of those states whose interests are most directly involved, because if you leave one of them out, that state will almost inevitably view the multilateral agreement as a pact against it. At the same time, however, it is important to include as few states as possible, because each additional state creates one more hurdle to achieving consensus among the member-states of the consortium. Therefore, all six (four-plus-two) should be parties to the consortium, but probably no others.

Some commentators, for example, have suggested that Russia could be left out. But Russian participation is essential to the success of the consortium for several reasons.¹⁴ If Moscow were excluded, not only might the Russians begin to think that the consortium was somehow being designed contrary to its interests and therefore try to sabotage it, but also the DPRK might try to play Russia against the others to obstruct the formation of a working consensus within the consortium. On the other hand, if a four-plus-two solution is reached, the consortium members will probably want to obtain United Nations sanction, and

¹⁴ Cristina Chuen, 'Russian responses to the North Korean crisis', North Korea Special Collection, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 24 January 2003, <www.cns.miis.edu/research/korea/rusdprk.htm>.

Russia could help facilitate that endorsement by means of its role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Finally, Russian participation is central to achieving multilateral cooperation for the development and transmission of energy resources in the region. This kind of economic cooperation can benefit all parties and could serve as a major foundation stone for political and strategic cooperation in Northeast Asia.

A role for the United Nations?

The United Nations would *not* be an ideal site for constructing a four-plus-two consortium. Trying to achieve consensus in the context of the UN Security Council would be likely to make things more, rather than less, difficult because Japan is not a permanent member, and the UK and France, who are, would want to put their particular stamp on the outcome. It would be difficult enough to achieve agreement among the six parties without including the two European UN Security Council permanent members whose interests in Northeast Asia are relatively remote. However, UN Security Council endorsement of the consortium should be sought *after* it was formed and tested, in order to affirm and strengthen its legitimacy. It will be vital that the six participants remain focused on those key objectives and interests about which they agree, and not be diverted into tangential disputes about their disagreements—which raises the question about whether an independent facilitator might help in the search for consensus among the six parties.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is probably the only person in the world who might have both the stature and independence needed to perform such a facilitating role. Without some sort of independent convenor, the initial meetings to build consensus among the four, much less the six, might easily deteriorate into arguments about their disagreements rather than their common interests. Also the US superpower might attempt to intimidate the others into accepting its particular unilateral view which simply would not work. Maurice Strong, the Secretary-General's personal representative, has already made trips to Pyongyang, to assist in the effort to find a peaceful solution.¹⁵

While Pyongyang says that it only wants to talk to the US, Bush insists on a multilateral approach. Yet both a bilateral US–DPRK agreement and a multilateral arrangement might serve together as component parts of a four-plus-two solution. The US–DPRK non-aggression pact that Pyongyang has demanded might turn out to be a necessary (but by

¹⁵ The European Union has also offered to facilitate a multilateral arrangement, but it is unlikely that the EU could maintain a united position on the North Korean crisis when, for example, it is so divided on Iraq. '3-country defense initiative further divides the EU', *International Herald Tribune*, 22–23 March 2003, p. 3.

no means a sufficient) condition for achieving a successful four-plus-two arrangement for the region. At best, however, a bilateral US–DPRK agreement alone is unlikely to provide a durable resolution to the deep problems of strategic volatility in Northeast Asia because of the deep distrust between the two governments and the history of conflict in the region.

Economic agreements among the six countries for the exploitation and delivery of energy resources could provide another foundation stone for a successful Northeast Asian security consortium. Selig Harrison shows how ‘American encouragement of regional cooperation could make a difference’ in helping the countries of the region conclude mutually beneficial deals to exploit natural gas resources in Russia and to deliver it through pipelines to markets in China, Korea, Japan, and beyond. Russia has the world’s largest gas reserves, but it needs capital to develop them. Constructing gas pipelines through the DPRK and extending the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Russia through to South Korea would help to bind the countries of Northeast Asia together in ties of mutual benefit and common interests.¹⁶

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MULTILATERAL SOLUTION

Bilateral approaches to resolving strategic differences with the DPRK to date have failed. The Agreed Framework, which was essentially a US–DPRK arrangement (although other countries were involved) has collapsed, and that precedent is now explicitly rejected by the Bush Administration in its own approach to North Korea. Earlier initiatives by both South Korea and Japan have also backfired. Kim Dae Jung’s ‘sunshine policy’, and his courageous attempt to resolve North/South differences through personal diplomacy with Kim Jong Il, failed after their first meeting in Pyongyang in June 2000, the victim of charges that Seoul had to pay the North US\$500 million up front to convince Kim Jong Il to meet. Two years later, in September 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi made another attempt to resolve historical differences with the DPRK through summit diplomacy, but his effort also failed when the problem of Japanese who had been kidnapped years before by North Korea to serve Pyongyang’s spying operation became an explosive domestic issue in Japan.

Kim Jong Il may well have made the admission to Koizumi about the kidnapped Japanese citizens as one way to reciprocate the Japanese Prime Minister’s good will in making the visit; but subsequent charges

¹⁶ Selig S. Harrison, ‘Gas and geopolitics in northeast Asia: Pipelines, regional stability, and the Korean nuclear crisis’, *World Policy Journal*, 19(4) 2002/03, pp. 23–36. See, also, the Northeast Asia Regional Grid Project, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, <www.nautilus.org/energy/grid/gridindex.html>.

and counter-charges about how many Japanese had actually been kidnapped, what had happened to those few that Pyongyang acknowledged having taken, and a tug-of-war over the five Japanese who returned to Japan from North Korea, all poisoned the earlier good will. It is very likely that Pyongyang's acknowledgement about a uranium enrichment program to US Secretary Kelly the next month during Kelly's visit to North Korea (and before the kidnapping problem had become a huge issue in Japan) was also made by the North Korean leaders in a similar spirit of good will; but this also failed, as we have seen.

In light of the failure of these bilateral attempts to resolve strategic issues with Pyongyang, there are three main reasons why a multilateral solution is essential.

First, as mentioned earlier, both the United States and the North Korean regime have taken such extreme positions that a peaceful resolution of the standoff is not possible without outside pressure to convince both governments to modify their irreconcilable positions—to bring the two 'realist' states into the 'cooperative security' solution. If they were left to themselves, their 'zero-sum' perspectives would be most likely to lead them to confrontation and possibly to military conflict.

Second, four-plus-two includes all of the countries with the most important relationships with the DPRK. If any one country were to be left out, North Korea could still try to play that country against the others, but with all of the most interested and influential countries included, the circle of influence on the DPRK is truly closed. However, the US wants to use the multilateral forum for a different purpose: to close the circle coercively on the DPRK and to force North Korea to accept its terms—all 'sticks'.

By 'closing the circle', I mean something quite different. The key point is to demonstrate unequivocally to North Korea that there is a consensus among the five other states both that the DPRK must give up its nuclear weapons capability and accept verification, and that, in return, the group accepts North Korea's concerns about security and development as legitimate, and is prepared to make appropriate commitments to achieve them. The solution requires the right combination of both 'carrots' and 'sticks'.

Finally, a multilateral approach can provide a much higher probability that once an agreement is concluded, it can be successfully sustained. As already discussed, both the US and the DPRK accuse the other of failing to fulfill the commitments they made before under the earlier Agreed Framework. Moreover, the Bush Administration has earned a reputation during its brief time in office for playing what is called 'bait and switch': making a commitment to another party in order

to gain something in return, but then failing to do what you had promised to do.¹⁷ In a multilateral arrangement such as the one proposed here, it is assumed that all parties have a substantial interest in assuring that the others honour the commitments that they have made. Multilateral pressure can help to ensure that no consortium member plays bait and switch.

CONCLUSION

All of the US bilateral options have serious problems: a) the use of military force could result in a horrific retaliatory attack by the North on Seoul, on US military forces, and possibly on Japan;¹⁸ b) heavy economic sanctions are opposed by Japan, South Korea and China and could result in economic collapse of the North, flooding the region with tens of thousands of refugees;¹⁹ and c) to negotiate bilaterally an offer of aid in return for a promised denuclearisation deal with Pyongyang would be criticised by hardliners as repeating Clinton's earlier 'appeasement' of North Korea. Moreover, the Bush Administration is seeking some sort of face-saving multilateral format for resolving the crisis to avoid being charged with caving in to North Korean 'nuclear blackmail'.

Why would four-plus-two be preferable for the US? It would be the multilateral solution demanded by Washington and would thereby help defend the Administration from its domestic critics. More significant for the US, four-plus-two would not only deal with the immediate DPRK nuclear issue but would also put in place a long-term arrangement that has the potential to bring peace and stability to a volatile region in which the US has important interests. Four-plus-two would not be simply a strategic bandaid like the earlier Agreed Framework. Finally, it could provide a precedent for multilateral security cooperation more broadly in the East Asian region, which could help to alleviate the widespread concerns there about possible unilateral US actions either to intervene or to withdraw from the region.

¹⁷ For example, Paul Krugman describes Bush's post-9/11 economic policies as 'the largest bait-and-switch operation in history', quoted in Russell Baker, 'The awful truth', *New York Review of Books*, 6 November 2003, p. 8.

¹⁸ Phillip C. Saunders, 'Military options for dealing with North Korea's nuclear program', North Korea Special Collection, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 27 January 2003, <www.cns.miis.edu/research/korea/dprkml.htm>.

¹⁹ For an analysis of existing US sanctions on the DPRK, see Dianne E. Rennack, 'North Korea: Economic sanctions', Congressional Research Service Report RL31696, Library of Congress, 24 January 2003. For analysis of the likely impact of economic sanctions, see Kimberly Ann Elliott, 'The role of economic leverage in negotiations with North Korea', Special Report, Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, 1 April 2003, <www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0326A_Elliott.html>.

An additional benefit for all parties would be that participation in such a security consortium would allow Japan (the only non-nuclear-weapons power of the four) to become a much more active and influential player, a major power in its geographical region of highest priority *without going nuclear*. Such a security consortium might well assist Japan to participate strategically as what Ozawa Ichiro would call a 'normal nation'.²⁰ A further benefit for Japan would be that four-plus-two could set a precedent for strategic cooperation in the region, which might facilitate, for example, the completion of Russo–Japanese negotiations for a peace treaty to formally end the hostilities of the Second World War.

In its negotiations with the DPRK, the United States needs a firm commitment of support by all four of the other countries in order to achieve a peaceful solution. A bilateral, US–DPRK agreement is most unlikely to work because of the absolute distrust between the two governments. Just as North Korean commitments to the US are not credible because of past violations by the DPRK,²¹ American promises to the DPRK are not believed for the same reason. They are two 'realist' governments playing a 'zero-sum' game.

Moreover, unrelenting pressure will be needed to convince the DPRK to do what it fundamentally does not want to do: to give up the nuclear programs that Pyongyang believes, in its 'self-help' security strategy, to be the best deterrent to a possible military attack by the United States. That pressure can only be imposed by closing the circle of influence on the DPRK through including all of its major sources of outside support.

At the same time, however, China, Russia and South Korea will not commit to a unilaterally imposed solution by the United States (as we have seen in their unwillingness to join Washington's Proliferation Security Initiative) that fails to include sufficient incentives to meet Pyongyang's minimum security and development requirements. Coercive diplomacy alone will not suffice. The other parties insist that there must be both 'carrots' and 'sticks' to achieve a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Finally, in the proposed Northeast Asian security consortium, the other four parties would in effect serve as guarantors to both the DPRK

²⁰ Ichiro Ozawa, *Blueprint for a new Japan: The rethinking of a nation* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1994).

²¹ Nicholas Eberstadt, 'Diplomatic fantasyland: The illusion of a negotiated solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis', Special Report, Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project, Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, Berkeley, 23 September 2003, <www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0342_Eberstadt.html>.

and the US that the deal, once made, will stick—because it will be in their collective interest to make it work. In that sense, the four in combination have the power to frustrate either side from prevailing. They know that they cannot let either the US or North Korea have their own way, or there will be no peaceful solution to the crisis. Earlier, the Bush Administration might not have been willing to agree to a cooperative security solution to the crisis, but as the coalition in Iraq continues to fail even to maintain security in that country, and the US becomes militarily and financially more overextended, the Bush leadership has begun to appear more willing to listen to its five other four-plus-two negotiating partners.

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