

## China's Viewpoint toward Peace Forum on the Korean Peninsula\*

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This concept paper is divided into two parts. The first section is intended to make an analysis of the complex security background that the proposed peace forum has to face. The second part intends to address concrete questions, from China's point of view, that are directly related to the forum, such as how the forum should be understood, what major issues and strategies to pursue, how many countries be involved in the process, and how the forum be implemented.

### I. Factors Affecting Security on the Korean Peninsula

The rocky road for finding a solution to problems concerning the nuclear program of the DPRK and other related security issues in the framework of the Six-Party Talks demonstrates the complexity of security situation on the Korean Peninsula. The current state and prospects of security situation in this part of the world are affected by a series of factors. In search of appropriate approaches to a peace forum focusing on establishing a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, we need at first to have a look at the effects of these factors on security situation. These factors may be divided into several categories as follows:

#### *1. The domestic situation of the DPRK and ROK.*

In this respect, what deserves special attention is the DPRK's desire of seeking a favorable external environment for domestic economic reform. The DPRK has taken an increasingly open-minded attitude toward reform and is making some progress in this direction in recent years. However, in the current external environment, the DPRK faces serious constraints on its efforts of continuing reform. In comparison with the external situation China had faced during the initial period of its reform, the DPRK lacks two indispensable conditions for pushing forward with its reform: One is a relatively relaxed and stable external security environment, which is essential, as proved in the case of China, if a country wants to redistribute its major national resources from the military and defense sector to domestic economic construction and social development. The other is a relatively benign international business environment, which is ready to provide the financial and economic cooperation necessary for keeping momentum of reform. Of course, to attain these conditions, a country must at the same time make efforts to improve its domestic economic, social, and legal environment in order to its appeal

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for attracting foreign investment and business. Nevertheless, attaining this kind of domestic situation would be extremely difficult when conditions of external environment do not ripe. Domestic and external conditions are like the two sides of a coin and cannot be separated from each other for evaluation. In this context, we can argue that having the security concerns of the DPRK appropriately addressed is not only important for unlocking the current standoff of the Six-Party Talks but also for encouraging the DPRK to continue its domestic reform, which is indispensable if we want to improve the security situation on the Korean Peninsula in the root-causes. In this respect, the understanding and support of the ROK's public views have a crucial role to play. Politicians and academics in the ROK bear special responsibility in steering the views of the public.

## ***2. The mutual relations between the DPRK and ROK.***

Bilateral relations between the two Korean states are a key factor for the establishment of a permanent peace regime on the Peninsula and for realizing reconciliation and eventual reunification of the Korean nation. In recent years, relations between the two sides have witnessed positive trends. During the historic summit meeting between the North and the South and in the subsequent Joint Declaration in 2000, both sides have reached consensus over principles concerning the issue of reconciliation and reunification. Significant progress has been made in cooperation and exchanges between the two sides in economic, social, cultural environmental fields. Of course, because of the long divided history and the influence of factors from outside, bilateral relations between the North and the South are yet to become more mature in terms of mutual trust and mutual understanding. It still takes time and patience for both sides to make a further breakthrough in their political relations. However, whatever the difficulty, keeping efforts on both sides to maintain the positive trends in bilateral relations is essential to making peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and to pursuing reconciliation and reunification between the two Korean states.

## ***3. Relations of big powers with the Korean Peninsula.***

Existing security situation on the Korean Peninsula is mainly the legacy of the cold war. The role played by big powers surrounding the Korean Peninsula has important implications for the prospects of security circumstances in the region. In this respect, there are both positive and negative factors. The respective role played by China and Russia on the Korean Peninsula is similar in the sense that the two countries enjoy, though to a varying degree, good relations with both the DPRK and the ROK. In contrast, the US and Japan, the other two major powers in Northeast Asia, are yet to normalize their relations with the DPRK. The asymmetric state of relations of the US and Japan with the two Korean states has posed serious obstacles to seeking settlement of security issues on the Korean Peninsula. As a matter of fact, the US-DPRK political animosity and mutual distrust are the single most important root-cause of almost all the security problems on the Korean Peninsula, including the nuclear weapon program of the DPRK. Without resolving the US-DPRK political contradictions, the DPRK would continue to feel threatened by the US. This is why the DPRK takes normalizing relations with the US as its top priority with respect to its security concerns. The DPRK's drive of pursuing nuclear weapons and the deadlock of the Six-Party Talks are directly related to the US-DPRK political animosity.

#### ***4. Mutual relations among big powers over the security on the Korean Peninsula.***

The US, China, Russia, and Japan share common interests in the management of security on the Korean Peninsula to the extent that all of them want to see the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and desire to find a peaceful solution to the nuclear weapon program of the DPRK and other related security issues on the Peninsula. However, for various reasons, the four powers have yet to further coordinate their stands over certain other issues concerning peace and security on the Peninsula, such as how to address the security concerns of the DPRK, and how to evaluate and build a permanent peace regime on the Peninsula, etc. To a certain degree, China may have a pivotal role to play in coordinating the policies of these four powers, as by China's role in the Six-Party Talks reveals. However, the attitude of the US towards the overall security situation on the peninsula is the real ultimate decisive factor affecting the effects of efforts made by China and by other parties for maintaining peace and stability on the Peninsula. In this sense, Sino-US coordination is of special importance. Much more work is yet to be although recent trends suggest that China and the US get along with each other fairly well in this respect.

#### ***5. Strategic interests of big powers in the transformation of geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia.***

This type of factors influences the thinking of big powers in evaluating security on the Peninsula, but their effects go beyond the Korean Peninsula and are concerned with the future of geopolitical and security situation in Northeast Asia. In this respect, the big powers and especially the China-US-Japan triangle are not yet ready for establishing a multilateral mechanism dedicated to security cooperation and dialogue amongst them, for they face many problems and challenges in managing their mutual relations from the strategic point of views. The US views China and Russia as the two major potential strategic competitors that may challenge its dominant role in this region and beyond and, in response, pursues a strategy of combining both engagement and containment by lending special weight on promoting US-Japan alliance. The foreign policy of the current government of Japan is aimed at maintaining its leading role in East Asia vis-à-vis China's development and at drastically promoting Japan's international political status, even at the expense of Japan's relations with neighboring Asian countries. For this purpose, the current government of Japan intends to make a full use of the adjustment of the US strategy and take issues with China, the ROC, and the DPRK over history, territory, resources and other issues. The problems in the strategic relations among big powers add to the complexity of searching for settlements for security issues on the Korean Peninsula. For instance, the reason way the US is not ready for drastic reduction, let alone removal, of its military presence on the Korean Peninsula is presumably in part related to its strategic consideration of containing the alleged potential challenge from China. Japan's ambition to become a fully-fledged political and even military big power in the Asia Pacific has given rise to Japan's intention of using the threat of the nuclear program of the DPRK as an excuse for promoting its won military build up.

## II. Peace Forum on the Korean Peninsula - Problems and Significance

The proposed peace forum should define its functions by taking into consideration features of the complex security environment on the Korean Peninsula. Several points are worth special attention.

First of all, the issue concerning the nuclear program of the DPRK is in essence one of the major consequences of the continuing US-DPRK political contradictions. A fundamental solution to the nuclear issue of the DPRK is possible only when the issue is related to rather than isolated from the US-DPRK political relations. Normalization of the US-DPRK relations is the key to addressing the security concerns of the DPRK and would help rid the DPRK of its drive to pursuing nuclear weapons. This suggestion may sound uncomfortable for some hawkish conservatives in the US, but it is the most feasible, effective and probably cheapest way not only for assuring the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, but also for short term confidence-building and long term peace-making on the Korean Peninsula. In principle, normalization of relations with DPRK would politically cost the US nothing but the commitment to showing respect and understanding to the sovereignty and reasonable security concerns of the DPRK rather than seeking regime change in that country. The initiatives of the US in this direction would encourage Japan to follow suit. Normalization of US-DPRK relations would also be conducive to promoting further reconciliation between the DPRK and ROK.

Secondly, in technical terms, normalization of US-DPRK relations would be inevitably related to a series of issues concerning the arrangement of security assurance on the Korean Peninsula, such as how to promote confidence-building between the North and the South on the Korean Peninsula, how to establish a long term peace regime to replace the armistice and put an formal end to the suspended state of war on the Korean Peninsula, and how to coordinate the strategic interests of concerned parties not only in the framework of a new peace regime on the Korean Peninsula but also in a larger context of Northeast Asian security assurance mechanism. Coping with these issues needs the joint efforts of all concerned parties, though the US-DPRK bilateral relations play a key role in these issues.

Thirdly, there is no doubt that it's not going to be easy to get these issues addressed appropriately. It takes time to find ways acceptable to all parties over these issues. Exactly because of this, we can never overemphasize the importance of the political will of certain key parties in overcoming difficulties in the way of searching for a peaceful way to resolve all the issues. Political will breeds mutual trust, deepens mutual understanding, and improves atmosphere of dialogue, which usually are essential and sometimes decisive in terms of their influence on the outcomes of negotiations on concrete divergence of interests.

Bearing in mind these points, we turn to more concrete issues concerning the functions of a peace forum on the Korean Peninsula. Such a forum may have positive significance for security assurance on the Korean Peninsula for the following reasons: On the one hand, this forum would be complementary to the role played by the Six-Party Talks in addressing security issues on the Korean Peninsula. The framework of Six-Party Talks is designed to find a peaceful solution to the nuclear weapon program of the DPRK. The progress in the previous four rounds of the Six-Party Talks demonstrates the significance of this framework. For further progress in dealing with this issue, the Six-Party Talks remains the indispensable venue to all the parties. On the other hand, as demonstrated by the current deadlock of the process, the lack of mutual trust between the US and DPRK has led the Six-Party Talks to a rocky road. A separate forum, participated by directly related parties, with priority given to establishing a long-term peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, may help reduce the political contradictions between the US and

the DPRK, and therefore pave the way for new breakthroughs in the Six-Party Talks. The logic accounting for the complementary functions of the two platform lies with the fact that denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and establishing a permanent peace regime to replace the armistice are actually part and parcel in terms of the security problems on the Korean Peninsula. As pointed out in our previous analysis, the two sets of issues can hardly be effectively approached in a mutually isolated way. In addition, negotiation on such a permanent peace regime would entail addressing the full range of security circumstances on the Korean Peninsula, ranging from the nuclear program and missile and conventional force capabilities of the DPRK, to the presence of the US troops on the Peninsula. Exchanges of views on such a wide range of issues would hopefully help increase mutual understanding between the US and the DPRK and is conducive to improving their political relations.

On the other hand, conditions necessary to initiate such a forum now are more mature than the previous period. To name the most important, the first is the shift of the US political attitude towards the DPRK. In the Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, the US and DPRK “undertook to respect each other’s sovereignty, exist peacefully together, and take steps to normalize their relations subject to their respective bilateral policies.” In the US statement after the afore-mentioned Joint Statement, the head of the US delegation to the Six-Party Talks, Christopher R. Hill, reaffirmed that “the United States desires to completely normalize relations with the DPRK.” The shift of the US policy toward the DPRK implies that the US is ready, at least in diplomatic terms, to enter talks in any forum with the DPRK over the settlement of their bilateral relations. The second change is reflected in the improvement of relations between the two Korean states. In 1996, the ROK proposed a forum participated by the two Korean states, the US and China, to negotiate a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. This proposal was rejected by the DPRK on the ground that South Korea was not a formal party to the armistice and thus not qualified to be a party in the negotiation. The DPRK insisted that such a negotiation should be between it and the US. The “Sunshine Policy” of President Kim Dae-jung and the Pyongyang summit between leaders of the two Korea states led to significant improvement in the atmosphere between the two Korean states. In the current new circumstance, the DPRK sees many benefits and advantages in developing relations with the South, and no longer rejects the latter’s participation in any future negotiations for setting up a long-term peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. In October 2005, the DPRK expressed that a long lasting peace regime on the Korean Peninsula should be negotiated in a four-party format, including the DPRK, the US, the ROK, and China. The change in the stand of the DPRK toward the ROK has removed another barrier on the way of initiating negotiations about making a new peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

With regard to the question of how many countries should be involved in the peace forum, my private evaluation is in favor of the 2+2 (the two Korean states plus the US and China) or the four-party format, at least at the initial stage of the negotiations. This is probably the most compact format that makes sense both in legal and in practical terms. It covers all the parties to the armistice and all the major players in shaping current security situation on the Korean Peninsula. This is perhaps the least disputable and most feasible format, very likely to be acceptable to all the four parties.

This evaluation, however, does not mean that we should refuse considering any other ways of building a new peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. From China point of views, it is better for all the concerned parties to stay open to any efforts and approaches, as long as they are conducive to finding a peaceful solution of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, to making a lasting peace and stability in this region, and to promoting reconciliation and reunification between the two Korean sides.