

Executive Memorandum

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Resume the Six-Party Talks—Even If North Korea Walks

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North Korea attempted to stun the world by declaring on February 10, 2005, that it had “manufactured nuclear weapons” and would “suspend participation in the six-party talks for an indefinite period.” Yet this should have not come as a surprise to North Korea watchers, who recognized this statement for what it was: a typical North Korean negotiating tactic to raise the level of tension and garner a more advantageous bargaining position.

The world has long suspected North Korea of possessing at least several nuclear weapons. In pursuing these and other weapons, North Korea has flagrantly violated at least four international agreements: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1991 Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards agreement, and 1994 Geneva Accords or Agreed Framework, which called for North Korea to freeze its plutonium program in Yongbyon in exchange for two civilian light-water reactors.

In June 2004, during the third round of the six-party talks, the United States articulated a proposal—similar to a South Korean proposal during the second round in February 2004—that called for North Korea’s commitment to the supervised dismantlement of all nuclear-related facilities and materials, the removal of all nuclear weapons and

weapons components, and a long-term monitoring program in exchange for provisional multilateral security assurances, non-nuclear energy programs, heavy fuel oil, and the lifting of economic sanctions. Since then, North Korea has ignored the proposal and instead has continued to stall the next

round of talks by blaming “hostile” U.S. policies. These statements, along with demands for bilateral talks with the United States and the removal of U.S. troops on the Korean peninsula, simply repeat demands and accusations that date back to the Korean War. Such posturing should not be allowed

to divert attention from the crucial issue of dismantling North Korea’s nuclear arsenal.

Regardless of North Korea’s contrived excuses, the time has come for the five other parties—the United States, South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia—to insist that Pyongyang has been given more than enough time to consider the proposal on the table and to respond. The five parties should set a March deadline for convening the next round of

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- The six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue should be reconvened as early as possible, regardless of whether or not North Korea attends.
 - If North Korea continues to be uncooperative in the six-party process, the issue should be internationalized.
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six-party talks. Whether or not Pyongyang chooses to participate, the talks should take place as scheduled, and the five parties should agree on the next steps to address an uncooperative North Korea.

To this end, the Bush Administration should:

- **Urge** the other four parties—South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia—to convene the next round of the six-party talks in March. If North Korea does not attend, the remaining five parties should issue a statement declaring that North Korea is responsible for the impasse and proposing concrete next-step actions. These actions should include expanding the focus of diplomatic efforts from regional to international. Specifically, the U.S. should urge countries that currently have diplomatic ties with North Korea—including some European Union countries, Australia, and Canada—to sign a resolution condemning North Korea's nuclear weapons program as a dangerous and destabilizing activity and to suspend their diplomatic ties with Pyongyang until it agrees to return to the negotiation table. The Bush Administration should also push for a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning North Korea's nuclear activities.
- **Focus** efforts before the talks on ending doubts—particularly on the part of South Korea, China, and Russia—about North Korea's uranium enrichment programs. The governments of these three countries have expressed public skepticism about the uranium program, choosing to focus instead on ending North Korea's plutonium programs. However, ending both types of programs must be retained as the ultimate goal, and all parties need to agree on this objective. The Bush Administration should consider issuing an unclassified white paper on the status of North Korea's nuclear programs.
- **Work** more intensively with Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing to reconsider their economic assistance

and ties with Pyongyang. Tokyo has drastically reduced its monetary transactions with North Korea by cracking down on illegal financial transactions and enforcing shipping regulations, but Seoul is considering increasing its aid and assistance programs. Although Washington should not demand that South Korea permanently halt its humanitarian and economic engagement with North Korea, it should convey to Seoul the imperative need for coordinating policy and the timing of aid to North Korea.

- **Urge** the Japanese government to work out its differences with North Korea over its abductees as an issue separate from the six-party talks. The United States should support Japan's stance and insist on resolution, but this issue should not be allowed to divert attention from the goal of dismantling North Korea's nuclear programs.
- **Continue** to move ahead with coordinated interdiction exercises in the region under the auspices of the Proliferation Security Initiative to crack down on North Korea's illicit activities, including drug, weapons, and human trafficking and counterfeiting activities.

Conclusion. The United States should use the next meeting of the six-party talks to send the clear message that North Korea will no longer be allowed to dictate the terms and conditions of the multilateral diplomatic efforts to end North Korea's nuclear weapons program. All parties, even North Korea, have officially stated that they agree that the goal is a denuclearized Korean peninsula. The time has come to test their commitment to this goal and insist on its realization.

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