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China's Efforts and the Development of the Six-Party Talks in 2007

Gong Keyu^{*}

Abstract

The Six-Party Talks concerning North Korea's nuclear issue achieved significant progress in 2007 with the issuance of two joint agreements on the concrete steps towards the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Largely thanks to China's strenuous efforts, the talks in 2007 were marked by clear objectives, a strong sense of time, direct emphases and high feasibility. Sharing important stakes on the issue, China has played an ever active role in promoting the communication and negotiation among all parties, which is widely acknowledged by the international society.

With joint efforts from all parties, the Six-Party talks concerning North Korea's nuclear issue achieved significant progress in 2007. A realistic roadmap for North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) to abandon its nuclear programme has begun to take shape. According to the two joint statements issued by all the six parties on the concrete steps toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, North Korea was to shut down and seal the Yongbyon nuclear facility, including the reprocessing facility, as well as accurately and completely report its nuclear program by 31 December 2007. Despite the procrastination towards the end of the year, the situation on the Peninsula tends to be stable and peaceful, as both the United States (U.S.) and North Korea are dedicated to improving their bilateral relations.

“China has insisted on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, thus it has played an active role in promoting communication and negotiation among all parties. Not only did China host three plenary meetings of the Six-Party Talks [in 2007], but it is also a major force

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behind the passing of the two important joint statements that mark substantial advancement in the denuclearization process of the Peninsula. Generally speaking, China has served as a very successful moderator in the formation of the peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula as well as the security mechanism of Northeast Asia.”¹ This irreplaceable role is increasingly acknowledged by international society.

I. New Advancement in the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

The missile and nuclear tests of North Korea and the subsequent United Nations (UN) Resolution 1718 in October 2006 greatly worsened the US-North Korea relationship and the security situation on the Peninsula. Thanks to the mediation of China, the Six-Party Talks reconvened shortly after the informal meeting of the heads of delegations of China, the United States and North Korea on 31 October 2006. From 18 to 22 December, the second phase of the fifth round of the talks were held in Beijing.²

In 2007, with the joint efforts of the international society, the Six-Party Talks achieved significant advancement: concrete measures and actions became focal topics of the talks, to replace the old ones on principles and standpoints.

The heads of delegations from the United States and North Korea met in Berlin in mid-January and reached “something of an agreement” on reconvening the Six-Party Talks. Such bilateral meetings were considered “quite beneficial” by both sides.³ At the end of the month, negotiations on the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) issue were held between Daniel Glaser, Deputy Assistant Secretary of US Treasury, and North Korean delegates in Beijing, which suggested that “both the U.S. and North Korea began to take a more flexible stand.”⁴

In an accommodating atmosphere generated by frequent contact between the United States and North Korea, the third phase of the fifth

¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi in “People’s Daily” interview in the end of 2007, *People’s Daily*, 24 December 2007.

² Yu Shaohua, “The North Korean Nuclear Issue’s Room and Prospects for the Six-Party Talks”, *International Studies* No. 3, 2007, p.52.

³ Xinhua News Agency from Seoul, January 19, 2007.

⁴ China News Service, Beijing, 7 February, 2007, According to interview with Tao Wenzhao, the Institute of American Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Banco Delta Asia was a bank in Macau, which was accused of illegal utilizing funds on North Korea’s behalf.

round of the Six-Party Talks began on 8 February, focusing on the measures to be taken by the six parties as the initial steps to implementing the September 19 Joint Statement. “All the six parties reiterated that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is their common objective and that they will endeavor to fulfill their commitment as stated in the Joint Statement. They assented to implement the Joint Statement by taking concerted measures based on an ‘action-to-action’ principle.”⁵ After nearly 100 bilateral and multilateral meetings over six days, the third phase of the fifth round witnessed the issuance of a document to implement the Joint Statement on the initial steps toward the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, in which a timetable is set for the six parties to act respectively, and five working groups—on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, normalization of North Korea-U.S. relations, normalization of North Korea-Japan relations, economic and energy cooperation, as well as a joint Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism. Beyond many people’s expectations, the February 13 Agreement finally came to so many specific and feasible agreements that it has been applauded as a new “milestone” on the road to the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.⁶

Within a month, each of the five working groups held its first meeting as scheduled. Besides, Mohamed ElBaradei, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), paid an invited two-day visit to North Korea to discuss details about the sealing of the Yongbyon nuclear facility.

A new round of talks started on 19 March after the shortest interval from the previous round since the mechanism took effect. In the first phase, all parties reviewed the reports submitted by the five working groups and discussed further steps to implement the Joint Resolution; they also agreed to proceed with the Six-Party Talks and reiterated their determination and commitment. Because a resolution to the BDA issue had not been reached, the six parties decided on a temporary adjournment on 22 March, but they expected to reconvene as soon as possible for making concrete plans for next steps.⁷ Later, since North Korea insisted in fulfilling its commitment

⁵ Bill Powell, “North Korea Has Agreed To Shut Down Its Nuclear Program. Is He Really Ready to Disarm?” *Time*, 26 February 2007.

⁶ Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, 13 February 2007.

⁷ Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, 22 March 2007.

only after the BDA funds had been freed, the original schedule to close the Yongbyon nuclear facility before 14 April was postponed.

With the efforts of such countries as Russia and China, the BDA issue was finally resolved, and the Six-Party Talks were able to proceed.⁸ On July 18-19, the sixth round of talks among heads of the delegations was held, and the six parties reached four basic agreements: 1) all parties will reiterate their determination to fulfill their commitment; 2) North Korea is to completely report its nuclear programme and demolish all nuclear facilities as promised; 3) North Korea will be provided with an amount of economic, energy, and humanitarian aid equal to 950, 000 tons of heavy oil; and 4) all parties agree to fulfill their respective duty according to the “action-to-action” principle.⁹

From September 27 to 30, the second phase of the sixth round focused on the formation of plans to implement the second steps of the Joint Resolution. As the joint document needs to be approved by relevant governments, the Talks adjourned for three days. When the delegates reconvened, they passed a second Joint Resolution on implementing the second steps towards denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, according to which “North Korea is to defunctionalize the 5MW(e) reactor, the processing factory (reactive chemical laboratory), and the nuclear fuel parts factory in Yongbyon, as well as completely and accurately report its nuclear program before December 31, 2007, as stipulated in the February 13 Agreement; North Korea shall reiterate its commitment not to transfer any nuclear materials, technology or relevant data. On that basis the U.S. and North Korea will agree to take measures to improve their bilateral relations towards the establishment of overall diplomatic relations between the two countries.”¹⁰

As compensation, 450,000 tons of heavy oil as well as energy equipment and other materials equivalent to 500,000 tons of heavy oil shall be provided to North Korea by China, the United States, South Korea (Republic of Korea) and Russia. Yet, only 150,000 tons of heavy oil altogether were provided to North Korea by the end of 2007 by three countries— South Korea in late July, China in late September and the

⁸ Bill Powell, “North Korea Comes Back to the Table”, *Time*, 27 June 2007.

⁹ [Singapore], *Zaobao* 21 July 2007.

¹⁰ Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea Says U.S. Will Lift Sanctions”, *New York Times*, 4 October 2007.

United States in late October, respectively¹¹—while Russia failed to perform its part to provide 50,000 tons in November. Moreover, South Korea was “the only country that provided 5,010 tons of steel to North Korea on December 16 as economic aid.”¹²

Towards the end of 2007, the United States kept urging North Korea to report its nuclear programme as scheduled, only to meet with North Korea’s postponement because of “insufficient compensation.” As a North Korean official said on 26 December, “Because other countries in the Six-Party Talks deferred their duty to compensate North Korea economically, we have no other choice but to adjust our steps towards denuclearization accordingly.”¹³ In contrast, the United States insisted that “North Korea completely and accurately report and disclose all its nuclear facilities, details of its nuclear program and related actions, as well as finish denuclearization as required in the agreement.”¹⁴ That indicates the Bush Administration would rather see North Korea postpone its nuclear report than accept a deficient one. Thus the United States and North Korea reached a deadlock once again on the uranium enrichment programme (UEP) report issue,¹⁵ which resulted in North Korea’s failure to meet the goal of fully reporting its nuclear programme before 31 December 2007, and in postponing a new round of talks to 2008.

II. Features of the Six-Party Talks in 2007

The Six-Party Talks (six rounds, or eleven phases, altogether) have lasted five years intermittently since August 2003. So far, many important documents including the Chairman’s Statement and a number of joint documents have been produced, playing a key role in resolving North Korea’s nuclear issue. Especially during 2007, the talks touched upon the central, yet most complicated, issues of North Korea’s denuclearization process and U.S.-North Korean normalization, as well as agreeing two documents on implementing the Joint Statement, which paved the way

¹¹ Peter Baker, “U.S. to Ship Oil To North Korea: Bush Cites Progress on Denuclearization”, *Washington Post*, 29 September 2007.

¹² [ROK] *Chosun Ilbo*, December 26, 2007.

¹³ *China Daily*, December 27, 2007.

¹⁴ Press Statement, Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman, Washington DC, December 30, 2007.

¹⁵ The United States agreed to use the word “uranium enrichment program” (UEP) instead of “high-enriched uranium program” (HEU).

towards a peaceful resolution of the issue. In general, the Six-Party Talks in 2007 had the following four features:

1. Clear Objectives

2007 was an important year for the Six-Party Talks and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The Six-Party Talks not only contribute to peace and stability of Northeast Asia as well as the development and good relationship of relevant countries, but they are also helpful to construct a new harmonious Northeast Asia. “The talks once again prove that more negotiation and communication are very hopeful for further achievements.”¹⁶

The original goal of the Six-Party Talks was denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, yet an argument arose about whether the talks were bound to be fruitless given North Korea’s nuclear test. As a matter of fact, “the Six-Party Talks are still the best way to resolve North Korea’s nuclear issue, whose significance cannot be diminished by North Korea’s nuclear test.”¹⁷

A major task of the talks before the final goal is achieved is to tackle the nuclear crisis as well as the subsequent conflicts among relevant countries. In other words, the Six-Party Talks serve “1) to avoid loss of control of the situation and the upgrade of conflicts between North Korea and the U.S. or between North Korea and the U.N.; 2) to preclude North Korea from conducting a second nuclear test; 3) to prevent proliferation; and 4) to avoid a race of nuclear buildup in Northeast Asia.”¹⁸

“With respect to North Korea, a self-claimed nuclear power, an ideal platform such as the Six-Party Talks is especially necessary for dialogue, communication and negotiation among related parties, as well as for dissolving regional conflicts and preventing proliferation. As the talks are irreplaceable in settling North Korea’s nuclear issue, the mechanism should be sustained without doubt.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, 13 February 2007.

¹⁷ Shi Yuanhua, “The North Korean nuclear test and re-open the six-party talks”, *Northeast Asia Forum*, January, No. 1, 2007, p.53.

¹⁸ Li Dunqiu, “North Korea and the United States, how to talk about outside the six-party talks”, *World Knowledge* No. 4, 2007, p.31.

¹⁹ Shi Yuanhua, “The North Korean nuclear test and re-open the six-party talks”, *Northeast Asia Forum*, January, No. 1, 2007, p.54.

From this perspective, the Six-Party Talks have played, and will continue to play, a key role in the final settlement of the issue.

2. Strong Sense of Time

The two documents concerning the initial and following steps to implement the Joint Statement both set very clear timetables. For example, “The initial actions shall be taken in the following 60 days,” “all the working groups are to function in 30 days,” “North Korea is to completely and accurately report its nuclear program by December 31, 2007,” etc. Herein can be seen a strong emphasis on “deadlines.” Indeed, during the five years since the talks began, a number of documents and statements were issued, only to disappoint many people time and time again. Besides, as the mechanism is not yet institutionalized, either North Korea or the United States might refuse to join the talks with certain excuses and so the mechanism has to be ‘paused’. As a result, North Korea had earned enough time to carry out its nuclear test while the marathon-like talks went on and on with little, if any, effect, and the denuclearization process was seriously hindered.

The delay and postponement of agreements mainly derives from a commonly-shared view of related parties “to keep patient and progress slowly,” or “even to take the talks as the final objective, instead of a means to achieve denuclearization of the Peninsula.” However, “facts warn people of the necessity to prevent North Korea from further developing its nuclear power as well as to avoid the possible proliferation in Northeast Asia within a limited period of time. The change in attitude is the most important reason for the actual progress of the Six-Party Talks (in 2007).”²⁰

Having learnt lessons from the past, the Six-Party Talks have put more emphasis on the deadlines of scheduled actions and consider this the key to the resolution of the issue, which is not only illustrated in the joint documents, but is shown in the dedicated actions of related parties.

²⁰ Zhang Liangui, “The six-party talks: a new start, the new test”, *World Knowledge* No. 5, 2007, p.31.

3. Direct Emphases

As a segment of the Six-Party Talks, the five working groups have not yet attained synchronized progress, yet they are very helpful to the development of the talks. Now that the five groups are responsible for different fields, an issue can be first brought to a group for discussion and negotiation, and then submitted onto the table of the Six-Party Talks, which, by its direct emphasis on specific issues, greatly enhances the effectiveness of the mechanism.

As a new means designed for the Six-Party Talks, the working groups can target and resolve specific issues with much clearer aims, thus North Korea does not have to face the other sides and all the problems at the same time, which makes the maximization of the self-interests of all the related parties more possible. In short, the working groups have begun to prove to be a better way to achieve normalization between North Korea and other countries as well as the establishment of a security mechanism in Northeast Asia on the basis of communication and negotiation.

For the Working Group on Normalization between North Korea and the United States talks were held “in a constructive and sincere atmosphere” between Kim Gye Gwan, head of the North Korean delegation, and Christopher Hill, head of the US counterpart; the first time between the two countries on such a topic, which suggests “the thick ice between them is beginning to thaw.”²¹ Meanwhile, negotiations between North Korea and Japan on normalization have also started “on the basis of a prudent reexamination of history and the satisfactory settlement of relevant disputes according to the Pyongyang Declaration.” Despite the lack of progress, the two countries have indeed deepened their mutual understanding, which lays a good foundation for further development of their bilateral relations. Meanwhile, the Working Group on Economic and Energy Cooperation held three talks on specific plans concerning heavy oil aid to North Korea and North Korea’s denuclearization process. Likewise, the Working Groups on Denuclearization and on Security Mechanism of the Korean Peninsula also drafted a number of specific plans for action.

²¹ Wang Yan, “Nuclear talks: North Korea step by step”, *China News Weekly*, March 26, 2007, p.34.

4. High Feasibility

Through the joint efforts of all parties, the documents on implementing the initial and second steps of the Joint Statement managed to clarify the rights, duty and tasks for each party, which serves as a good beginning for denuclearization of the Peninsula.

Mohamed ElBaradei's visit to North Korea on 13 March was the first since IAEA officials were expelled from North Korea after the nuclear crisis began in 2002. From June 26 to 30, Olli Heinonen, the IAEA's deputy director general, and three other IAEA officials examined the nuclear facilities at five places, and reached consensus with North Korea on the verification procedure of closing and sealing the nuclear facilities in Yongbyon. On 14 July, North Korea formally closed the Yongbyon facility and opened the site for IAEA officials' inspection. On 5 November, a nine-specialist team headed by Sung Kim, Director of the Korean Affairs Office in the US State Department, arrived in Yongbyon to begin defunctionalizing the nuclear facilities.²² On 27 November, an inspection group consisting of ten officials and specialists from China, South Korea, Japan, Russia and the United States also landed in Pyongyang to supervise the defunctionalization of the facilities.²³

Up to now, many tasks mentioned during the Six-Party Talks have been completed one after another - North Korea has closed and sealed the Yongbyon nuclear and processing facility, IAEA officials were invited to return to North Korea, and the 5MW(e) reactor in Yongbyon has begun its defunctionalization process, etc. - basically according to such principles as "all necessary inspection or verification is to be encouraged with consent from both IAEA and North Korea" and that "measures proposed by the specialist teams shall be approved by the heads of delegations by international standards for soundness, security and verifiability." These measures and principles clearly indicate the feasibility of the documents produced in the Six-Party Talks.

Except for the goal of North Korea's "completely and accurately reporting its nuclear program by December 31, 2007," all the objectives of the joint documents have been reached, and the Six-Party Talks are

²² Jae-Soon Chang, US: N. Korea Cooperating to Disable Nukes, *The Washington Post*, 6 November 2007.

²³ *People's Daily*, Pyongyang, 27 November 2007.

expected to play an even more important role in the denuclearization of the Peninsula.

III. China's National Interests on the Korean Peninsula

China has been an active advocate for peace, development and cooperation since the New Millennium began. By sticking to the road of peaceful development, it endeavors to develop itself by maintaining peace of the world and, in turn, to promote peace of the world by developing itself. Its "Good-Neighborliness-and-Friendly-Cooperation" foreign policy not only helps create a favorable environment for China's reform and modernization, but it is also vital to a harmonious neighborhood of lasting peace and common prosperity. With the increase of China's national power and its influence over regional affairs, China is playing an ever more important part in molding a security environment of its neighborhood that is beneficial to peace and prosperity of the whole region.²⁴

In terms of North Korea's nuclear issue, China's standpoint has always been clear and consistent, i.e., "to maintain denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and to preserve peace and stability of the Peninsula through the dialogue mechanism." "To maintain denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" is the objective of China's policy on North Korea's nuclear issue; "through the dialogue mechanism" is the best way to the objective; and "to preserve peace and stability of the Peninsula" is a natural result after the objective is achieved. Therefore, this statement has a clear logic and profound significance, no part of which can be omitted or put in a different order.²⁵

Specifically, China's national interests include:

1. Peace and Stability of the Region

The general objective of China's foreign policy is to promote "a harmonious Asia" and "a harmonious world," which is an extension of China's "harmonious society" principle and marks a new phase for China's

²⁴ Xu Jian, "The International Situation and China's Diplomacy", *International Studies*, No. 2, 2007, p.15.

²⁵ Zhang Liangui, "The situation after North Korea's nuclear test and China's choice", *New Vision* No. 2, 2007, p.26.

diplomacy. Harmonious foreign policy, derived from China's culture, confidence, power and ambition, is comprised of a brand-new global value, indicating that China expects to shoulder a heavier duty to maintain world peace and promote common development. This policy suggests that China acknowledges and takes an active part in the current international system, and that it is willing to realize its own interests and seek common interests within the existing international order. Besides, it advocates a new style of behavior that is conducive to the friendly coexistence and common benefit of all countries of the world.²⁶

A harmonious neighborhood is the primary goal of constructing a harmonious world and the foundation of a domestic harmonious society. Thus China's Friendly-neighborhood policy helps reach its strategic goal on the regional level.²⁷

Bordering China, the Korean peninsula's geopolitical position, its history and current status have been closely related to China's political, military and economic security. Should the nuclear crisis give rise to a large-scale riot or even a war, the international environment that China faces would deteriorate seriously and social stability and economic development in Northeast China would also be greatly impaired. Therefore, it is of vital importance to China's strategic interests to lower the possibility of the crisis escalating into a war, to help pull the peninsula out of a Cold War status, and to prevent, or at least postpone, the occurrence of acute conflicts on the peninsula. To maintain peace and stability on the peninsula, however, does not mean to maintain the separated situation. On the contrary, China is playing an active role in breaking the impasse between the United States and North Korea, helping with a soft landing of North Korea's economy, and promoting the peaceful reunification of the peninsula, which is not only in China's interest, but will satisfy the common interest of all parties to the greatest extent.

2. Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

The nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula is a heritage of the Cold War era, which should be resolved as the peninsula steps out of its Cold

²⁶ Yu Zhengliang, Que Tianshu, "China's New Diplomatic: Concept and Practice", *Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theory*, No. 5, 2007, p.15.

²⁷ Shen Guofang, "China's New Diplomatic: Concept and Practice", *World Knowledge*, No. 13, 2007, p.44.

War status. The tension and the Cold War status on the peninsula will never be eliminated until North Korea gives up its nuclear programme. Paradoxically, as long as North Korea still faces heavy pressure on its strategic environment or feels threatened by the United States and some other countries, it will stick to the goal of developing its own nuclear weapons, regardless of the objective of “denuclearization” announced in the September 19 Joint Statement. The nuclear programme has always been used by North Korea as leverage against the United States. Once its security is guaranteed by a non-invasion promise by the United States and the beginning of the normalization process, it can be predicted that North Korea will happily give up its nuclear programme and begin to be engaged in international society. Therefore, boosting denuclearization without first ensuring the peace and stability of the peninsula, or insisting in reaching the goal by force, will prove detrimental to the final resolution.

The Chinese government has always held that North Korea should not conduct nuclear tests, but its sharp and grave attitude, as well as prompt reaction, towards North Korea’s nuclear test in 2006 is a first in the history of China-North Korea relations. This is because: 1) North Korea’s nuclear test further complicates the issue and provides a good excuse for the ‘hawks’ in the United States to apply to force, which poses a serious threat to the security of Northeast Asia; 2) the test may lead to nuclear pollution and “a high tide of refugees,” thus menacing the peace and development of Chinese Northeastern provinces; 3) the test may bring about a domino effect of a nuclear buildup in neighbouring countries, which will harm the peaceful environment for China, Northeast Asia, and even the whole Asia-Pacific region; and 4) the test might render all the efforts through the Six-Party Talks useless and generate an uncontrollable situation.

3. Easing Tension on the Korean Peninsula

“Détente, peace and reunification” has become a common hope for the people of both the North and the South on the Korea Peninsula. The leaders of both countries are also adjusting their policy according to the changing situation, trying to enhance peace and stability on the Peninsula. However, due to the lasting mutual distrust and huge differences between the two in their social systems, ideologies, economic systems and values, a breakthrough in their political relationship is barely visible in the short

term. A resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue and the following establishment of a peace mechanism, therefore, will be able to end the precarious situation of "no war, no peace and no negotiation" by gradually increasing their mutual understanding and trust.

China has been supporting the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. As a close neighbour to the peninsula, China does not only expect to maintain friendship with North Korea, but is looking forward to developing a cooperative relationship with South Korea both on the political level and in other fields. China does not seek a leading position, scope of influence, or self-interest on the peninsula. Actually, the Chinese government and the leadership have repeatedly declared that China supports the two sides on the peninsula advancing towards détente, and then a peaceful reunification, on the condition that no foreign forces get involved.²⁸

4. Development of Mutual Trust and Benefit and the Bilateral Relations with the United States

US-China relations are among the most important and complicated bilateral relations in the world today. After 9/11, anti-terrorism and the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction became two major strategic goals of the United States, while China's active cooperation with the United States in these fields strongly pushes forward the development of the bilateral relations as well as their cooperation on global and regional issues, now that they share many common interests in maintaining national security and the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

North Korea's nuclear issue provides a good opportunity for China and the United States to improve their mutual acknowledgment and trust, as well as to promote the overall development of their bilateral relations, despite the fact that they share both common interests and significant dissension. From the perspective of the general environment for China's diplomacy, especially for the long-term dynamics between China and the United States, the Korean Peninsula might well serve as an effective platform for China to balance the influence of the United States while strengthening their cooperation on the global level. Taking an active role in

²⁸ Li Dunqiu, "The Development of Relations between China and ROK in Northeast after the Cold War", *Contemporary ROK*, Summer, 2007, p.7.

diffusing the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, China is not only able to contain US expansion more effectively, but it will also help maintain and develop the US-China strategic relationship.

5. A Mutual Trust Mechanism for Regional Development

The Asia-Pacific region witnesses the dynamics of big powers and delicate intermingled national interests. Since the end of the Cold War, big powers in the region keep adjusting their foreign policies to the ever-changing situation and seek to exert more influence over the region. The relative peaceful status of the region at present does not only depend on the general trend of the world development, but also on the interest and power structure of the four big countries, namely, China, Russia, Japan and the United States. However, the crisis over nuclear proliferation is speeding up policy adjustment of these countries, which may lead to the collapse of the relative balance of power in the region.

The lack of mutual trust is a major cause for the security dilemma in Northeast Asia. Meanwhile, there exists great potential for the establishment of a mutual trust mechanism in the region, as all countries share the same security interests and the need for economic development. In the past, the different characteristics of national interests of individual countries were the topic of concern in analyzing the causes for the lack of mutual trust, yet in this globalization era, the common features of different countries' national interests have become increasingly conspicuous. Undoubtedly, to maximize national interests is the guiding principle in formulating a country's foreign policy. Therefore, international society and all countries in Northeast Asia can work together to establish a mutual trust mechanism by expanding and developing their common interests, on which basis their separate national interests can be better achieved.²⁹

IV. China's Role in the Six-Party Talks

China's constructive role in resolving North Korea's nuclear issue is widely acknowledged in the world. It can be said that, without China, the Six-Party Talks would never be possible, let alone the progress that has

²⁹ Li Shuyun, CK Lau, "Trust: The Key Factor of the Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia", *Diplomatic Comment*, February 2007, p.82.

been achieved so far. In general, China's contribution to the talks is shown through the following four aspects:

1. Facilitating the Talks as a Warm Host

China has paid enduring efforts during the talks and proves to be a very warm host and successful moderator. "At the critical moment, the talks lasted from the previous morning till early next day. China not only created a platform for negotiation, but it also served as an active mediator among related parties. When it looked 'hopeless,' China could still find a breakthrough to improve the atmosphere and reach an agreement. As the host country for the talks, China is one of the keys to the final issuance of the joint documents. In this sense, we can say that the Chinese diplomacy scored quite some points."³⁰

Both the Joint Statement and the following joint documents were reached on the basis of China's proposals, because they were flexible and designed to balance all parties' interests. In view of the intricacy and sensitiveness of the nuclear issue, China has been trying its best to create a rather friendly atmosphere for negotiation among all parties, thus greatly enhancing their trust in each other. "Although China's national power is increasing, it has never before played such a leading role as a moderator in multilateral diplomacy."³¹ Its efforts are not only instrumental to the resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue, but also prove that China has become the most important country in promoting the establishment and development of the peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula.

2. Coordinating among All Parties as a Patient Moderator

China is the initiator and promoter of the Six-Party Talks. "With an objective, overall and balanced attitude, China endeavors to take all parties' interests into consideration. As China is always open to communication and negotiation with the other five parties, its travail is surely helpful to the goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and to peace and stability of Northeast Asia."³² "China tries its best to support and promote the Six-Party Talks, as well as to encourage all parties to seek

³⁰ Xinhua News Agency February 14, 2007.

³¹ Xinhua News Agency, September 19, 2005.

³² China Daily Online, December 17, 2006.

more common interests. Besides, it has taken a lot of measures to fulfill its promises in a balanced way, by which to increase mutual trust among all parties. It also takes efforts to make some new achievements for each meeting or talk. This peaceful means through negotiation and dialogue will prove to be the best way to more consensuses and the final solution.”³³

From shuttle diplomacy to mutual visits of the leadership, from sending special envoys to meetings between heads of delegations, China has played the role of a patient moderator among all parties, encouraging each of them to reach the goal of denuclearization step by step and by peaceful means. Furthermore, China has paid due concern over North Korea’s political and economic requests, and advocated joint engagement of the other five parties in compensating North Korea.

3. Mediating between the U.S. and North Korea as a Skillful Balancer

In the eyes of Japan, South and the United States, among others, China maintains a special relationship with North Korea - from “brotherly friendship” in the past to Kim Jong-il’s many informal visits to China in recent years.

The volume of bilateral trade between China and North Korea reached US\$ 1.7 billion (around 12.92 billion RMB) in 2006, almost half of the total foreign trade volume of North Korea. Moreover, 80 to 90% of North Korea’s daily commodity imports are from China. After North Korea’s nuclear test, the grave statement of the Chinese government and the following action (overall suspension of investment into North Korea³⁴) became a key to reopening the Six-Party Talks, “because North Korea takes China’s stand seriously. The U.S. has to cooperate with China in pushing North Korea away from its nuclear program. In a word, China’s influence over North Korea is irreplaceable.”³⁵ Indeed, “China enjoys the greatest leverage to move North Korea, that is, China provides the most support to the country, and is its largest trading partner as well. Yet China does not boast the leverage, but use it tactfully in pressuring upon North Korea when necessary.”³⁶

³³ Yu Zhengliang, Que Tianshu, “China’s New Diplomatic: Concept and Practice”, *Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theory*, No. 5, 2007, p.15.

³⁴ Yonhapnews Agency, Seoul, 2 February 2007.

³⁵ Xinhua News Agency, 12 October 2006.

³⁶ *Chosun Ilbo* 12 October 2006.

On the one hand, China firmly disapproves of North Korea conducting the nuclear test while remaining cautious in levying sanctions upon it; yet, on the other hand, China is trying its best to convince the United States not to upgrade the conflicts and crisis. This dual-purpose strategy serves as a guarantee for the peaceful resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue, and renders China much influence over the issue as well as receiving wide acknowledgement from the world.

4. Promoting the Talks as a Wise and Flexible Participant

Many details demonstrate China's wisdom and flexibility during the Six-Party Talks. For example, to enhance contact and communication between delegates from North Korea and the United States, China arranged their seats by the order of the full names of their respective countries, so that heads of both delegations could be seated next to each other;³⁷ the interpretation system was made to synchronize with the flashing of five bulbs, which would be lit once simultaneous interpretation began, and would be turned off when interpreters finished in all five languages. Besides, officials of China's Foreign Ministry often responded to a question with vivid similes, such as "wishing the talks as sweet as Coca-Cola," "we have mounted many peaks, and caught many big fish,"³⁸ "all the six parties are on the same boat that has departed from the port; now that no one can get off, all we can do is unite together and sail forward."³⁹ These humorous but sincere remarks not only represented a new image of Chinese diplomats, but also greatly helped to ease the tension among all parties at the beginning of the talks.

With regard to the fact that the Six-Party Talks and the bilateral negotiation between North Korea and the United States were often held at the same time, China's position was that "results are more important than means," as it is certain that the bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea - whether in New York or in Berlin - have to be finalized with a statement or other documents within the framework of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing. For instance, the US-North Korea meeting in Berlin is

³⁷ Accordingly this means North Korea is DPRK (D), Japan is Japan (J), China is PRChina (P), South Korea is ROK (Ro), Russia is Russia (Ru), the United States is the USA (U), So the United States and North Korea can sit nearby each other.

³⁸ China News Service, 29 September 2007.

³⁹ China News Service, Beijing, 22 March 2007.

still “an integral part of the Six-Party Talks, a kind of bilateral contact during the interim.”⁴⁰

As to the other five parties apart from North Korea, patience is especially needed for better atmosphere for the bilateral negotiation between the United States and North Korea within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. All related parties should make full use of their own advantages and influence and play their bargaining chips wisely, so as to prevent the crisis from escalating into a whole-scale war on the Peninsula. In the process, China, South Korea and the United States are to cooperate closely and coordinate their separate interests and policies. Despite its limited influence over North Korea, China should actively work with other parties to implement UN resolutions and put pressure on both North Korea and the United States, in order to push forward the Six-Party Talks with its political and economic power as well as its impartiality.⁴¹

Action is the key to the final resolution of the issue. It will remain a massive “systematic project” to implement the Joint Statement, the joint documents, energy aid such as heavy oil, “fully reporting North Korea’s nuclear program,” “defunctionalizing all its nuclear facilities,” and the future impact of the five working groups.⁴²

There is still a long way to go before our final goal is reached. But we are confident that China’s strenuous efforts will help generate further progress towards the resolution of North Korea’s nuclear issue. As Tang Jiaxuan, China’s State Councilor, said, the Six-Party Talks entail “further efforts - political will and wisdom, flexibility and patience - from all related parties, who must stick to the road of resolving the issue through dialogue and remain loyal to their commitment, so as to push forward the Six-Party Talks towards even better results. The Chinese government fully supports the documents reached on the talks and will be always ready to undertake its duty.”

⁴⁰ *People’s Daily Online*, 9 February 2007.

⁴¹ Liu Ming, ‘The North Korea nuclear test and the six-party talks: Assessment and Prospects’, *International Observer*, No. 3, 2007, p.72.

⁴² Gao Haikuan, “Where will the North Korea nuclear issue going after BDA,” *World Knowledge*, No. 14, 2007, p.2.