

## Prospects for 6-party talks: Nuclear weapons are a means of survival for Kim Jong Un

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The most imperative duty of the third-generation Kim Jong Un is the “survival” of North Korea. This will require not only a smooth transfer of power from his father but also shoring up the national economy. This is because I feel the current regime will sooner or later come to the end of its tether unless North Korean economy breaks free of foreign dependence and begins to grow autonomously.

In May 2011 I had the opportunity to visit the capital Pyongyang and its environs. The North Korean economy I saw there was truly miserable. In farming villages, although rice planting had already begun I hardly saw any equipment such as tractors or rice planting machines.

I realized then that there would be no tomorrow for North Korean agriculture still done entirely with manual labor. What’s more, the people’s economic grievances will likely grow as the heredity of power reaches a third generation. The mourning period aside, even Kim Jong Un, for his part, will eventually have to improve the national economic system and build a society capable of reproduction.

The bottom line is that it is not only a matter of Kim Jong Un surviving as the third generation of the “Kim Dynasty” but also the fact that he has been left with the extremely difficult task of giving the “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” system a chance to survive in the mournful years to come.

### **The unpleasant truths behind the talks**

Based on the above, I would like to consider the impact of leader Kim Jong Il’s death on 6-party talks surrounding the nuclear issue. Firstly, we should reexamine the history of these 6-party talks to ensure an accurate understanding of their “objectives and limitations” because I believe that there are 3 “unpleasant truths”

behind these talks, held 6 times since the summer of 2003, that no one wants to talk about.

### **1. North Korea has no interest in abandoning nuclear weapons**

The current North Korean military does not have the ability to wage large-scale war like that in the 1950s. For this reason North Korea has devised a policy to “survive” by bolstering unconventional war capability to deter the U.S., South Korea, and Japan. It goes without saying that unconventional war capability refers to nuclear weapons and the special operations unit.

By now North Korean leaders are undoubtedly aware of the deterrent power of “nuclear weapons development.” If so, North Korea is hardly about to abandon nuclear development and will continue to streamline North Korean-made nuclear warheads. This is something we need to be prepared for.

### **2. Japan, the U.S., China, and South Korea do not want war**

Different from the Cold War era, present-day South Korea has grown too prosperous to engage in a major war. Japan, a “peaceful nation,” wants nothing to do with war. The U.S. too, which has been fighting in the Middle East for the last 10 years, does not want to get involved in a war on the Korean peninsula.

North Korea knows the situation perfectly well. For this reason, North Korean is silently pressuring Japan, the U.S., and South Korea by launching repeated near-miss provocations to which South Korea can offer no real counterattack. These tactics are indeed effective from the perspective of South Korea, which has too much to lose.

### **3. The nuclear issue will not be resolved by 6-party talks**

North Korea taking advantage of Japan, the U.S., and South Korea is becoming almost stereotypical behavior. Agreement at the 6-party talks → breach the agreement → provoke Japan, the U.S., and South Korea → refuse to engage in dialogue → soften its position → negotiate with the U.S. → begin negotiations in earnest → the U.S. offers concessions to North Korea → new agreement.... This pattern of futile negotiations has been repeated over and over in 6-party talks.

At the end of the day, 6-party talks are not a mechanism for resolving North Korea’s nuclear issue— they are no more than a type of “life support” for North Korea to maintain the status quo. A change in policy to exclude China, which “chairs” and “hosts” the meetings, would make it a virtually impossible and ideal meeting for China.

**If stalled, provoke**

As described above, the dynamics of the post-Kim Jong Il North Korean domestic political game are one thing, while the dynamics of 6-party talks are another. The substance of what is discussed at 6-party talks will probably be affected in the process of transferring power within North Korea, of course, but the reverse may not necessarily be true.

For example, one cannot deny the possibility that if the transfer of power to Jong Un stalls for some reason, the new system may strike out in some new form of adventurism. In this regard, however, such an event would not assume a completely new pattern but, rather, would be worth seeing as a part of the traditional “brinkmanship” tactic to take advantage of Japan, the U.S., and South Korea.

Due to leader Kim Jong Il’s death, at least, there is little possibility that any new hopes will emerge from the 6-party talks. It would hardly be realistic to think that Jong Un will be able to effect major change in North Korea’s strategy on nuclear weapons since he yearns for the “survival” of the system even more than his father did. In other words, there is little potential that 6-party talks which aim to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue will move towards a new substantive agreement. In fact, there is more cause for concern that Jong Un will raise North Korea’s “ante” with a new provocation. The prospects for 6-party talks in 2012 do not seem so bright.

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