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Negotiations: The United States and North Korea

REMARKS BY STEPHEN W. BOSWORTH

The United States and North Korea have more to lose than to gain from a return to confrontation and posturing. U.S. strategy in Northeast Asia continues to evolve in the aftermath of the Cold War and the more recent transition from the Bush to the Obama administration. The United States is still readjusting to the post-Cold War period in Northeast Asia. While our security and economic interests remain the same, the stakes are higher and the players have changed. Our alliances are important but not sacrosanct. Trade has proved itself to be a potent force in rearranging the geo-strategic balance. Trust remains in short supply. Negotiating with the North Koreans has never been easy, but the United States remains undaunted by the scale of the challenge. We are committed to a negotiated agreement with North Korea.

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The United States' grand strategy in Northeast Asia is anchored to preserving our position as an influential actor in the region and advancing our interests in peace and stability on the peninsula. In this sense, our regional alliances remain essential. The nuclear umbrella that the United States extended over Japan during the Cold War remains in place and obviates the need for Japan to consider initiating its own nuclear program. Russia certainly has an interest in stability. Most importantly, our close relationship with South Korea still constitutes, for

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both South Korea and North Korea, a very credible deterrent to North Korean adventurism.

China has emerged as a key player on North Korean issues, a development that we have welcomed and encouraged. It is widely thought that China must have a special relationship with North Korea. But North Korea tends to resist Chinese pressure, although they are both communist countries and were allies in the Korean War, and although China provides North Korea with significant amounts of energy and food. The North Koreans, after all, have a 5,000-year history of resisting Chinese incursions. China has more influence over North Korea than the Chinese admit to, but far less than others believe them to have. Despite these tensions, the United States is encouraging North Korean-Chinese bilateralism because China's interests are surprisingly compatible with American interests.

As the six-party process wears on, numerous alternative arrangements have been suggested. Frustrations with the current system reflect frustrations with the diplomatic deadlock and the expanding role of bilateral alliances, vis-à-vis multilateral engagement, but the six-party talks nevertheless remain the forum for progress in Northeast Asia. The six-party process, if it succeeds in a significant way in dealing with North Korea, could potentially evolve into a closer and more permanent regional affiliation, but there are no plans to scale it up into a regional organization approximating NATO.

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That being said, economic integration in Northeast Asia is barreling ahead at a startling speed, leading a process of integration that is very different than that which occurred in Europe. In Europe, governments led integration. Northeast Asian integration has been led my markets, trade, and technology. It is integration with a corporate face, not a government face. Amazingly, the level of intra-Asian trade relative to total Asian trade has reached the level of intra-European trade relative to total European trade. With or without North Korea, the integration of Northeast Asia is advancing.

A number of factors influence our talks with North Korea. Effective and principled negotiations demand that each party disclose its core interests. The North Koreans are reluctant to speak openly about their hopes and fears vis-à-vis the United States. We still lack a clear picture of their vision of the endgame or of their ideal future bilateral relationship. The government wants us to deal with them on an equal footing and to respect North

Korean sovereignty. We've seen over the years that easing the suffering of the North Korean population may be important to Pyongyang, but it is not a core interest. If it *was* a priority, they would not have expelled our humanitarian assistance mission even though it is clear that large numbers of people are starving. As with many totalitarian governments, regime survival is their primary concern, but it is hard to structure negotiations around such narrow interests.

Track-two diplomacy has a long record of effectiveness in conflicts around the globe; however, due to the nature of North Korea's political system, we have no such opportunities. There is no track-two in North Korea; the United States strives to complement its official talks with what would be best described as "track one-and-a-half talks." Although the North Koreans are not bringing track-two participants to the table, the United States continues to seek to build unofficial linkages between our two countries. We will continue to try to bring the U.S. participants in track-two farther into the tent and draw upon their creative thinking about ways to break the current diplomatic impasse.

In the past, North Korea has sought bilateral guarantees from the United States. The key difficulty in the United States–North Korean relationship is that we are still not in a position to guarantee a lifeline to the regime. We have been guilty of perverse incentives. The 2000 communiqué that was issued when Vice-Marshal Jo Myong-Rok came to Washington provided a negative security guarantee. Rather than guaranteeing positive benefits from positive behavior, we promised that we would not do bad things to them if they misbehaved.

Kim Dae-jung made a major contribution to the eventual stability and peace on the Korean peninsula by propounding the "Sunshine Policy". The policy's underlying principle was the recognition that South Korea's enormous economic superiority could be employed to leverage change in North Korea. South Korea, fortunately, has a democratic government, and, in democratic governments, bold new ideas can be shouted down. Kim Dae-jung was unable to openly defend the truly innovative element of his policy, which was to change North Korea in a very fundamental but slow fashion, because the North Koreans were listening and would drop out if he spoke too directly about change. The current president is correct when he says that there needs to be, at this stage in the relationship, more reciprocity. The benefits cannot all go in one direction.

Some analysts have speculated about a possible "Korean Gorbachev" figure who could succeed Kim Jung-Il. The United States is not actively seeking out such a figure, nor does one appear to be on the horizon.

Gorbachev was, to some extent, a product of what was happening within the USSR system as much as he was an agent of change within the system. The United States is watching North Korea closely and will respond positively to change within the system, as well as to future agents of change.

It goes without saying that there is a lot of mistrust in Northeast Asia; however, trust is not a major element of any negotiation. You make agreements and then you see whether or not the other side adheres to them—and they see whether or not *you* adhere to them. The reason our dealings with North Korea in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization worked as well as they did—and we made many agreements with them that they never violated—is that we held them to a high standard, and we always did what we said we were going to do. A common complaint about negotiations in North Korea is that the United States does not do what it says it is going to do.

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The United States' approach will remain very cautious and conservative. We recognize that any successful negotiation involves some element of compromise. Very few negotiations involve unilateral capitulation of the other side.

I have often thought back to the words of one of America's best negotiators, Robert S. Strauss, who was President George H.W. Bush's Ambassador to Russia right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Prior to becoming Ambassador, Strauss was the U.S. Special Trade Representative, and I had the honor and pleasure of working alongside him. One day, as we were outlining goals for a global trade negotiation, he scolded a colleague for being a little too exuberant and said, "Remember, the other guy has to be able to go home and say that he won too." Ambassador Strauss's wisdom is applicable to any negotiation and will remain with me the next time I sit across the table from my North Korean counterparts.■