

ILC 2021 Session 4 - The Role of Six-Party Talks for Future of Korean Peninsula

Michael Jenkins
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North America -- The fourth session of the June 2021 International Leadership Conference for UPF's North America region was titled "Prospects for Renewal of the Six Party Talks: Goals vs. Expectations."

The June 25 session was one of nine ILC webinars that were held from June 24 to June 29 under the theme "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Peace and Security."

Speakers

- **Michael Jenkins** (Moderator)
- **Joseph DeTrani**, former Special Envoy for Negotiations with North Korea and director of the National Counterproliferation Center
- **Christopher Hill**, Charles W. Ball Distinguished Adjunct Professor of International Affairs in the Columbia University School of International Public Affairs; former head of the U.S. delegation to the Six Party Talks
- **Fred Fleitz**, CEO, Center for Security Policy, Washington, DC

Session Report

Yonhap News Agency in Korea reported on this session. That story was picked up by the Korean press, including *The Korea Herald*, the influential English-language daily widely read by the Korean government and the diplomatic corps posted in Korea.

Amb. Joseph DeTrani is one of the most experienced negotiators and veteran envoys to the Korean six-party talks and is highly engaged in "track 1.5" meetings with representatives of Russia, North Korea, China, the Republic of Korea and Japan. He was extremely respectful of the various views but unequivocal that North Korea cannot be allowed to become a nuclear state with deliverable long-range nuclear warheads. Complete, verifiable denuclearization is Ambassador DeTrani's non-negotiable position.

Many in the Biden administration and the U.S. diplomatic and intelligence community in Washington believe that North Korea will never give up its quest to be recognized as a nuclear state. However, Ambassador DeTrani sees hope that it can happen. He praised the Trump administration's efforts to move forward on the Singapore and Hanoi Summits, although he sees nothing to indicate that these summits did anything to stop North Korea's nuclear development. He also confirmed that the six-party talks did not achieve their ultimate goal of establishing an engagement process with the North that would prevent a hot war from breaking out.

Ambassador DeTrani said, "The fact is we don't have a dialogue (with North Korea)." He added, "The option is for North Korea to come back (to the talks). The DPRK's representative should be meeting with the ambassadors from the six-party nations." He insisted, "That's point Number One, but that's not kicking

in. China is so important in this equation, and we all know this. So why not ask China -- and hopefully China is doing this as we speak -- ask China to encourage North Korea to come back to the table, to sit down with the United States and talk about complete, verifiable denuclearization? I was sorry to see the talks in Hanoi break down, as there was a chance to go forward."

Amb. Christopher Hill, like Ambassador DeTrani, has also headed the U.S. delegation to the six-party talks. He agreed with Ambassador DeTrani that there must be multilateral dialogue with China, Russia, the United States, Japan, South Korea and North Korea. China cannot be left out because without China there will be no denuclearization.

Ambassador Hill recommended that the United States reconstitute the multilateral discussions. He said, "I don't care if they call it the six-parties or whatever, but what I do care about is the idea that the U.S. by itself cannot leverage the end of this problem. We need the other countries to be engaged, and other stakeholder countries who have a substantial interest in a positive outcome."

The six-party talks, which had also included South Korea, China, Japan and Russia, ended in 2009 when North Korea quit the process. Ambassador Hill highlighted the importance of engaging with U.S. allies, such as South Korea, and also emphasized the need to include China in any multilateral format. "After all," he said, "the North Korean state, to a great extent, owes its very existence to China. Therefore, I think it's fair to say China has leverage with North Korea. Perhaps they don't have as much leverage as some American observers suggest they do, but they certainly have more leverage than *they* suggest they do."

Ambassador Hill also noted that the number of countries involved in the six-party talks is not an arbitrary number, and not limited to six. The talks, he said, "reflect countries that have a direct interest. I think these countries all need to be involved and I think it behooves the U.S. to see if we can work with these countries."

The call for the United States to work with China and others comes amid a growing rivalry between Washington and Beijing, but the former U.S. diplomats insisted that the countries must cooperate when they can. "These are issues where we can work with China. China can show an overture to the U.S. and to the world that they are willing to work on not only climate, trade issues, but also on issues of national security like North Korea and the nuclear issue," said Ambassador DeTrani.

Ambassador Hill argued that the United States and China working together on an issue of mutual concern such as North Korea may even help improve their bilateral relations. "Now clearly the U.S.–China relationship, with all its difficulties, is not going to be resolved by addressing bilateral problems between that relationship, like a lot of things," Ambassador Hill said. "Our ability to work with China could be enhanced if we can look at a third-country situation or another issue out there and see if we can find a way forward cooperating, and that can help improve some of the bilateral (problems)," he added.

Mr. Fred Fleitz, in addition to being CEO of the Center for Security Studies in Washington, served as chief of staff to National Security Advisor John Bolton, and deputy assistant to President Trump on security. Fleitz underscored that great progress had been made through the Trump administration's direct approach with Kim Jong-un. He also said Korean President Moon is to be credited with helping with the summits. Fred totally rejects the multilateral approach of the Biden administration toward Iran and toward Korea. He praised President Trump's approach direct engagement and stated that President Trump definitely engaged Kim Jong-un, who stopped nuclear testing. He asserted that the six-party talks did not work, in contrast with the opinions of Ambassadors Hill and DeTrani.