Research Skills Workshop on the

Nuclear Security Dilemma in Northeast Asia

Organized by the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies

and the Security Research Group

Department of International Politics

University of Wales Aberystwyth

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Rapporteur's Report

The Workshop essentially addressed three key questions: how should the international community manage the nuclear challenge posed by the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK); what are the implications of this case for the future viability of the nuclear non-proliferation regime; and what strategies and policies should be adopted in meeting these challenges in the future.

The DPRK's Nuclear Challenge

Regarding the question of how the international community should manage the nuclear challenge posed by the DPRK, a range of viewpoints was expressed. The paper delivered by Erwin Tan in the first session emphasised the importance of dialogue, focusing on the claim

that former President Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang in 1994 was essential in both defusing the escalating crisis between the United States and the DPRK in 1994, and laying the ground for the signing of the Agreed Framework between the United States and the DPRK later that year. However, some of the practitioners present questioned whether the Carter visit had been so influential.

There was discussion of US policy in relation to the DPRK, and this focused on Secretary of State Rice's five-point plan. According to this, the United States should (i) strengthen strategic relationships in the region; (ii) impose a range of costs on the DPRK in the event that the latter reneges on its agreements; (iii) expand defensive measures in the region (for example, the Proliferation Security Initiative) to counter the security threat posed by the DPRK; (iv) work to preserve the viability of the nuclear non-proliferation regime; and (v) communicate to the DPRK that the path to increased cooperation is open through Pyongyang's full compliance with the Agreement reached in the Six Party Talks (China, DPRK, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United States) in February 2007, crucially the freezing and dismantling of the DPRK's nuclear reactor at Yongbong. In short, the United States wants to work with the DPRK, but, as Secretary of State Rice stated on 1 May 2007, 'We don't have endless patience'.

Some participants were concerned that the Bush Administration was insufficiently sensitive to how US actions might be perceived as threatening by the DPRK. One declared that what motivated Pyongyang in its nuclear ambitions was 'fear- fear of the United States, fear of China, and fear of Japan'. Yet others with experience of the diplomatic world maintained that North Korea had nothing to worry about because it knew the United States and South Korea would never attack it. Moreover, it followed that because Pyongyang knew the White House

was not a threat, its arming must indicate aggressive intent. Here, it was argued that the United States has very real fears regarding the DPRK's nuclear and missile weapon programmes, and its development of National Missile Defence (NMD) has to be seen in the context of the long-term threat posed by the DPRK's latent nuclear capability to the US homeland. The problem is that measures which one side views as inherently defensive are seen by potential adversaries as threatening and provocative.

The importance of diplomats and policy-makers appreciating that different Asian states exhibit different strategic cultures, which in turn shapes the formulation and execution of policy, was stressed by Justin Wong in his presentation. This led to a discussion about how International Relations theory might contribute to our understanding of Asian security dilemmas, and whether we could meaningfully talk about an Asian IR. There is increasing interest in trying to determine whether there is a specifically Asian element that could help to resolve disputes like the nuclear stand-off on the Korean Peninsula. Overall, however, this idea of a uniquely Asian IR was seen as problematic. The Asian values debate has now evaporated, and it was suggested that the Asian security debate might do the same.

Internal Political Dynamics as Obstacles to Cooperation

In deciding how to deal with each other, both the United States and the DPRK must take account of domestic factors, and it was considered important to look more deeply into these internal political dynamics. The Republican Congress after 1994, for example, made it difficult to sustain the trust-building which had arguably made possible the Agreed Framework. President Clinton was accused of selling out to the regime of Kim Jong-Il. Equally, a number of commentators at the workshop pointed out that it was very difficult for

Pyongyang to promote a deal that looked like selling out to the ideological foe. A further obstacle to cooperation which one commentator highlighted was that the DPRK leadership do not understand the US political process. Consequently, they found it hard to believe that the US Congress could block the Clinton Administration in its implementation of the Agreed Framework, believing instead that any stalling on Washington's part showed that the United States was not committed to cooperation.

The point was made that analysis of documents can provide important insight into internal political dynamics, even in relation to the DPRK. According to one participant, the problem in assessing the motives and intentions of Pyongyang is not the lack of sources, but rather knowing how to handle the variety of sources that exist in order to make sense of events. When handled in the correct way, it was argued, these sources allow us to reconstruct many policy-making processes.

Cooperation derailed and restarted under Bush

The 1994 Agreed Framework was regarded as both a significant breakthrough and as a missed opportunity. Under the Agreement, the US and the DPRK agreed to move towards full normalization of political and economic relations, with Pyongyang agreeing to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear facilities in exchange for two electricity-generating light-water reactors and fuel shipments. In the United States, however, the Agreement was criticized as appeasement, and under the Bush administration, the opportunities for normalizing relations with the DPRK have been set back still further.

In October 2002, Pyongyang had hoped that a new dialogue might be started between the DPRK and the United States. As one participant pointed out, the DPRK had expected the new US administration to honour the Agreed Framework, especially what the DPRK leadership viewed as the great prize of normalisation of relations with the United States. However, the visit to the DPRK by James Kelly, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, witnessed a severe breakdown in relations when the US negotiator accused Pyongyang of developing a covert uranium enrichment programme. The view was expressed by some participants that the only purpose of the Kelly visit was to find a pretext for the White House to kill off the Agreed Framework. The DPRK interpreted the Kelly visit as the end of the 1994 Agreement, and it withdrew from the NPT three months later in January 2003. It was pointed out by some participants that whatever its limitations, the Agreed Framework had capped the DPRK's plutonium production in the period 1994-2002. With the Agreed Framework dead, and the IAEA no longer able to monitor the production activities at Yongbong, there were no outside restraints on the DPRK's capacity to produce weapons grade plutonium.

The DPRK did return to the negotiating table later that year and two years later a new agreement was reached in the Six Party Talks on 19 September 2005, but an agreement on initial actions to implement this agreement were delayed until February 2007 by the DPRK's missile and nuclear tests in 2006. And now the implementation of the initial actions is being further delayed by wrangling over the release of assets which under US pressure have been frozen in accounts held by the DPRK in The Banco Delta Asia in the Chinese enclave of Macao.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

It was argued by some that when the DPRK felt that it could no longer adhere to NPT, it preferred to withdraw rather than violate its provisions by remaining a party to it. This was pointed to as showing the efficacy of international law in constraining state decisions. However, others argued that the DPRK had not withdrawn from the Treaty due to fear of breaking its terms, but because it did not want to undergo the extremely intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Others felt that the IAEA had adopted a very uncompromising stance with Pyongyang, causing the latter to feel that it was being pushed into a corner. Reflecting on the 1994 nuclear crisis, it was suggested that the rigid application of IAEA rules might have contributed to the escalation of the crisis rather than helping to defuse it.

According to the pessimists at the workshop, the case of the DPRK poses a fatal challenge to the NPT regime. First, the case calls into question the effectiveness of IAEA safeguards, given that on numerous occasions Pyongyang has refused to co-operate with the IAEA and has prevented it from carrying out its inspections. Second, the case of the DPRK highlights the weakness of the UN Security Council which, until last year, had refrained from taking firm action against Pyongyang. Third, the DPRK's behaviour in the nuclear field has shown that wrongdoing will not be punished. In the 1994 Agreed Framework, for example, North Korea was rewarded by being provided with free light-water reactors, even though it had not complied with the provisions of the NPT. Finally, it was argued that the DPRK's actions have undermined the non-proliferation regime by causing other states, such as South Korea and Japan, to reassess their commitments to it.

Set against this, it was felt by others that the pessimists were wrong and that each of the above criticisms can be rebutted. It was suggested that the North Korean experience shows that the IAEA safeguards system does work if it is given a chance to do so. The UNSC and the international community have not done nothing about North Korea and few states would wish to find themselves in the position North Korea now does. Offering carrots for good behaviour to regimes like North Korea may be uncomfortable, but it may also work and is not in practice likely to encourage others to follow the North Korean example. Nor is further proliferation in North East Asia an inevitable consequence of North Korean actions. So, it was suggested, the challenge that the DPRK poses to the non-proliferation regime is manageable rather than fatal. Indeed, it was further argued by some that in the long run the non-proliferation regime may yet prevail over the DPRK rather than the other way round.

The Way Forward

Concerning the future of the DPRK, the general consensus was that despite the problems that confront the regime, it does not face imminent collapse. It was emphasized that one of the reasons that the regime has been able to survive is that it has been very successful in using the nuclear threat as leverage to secure aid. It was also pointed out that the regime has benefited from the fact that its neighbours – South Korea, Japan, and China – regard the continued existence of the DPRK as preferable to the enormous chaos that would necessarily flow from its collapse. South Korea and China particularly fear the huge influx of refugees that would accompany the DPRK's demise. However, the point was also made that there are people who believe that the North Korean regime will not endure, and that its trials and tribulations have discouraged other States from developing nuclear weapons.

It was widely agreed that the way forward is continued engagement with the DPRK, and consensus seemed to settle on the view that what is required is a judicious mixture of carrots and sticks. The 1994 Agreed Framework was cited as an example of how it is possible to modify Pyongyang's behaviour through engagement strategies. There was a strong feeling that China increasingly holds the key to progress on the nuclear stand-off, and that Washington's relationship with Beijing will be a key determinant of whether the DPRK's nuclear ambitions can be arrested and reversed. Here, it was pointed out that China has recently proved much more accommodating on this issue. For example, the support it has given in relation to the two UN Security Council resolutions on the DPRK would have been unthinkable a few years ago. There was some discussion about whether negotiations on the nuclear question should include extraneous matters like the issue of abductions and human rights. One view was that this issue was irrelevant to the Six-Party Talks. However, the US position on this is that it will not sacrifice an issue that is so important to Japan, a key ally in the region. It was stressed, however, that resolving this problem between Japan and the DPRK should not be held hostage to making progress on the nuclear issue.

Dr Janine Clark