

SPOTLIGHT

Korean Peninsula

After more than two years of “strategic patience” exercised by Washington in not rushing into negotiations with North Korea, why did it convene a bilateral meeting in New York in late July? It is important to view this meeting in the larger context of the Chinese-led three-stage proposal. In stage one, the two Koreas would seek to improve relations. This would, in turn, lead to U.S.-North Korea talks in stage two. Based on a satisfactory outcome, this process would culminate in a full resumption of the Six-Party Talks in stage three.

This “exploratory” New York meeting is linked to another meeting that took place on July 22, in the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Bali, between the North and South Korean envoys to the Six-Party Talks. While it appeared that the earlier Chinese proposal had collapsed because of South Korea’s insistence on an apology for North Korean provocations in 2010, this two-hour inter-Korean meeting offered a face-saving way to proceed anew with both envoys stating their respective country’s desire to resume the Six-Party Talks. This created a sufficient opening for Secretary Clinton to formally invite Kim Kye-gwan, North Korea’s First Vice Foreign Minister, to New York for a meeting with U.S. officials led by Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, Special Representative for North Korea Policy.

Washington carefully managed expectations, hence the specific reference to the meeting as exploratory in nature rather than a resumption of formal negotiations. The U.S. sought two things: First, it wanted a North Korean commitment not to repeat the destabilizing provocations against South Korea in 2010. Second, the U.S. was looking for North Korea’s clear commitment to denuclearization in the manner that it had already agreed to in previous accords. North Korea expressed a desire to resume the Six-Party Talks, proposed a U.S.-North Korea peace treaty, and appealed for humanitarian food assistance. In a post-meeting press conference, both sides stated that the sessions were “businesslike and constructive.”

If the U.S.—after close consultations with Seoul—determines that there is sufficient indication about North Korea’s commitment to denuclearization, there may be additional exploratory meetings. However, whereas the inter-Korean talks in Bali were a quick sprint, all the parties involved recognize that even if the exploratory meeting in New York ends up providing a modest green light, the pace will proceed like a slow walk. The main goal at this delicate stage is not speed, but preserving any form of rare forward movement in a principled manner.

USIP’s Korea Working Group (KWG) continues to engage current and former policymakers as well as experts in Washington, Seoul and Beijing in Track 1.5 dialogues that provide feedback on collaborative ways to prevent future North Korean provocations and facilitate a resumption of denuclearization activities.

4th U.S.-China Project on Crisis Avoidance and Cooperation Track 1.5 conference in Washington DC, November 2010. Source: U.S. Institute of Peace.

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OVER THE HORIZON—HIGHLIGHTS

Iran's 2012 Parliamentary Elections

There are signs that Iran's political space may be opening slightly in advance of the March 2012 parliamentary elections, as exemplified by the re-publication of three, previously banned, reformist newspapers. This pattern has been repeated in the past, but this time could have added significance given the effort of hard-liners to shut down the reform movement since June, 2009. Reformist circles and media have been openly debating whether or not people should participate in the elections, since reformist candidates will most likely be vetted and the choices will be between pro-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hardliners and the more traditional conservatives. In early July, former President Mohammad Khatami set out three conditions for reformist participation in the upcoming elections: release of political prisoners, fair elections, and freedom for press and political parties. Since it is unlikely that these conditions will be fully met by the Iranian government, we have yet to see whether or not reformist candidates will decide to participate. Moreover, the reform movement remains badly split, as is amply demonstrated by the contending responses to Khatami's initiative. Nevertheless, these developments suggest a possible revival of the system of state managed conflict resolution politics that had previously defined the core logic of the Islamic Republic.

Pakistan

Since the May 2, 2011 U.S. raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan, that killed Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been in a downward spiral. The two partners in the fight against terrorism have adopted a tit-for-tat brinkmanship approach, finger pointing at the other and threatening to scale down relations. Ties between the two militaries and the two intelligence agencies have been worst hit. These tensions are most unfortunate as they come at a time when the need for both sides to work together in the so-called "end-game" in Afghanistan is more critical than ever. As the 2014 security transition in Afghanistan approaches, Pakistan's constructive role will be central to a durable settlement in Afghanistan. While the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral mistrust continues to overshadow potential for cooperation, the USIP Pakistan program's research highlights that the U.S. and Pakistani position on Afghanistan converge to a much greater degree than is usually believed. In a research project conducted in partnership with the Jinnah Institute in Islamabad, we drew on the expertise of 53 Pakistani foreign policy elite and politicians to examine Pakistan's outlook towards Afghanistan. We found that Pakistan's goals are often overlapping, and the divergent ones are entirely reconcilable, with U.S. objectives.

Lebanon Highlight: UN Indictments Issued

On June 30th, the United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) issued its long-anticipated indictment naming four members of the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Despite longstanding fears that the indictment would provoke significant sectarian unrest inside Lebanon, reaction to the charges has been relatively muted thus far. Hezbollah has adamantly refused to cooperate with the Tribunal, deeming it part of an "Israeli-American plot" to destroy the organization.

Two-day seminar co-sponsored by USIP on "Great Powers in South Asia" in Islamabad, Pakistan, on August 9-10, 2010. Source: U.S. Institute of Peace.



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Moreover, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has vowed to “cut the hand” of anyone who attempts to arrest members of his organization. Thus far, Prime Minister Najib Miqati has promised to cooperate with the STL, but the prospects of finding and arresting the Hezbollah militants are virtually non-existent. If the Tribunal is unable to arrest the suspects, provisions allow for the trial to be held in absentia.

Towards a Palestinian State?

The United Nations General Assembly will begin its 66th session in September. Among the most anticipated diplomatic maneuvers at the UNGA is the possibility of a resolution seeking recognition of a Palestinian state. The United States has been lobbying the Palestinian Authority not to push for a statehood resolution, arguing that statehood should only result from a negotiated settlement with Israel. It remains uncertain at the time of writing whether a resolution will be tabled at the UN, and if so, exactly what type and in which UN venue, but a likely scenario appears to be the UN General Assembly’s passage of a resolution recognizing a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Many fear that this scenario could be a spark for renewed Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Kenya

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission Act (IEBC), which sets the parameters for Kenya’s 2012 General Elections, came into force on July 31. The IEBC Act seeks to introduce several key reforms and oversight measures to reduce corruption and facilitate transparency in Kenya’s electoral process. Importantly, the IEBC Act sets financial limits on political campaigns, provides legal and financial resources to the electoral commission to fight electoral fraud, introduces new technology to reduce fraud, and curbs the politicization of the electoral commission. However, administrative reforms are but one aspect of reducing the prospect of continued electoral violence in Kenya. Equally critical are positive steps to prosecute those responsible for the 2007-2008 postelection violence; judicial reform; land reform; and successfully addressing the issues of Kenya’s displaced population, of which more than 600,000 resulted from the postelection violence. To date, there is uneven progress on all these fronts—making the specter of violence in Kenya’s next elections very likely, unless more credible steps are taken toward reform. The date for the next election has not yet been decided.

Côte d’Ivoire

The postelection violence in Côte d’Ivoire, in which 3,000 people were killed and approximately one million displaced, make it the deadliest incident of electoral violence in Africa since 1990. A critical aspect of peacebuilding remains reconciliation. To that end, there are several domestic and international efforts underway. A “Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” headed by former Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, began on July 20; the International Criminal Court has started an investigation into serious crimes committed since December 2010, and Côte d’Ivoire, not a signatory to the Rome Statute, has agreed to recognize the final results; and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding–Côte d’Ivoire (WANEP-CI) has begun training mediators to help facilitate social reconciliation among communities torn apart by the violence. An important component for successful reconciliation is to ensure that pro-Gbagbo, as well as pro-Ouattara forces, are investigated for crimes. Indeed, the UN’s Commission of Inquiry’s report, released on June 15, emphasized the need for such a balanced and transparent judicial process. To date, no pro-Ouattara forces, which

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*WANEP-Côte D’Ivoire workshop sponsored by USIP in November 2007.
Source: U.S. Institute of Peace.*

have been implicated in several investigations of postelection violence, have been subjected to judicial procedures.

WORKING GROUPS

Members of the • **Korea Working Group (KWG)** participated in a Defense Threat Reduction Agency-funded workshop with U.S., South Korean and Japanese diplomats and military officials from June 27 to 30. The workshop focused on preventing future North Korean provocations, dealing with maritime issues in the South China Sea, and enhancing strategic deterrence in Northeast Asia. On July 19, the KWG launched a new project by convening a full-day conference that explored transformations taking place inside North Korea that have significant implications for the regime and the U.S. North Korea policy. A group of Seoul-based North Korean defectors spoke at the conference, and provided views on how these informal markets operate. The KWG also conducted briefings on key findings from the conference on informal markets in North Korea for State Department officials and Congressional staffers.

The • **Lebanon Working Group (LWG)** hosted retired General Tannous Mouawad on July 22. He provided an assessment of the security implications for Lebanon of numerous recent developments including the issuance of UN indictments and escalating unrest in Syria.

The second meeting of the • **Responsibility to Protect Working group (R2PWG)** was held on July 27. Jointly organized by the United States Institute of Peace, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Brookings Institution, the (R2PWG) seeks to increase understanding of R2P and identify concrete steps to bolster the political will of U.S. decision-makers to respond in a timely manner to threats of genocide, crimes against humanity and other mass atrocities in this emerging national norm. The R2PWG is co-chaired by Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Presidential Special Envoy to Sudan Richard Williamson.