

Other Participants' Views on the North Korea Talks

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The five other parties to the Beijing talks have all stated that North Korea should not have nuclear weapons. But the United States and the other four countries—China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia—have taken different approaches, voicing their support for U.S. negotiations with North Korea and displaying far less enthusiasm for containment efforts. These differences of opinion will likely complicate any U.S. efforts to gain future support for a hard line on North Korea and suggest that the White House might allow the other participants to take the lead in offering inducements such as energy and economic assistance.

China

Beijing retains strong economic ties with North Korea, accounting for the bulk of that country's economic activity. China was not involved in negotiating the Agreed Framework in 1994, under which North Korea agreed to freeze its plutonium-based nuclear weapons program in exchange for certain aid, but Beijing has taken a leadership role in bringing the United States and North Korea into a format for talks acceptable to both sides, including hosting both rounds of talks.

Many experts believe that Beijing has been applying pressure on North Korea through back-door diplomacy to resolve the issue. China, however, has constantly emphasized its opposition to the use of force or pressure to resolve the issue and held that the United States should engage North Korea in direct dialogue. China has also opposed U.S. efforts to raise the issue at the United Nations, and a Chinese arms control official said Beijing expressed reservations about the U.S.-proposed Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), according to an August 23 Washington Post article.

China's delegate to the August talks, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, stated August 26 that "the Korean Peninsula should be nuclear-free. At the same time, [North Korea's] security concerns should also be addressed through...dialogue and peaceful talks."

Japan

Tokyo has publicly taken the position closest to Washington but has still supported negotiations with North Korea. Japanese-North Korean relations appeared to make progress last September, when Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi became the first Japanese prime minister to visit North Korea. During that meeting, North Korea apologized for the kidnapping of a number of Japanese citizens and extended its moratorium on missile tests beyond 2003. The two sides also agreed to meet the next month to discuss normalizing diplomatic relations and undertaking some economic cooperation initiatives.

The normalization talks have been stalled, however, due to revelations about North Korea's nuclear program and public anger over the kidnapping issue. Hatsuhide Takashima, press secretary for Japan's Foreign Ministry, said August 26 that Japan could normalize relations and "extend economic assistance" to North Korea if the latter resolves the issues surrounding its nuclear programs and the abductions.

Takashima added that Japan would "raise" the abduction issue during the talks but would leave the

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detailed discussion on the matter to bilateral talks it hopes to hold with North Korea on the sidelines of the Beijing talks.

Japan has shown somewhat greater interest in putting pressure on North Korea than the other participants in the Beijing discussions. Tokyo has expressed interest in stemming North Korea's trade in illicit cargo, such as illegal drugs, and has stepped up port inspections of North Korean ships traveling between the two countries. Japan is also a participant in the PSI but has not publicly committed to any further interdiction efforts, partly because the PSI is still a work in progress. It is unknown whether Japan will fully participate in the PSI's September Australia-hosted interdiction exercises or merely observe, an Australian government official said August 27.

South Korea

South Korea has repeatedly expressed its opposition to a nuclear-armed North Korea but has emphasized a negotiated solution to the issue. Although the nuclear issue has somewhat strained the countries' bilateral relationship, Seoul and Pyongyang have continued discussions about various bilateral issues for some time.

South Korea has proposed a step-by-step negotiating strategy with Pyongyang to address that country's April proposal. ([See ACT, July/August 2003.](#)) President Roh Moo-hyun said August 15 that, if Pyongyang gives up its nuclear weapons, South Korea "will take the lead in developing [North Korea's] economy" and will "lure international organizations and funds" to North Korea.

Russia

Moscow's ties to North Korea have weakened considerably since the end of the Cold War, but Russia has publicly been one of the countries most supportive of North Korea. Russia has repeatedly expressed its support for a negotiated resolution of North Korea's nuclear program. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Yuri Fedotov said August 15 that Russia was considering the merits of a "joint document on security guarantees...[to North Korea] to which Russia and China could accede," according to the official ITAR-Tass news agency.

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