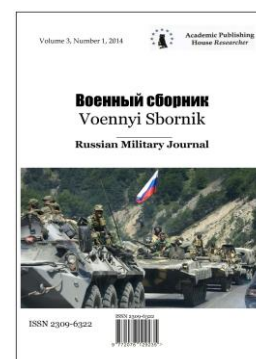


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The Format of the Six-Party Negotiations on the North Korean Nuclear Issue (2003–2010): Position of the Russia

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Abstract

The article examines the six-party negotiation format on the North Korean nuclear issue, involving Russia, China, United States, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Republic of Korea, formed officially in 2003. Russia, China and Republic of Korea have promoted the idea of keeping and using this format after the settlement of North Korea nuclear crisis to address other security issues at North-East Asia, especially related to new threats. North Korea's nuclear tests, in fact, throughout the period of the negotiations on the North Korean nuclear issue showed the inefficiency of the existing political and military-force means in East Asia to counter the spread of nuclear weapons. The threat of nuclear proliferation became especially acutely in the East Asia by the beginning of the 21st century. In the spring of 2013, North Korea's threats of nuclear attack on the United States and the Republic of Korea were the pretext for the concentration of the American military power and presence of the intelligence assets not so far from Russian Far East. Spring events of 2013 on the Korean peninsula and the aggravation of the crisis in the spring – autumn of 2017 indicate that Russian balanced policy here can be one of the key elements, governing the relations in this area of East Asia.

Keywords: Korean peninsula, six-party negotiation format, North Korea, nuclear issue, Russia

1. Introduction

In the modern East Asian military security system, the development of the situation on the Korean peninsula is great importance for Russia and regional countries. So the six-party negotiation format on the North Korean nuclear issue, involving Russia, China, United States, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Republic of Korea, formed officially in 2003, has always attracted the close attention of the policy makers and the researchers (Ban Ki-moon, 2013; Del Valle, 2013; Cronin, 2012; Mansourov, 2013). Moreover, the North Korean nuclear program was an experimental platform for the coordination actions of the parties, involved in the field of East Asia security (Yaqing, 2006). Besides that, experts of Russia, China and Republic of Korea have promoted the idea of using this format after the settlement of North Korea nuclear crisis to address other security issues at North-East Asia, especially related to new threats. In addition, the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear problem could be a step towards the establishment of a multilateral system of security in the region. At the same time, according to Russian and South Korean experts, the settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula

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cannot be achieved without the normalization of inter-Korean relations ([Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia, 2015](#)).

2. Materials and methods

The author of the article used participant observation, analysis of primary and secondary sources of information. Expert opinions, concerning the main issues of the article, were collected on open resources, namely on special websites, journal publications and monographs. Methods. The author of the article uses comparative-historical and problem-chronological methods.

3. Discussion and results

The period, following after the war between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea(DPRK) and Republic of Korea (1950-1953), became not only a period of attempts to settle the inter-Korean relations, but also four major global powers constant pushing of interests—Russia, China, Japan and the United States. North Korea's desire to possess nuclear weapons has contributed to the dramatic deterioration of the situation. It was too dangerous because this country was beyond the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and outside the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

In the initial phase (1950-70), the USSR and partially China helped the North Korea as to the fundamental research, related to nuclear weapons, including the establishment of the necessary infrastructure and preparation of technical and scientific staff. Since the late 1970 's and, in fact, to the present, North Korea continues to develop its scientific and industrial base by attracting foreign investors to create atomic energy complex of the country for removing the energy problem. Over the years, Beijing has provided the economic assistance and diplomatic protection for the North Korean regime from the United States and other States. Against the backdrop of China rapid economic and military growth, as well as the struggle for political leadership in the East Asia, its role in North Korean nuclear crisis have intensified. All this happened while reducing the weight of Russia in the 1990s and lacking of the United States clear position, regarding the determination of the East Asia place in its foreign policy strategy. For most East Asia countries, the United States position in the field of security was the main problem in the post-cold war era. First, it wasn't so sure that America, in fact, was the sole superpower of the world. At the same time, the formation of a multipolar world order was to counteract the United States military predominance. Moreover, it was obvious that the United States, in principle, had not enough financial or technical resources for support the predominance ([Litsareva, 2014: 176](#)).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the termination of the Soviet military threat, the intention of the United States to reduce its direct military presence in the East Asia made a significant impact on changing the balance of power in the region. It was connected with a problem of the allies and military bases. This problem was not directly related to the United States "joint defense agreements" with South Korea (1953) and Taiwan (1954), which were an integral part of the United States and the Soviet Union military blocs and alliances system after the World War II. In addition to Taiwan and South Korea, the United States had similar agreements with Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines, and the Soviet Union-with the People's Republic of China. The "Block policy" of the United States and its allies in the East Asia was not such successful as in other regions. Established blocks, ANZUS-Australia, New Zealand, the United States (1951) and SEATO-United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan (1954), were not sustained, such as the NATO. They virtually ceased in 1970s.

However, with the United States troops and assistance, the South Korea had become important strategic location in the region. It was, in fact, the US military base in the East Asia. In addition, the United States and Japan provided economic assistance, loans and credits to South Korea (since the mid 1960s) ([Litsareva, 2014: 177](#)). The presence of US 43-strong contingent troops at South Korea, armed with the latest technology and nuclear weapons, the militarization of this state, as well as the desire of the United States to place on the territory of the South Korea the medium-range nuclear weapons, including cruise missiles, indicated that the United States planned to turn South Korea into factor of the global military-strategic importance. In this regard, the North Korean Government has always been concerned about the security of the regime and believed that the existence of nuclear weapons could stem from military force using by the United States and South Korea. In the negotiations, including with the participation of the United States,

the existence of nuclear weapons gave certain advantages to the Government of North Korea.

Today it is the most conflict regional zone, problems that for a long period remain unresolved. At the beginning of the 21st century, the threat of the nuclear weapons proliferation in East Asia faced particularly acute. An important role in the formation of the six-party format on the North Korean nuclear issue has played a «Dialogue cooperation of the North-East Asia» with the participation of the United States and North-East Asia countries, including Russia and the DPRK. It is the conferences in October 2002 in Moscow and in August 2003 in Beijing, including North Korea, in the framework of «Dialogue», showed that the full six-party format could exist.

In 2003, notifying all countries within the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, North Korea formally withdrew from the Treaty. Since then the nuclear programmer of the North Korea, based on statements that seemed initially peaceful, began to acquire military thrust. China was very puzzled by this. It planned to send a special representative to North Korea to convince leadership of the need to conduct the first round of the pentilateral negotiations (DPRK, Republic of Korea, Japan, China and the United States) on settlement of the nuclear issue in July-August 2003. Initially, China refused to direct participation in the negotiation process on the North Korean nuclear problem and insisted on the trilateral format (DPRK, Republic of Korea and the United States). Then Beijing agreed not only to its participation, but also to provide China's territory for six-party talks, including Russia. China has spoken sharply against the boycott of the North Korea and entering any sanctions against DPRK. During the conducting US-North Korea consultations (July 31, 2003) on the negotiations as to the North Korean nuclear issue and the discussion on the possible format and participation, it is the North Korean proposed a new approach- the six-party talks, involving Russia, normalizing relations with our country after the following reciprocal visits of North Korean and Russian leadership over the previous two years.

In the first six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue, held in Beijing ([August 27-29, 2003](#)), all participants expressed hopes to reduce doubt and creating a climate of trust through dialogue to peacefully resolve North Korean nuclear weapons problem, considering that the six-party talks provide a real opportunity for peace in North-East Asia ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2003](#)). North Korea promised to abandon development of nuclear weapons, if the United States meet four basic requirements: signing of the non-aggression pact, diplomatic relations establishment with the DPRK, North Korea's economic cooperation with Japan and the Republic of Korea, the provision of light-water reactors to the DPRK for energy needs. Despite the fact that a joint document was not adopted, the participants agreed to continue the dialogue and to agree on dates for a new round of consultations through diplomatic channels. 25-28 February 2004, the second round of the six-party talks to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis hosted in Beijing, which ended with an agreement to continue negotiations. It was also expected to create a working group between the main rounds of negotiation.

In 2005, the situation has worsened significantly. Despite the attempts to the six-party talks on the Korean peninsula nuclear issue throughout 2005, on February 10, 2005 DPRK first recognized the creation of its own nuclear weapons. In response to the demands of the United States to collapse the nuclear programmers the Government of the DPRK officially announced the existence of nuclear weapons and the intention to develop nuclear arsenal in order to protect ideas and political system of the North Korea. In doing so, the DPRK Government has repeatedly stated about its right to the peaceful use of atomic energy. The North Korea also intended to realize the normalization of bilateral relations with Japan in order to overcome the unresolved political and psychological conflicts. These conflicts had historical roots and were connected with the consequence of Japanese colonial period in the region. After the United States declared economic sanctions on an Asian Bank in Macau (September 2005), through which the DPRK has carried out a significant part of its international currency transactions, North Korea had intended to go out the six-party format negotiations.

In October 2006, Pyongyang conducted the first underground explosion of a nuclear device. On October 14, 2006 the United Nations Security Council resolution relative to the North Korean nuclear test was adopted ([United Nation Security Council Resolution, 2006](#)). In accordance with this resolution, there was a prohibition on the supply, sale or transfer to the DPRK of any military equipment and weapons, materials, technologies that can be used in nuclear research.

In such circumstances, China was not interested in worsening of the situation at the Korean peninsula and stopped oil shipments to North Korea (the DPRK imported from China about 90 %

of all the energy resources). Largely due to the economic pressure of China at the end of October, 2006 the DPRK announced that it returned to the negotiating table. The North Korea demanded that during the negotiation, along with discussion of the nuclear issue, the question of the United States economic sanctions withdrawal should be discussed.

In fact, continuing North Korea's nuclear tests, showed the inefficiency of the existing political and military-force means in East Asia to counter the spread of nuclear weapons. At the same time, a year later, during the process of the six-party negotiations, the agreement on a phased implementation of the DPRK denuclearization measures was reached and Yongbyon nuclear reactor, founded in 1964 with the assistance of the USSR, was stopped (Ban Ki-moon, 2013). In addition, there were established working groups on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula; economic and energy cooperation; on the peace and security mechanism at North-East Asia; the normalization of bilateral relations of the DPRK with the United States and Japan.

Gradually it became clearly, that the DPRK has reviewed its nuclear program not so much as an instrument of military deterrence, as a means of obtaining financial assistance from the United States and security guarantees. Some experts have argued that the United States not just for many years, closed eyes on North Korea, helped it to create the atomic industry and even allowed (unlike Iraq) to obtain nuclear weapons. They believed that Pyongyang was "useful enemy" for Washington and threat, which was the pretext for the American military presence at the South of China. The purpose of such "Asian belt" was not only to counter the North Korean threat and justify the American presence at the region, but also to surround the main geo-strategic enemy of the United States – China, which together with Russia was a member of the Central Asian alliance against the American hegemony- the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Del Valle, 2013).

During an underground nuclear explosion in 2009, the North Korea stated that nuclear testing was carried out in order to "protect the highest interests of the Republic" and "the sovereignty of the country and the nation" in the face of the threats of preventive attack and strengthening of United States sanctions (Radio Pyongyang (voice of Korea), 2009). After the launch in April 2009 the carrier rocket to launch the pilot experimental communications satellite and the ensuing threat to strengthen sanctions, the North Korea announced the withdrawal from the six-party talks and the intention to develop a nuclear deterrent. Despite the fact that, China has proposed to hold emergency consultations among the heads of six-party talk's delegations in December 2010, but an initiative of the China has not found response. Gradually, the North Korea became a very restless ally for China, which increasingly put him in an uncomfortable situation. The DPRK was not subordinated to any dictates, even from China. For years, the Beijing has provided an economic assistance to the North Korea and diplomatic protection from the United States and other States. China found itself in a difficult situation. On the one hand, China wanted to stand in one number with other Nations, on the other hand, could not throw its ally.

Over the past decades, the North Korea alternated periods of provocation with periods of tension reducing, when the DPRK, under the pressure of China agreed to return to the negotiating table, renouncing nuclear weapons on the peninsula. Many times the North Korea promised to inflict a crushing blow on the "United States puppets" in the South of the peninsula, declared martial law, the mobilization of the army and the large-scale exercises. There have been two military incident in 2010 – the South Korean Corvette – Cheonan sinking by the North Korean submarine and the shelling of the island Ænphënd. The North Korean regime tone tightened in February 2013, because of the new leadership of Kim Jong Un. It was very important for Kim Jong Un to strengthen his position and power, as all regional leaders were a new: the new Government in China, the new President of South Korea, the new Prime Minister in Japan (Cronin, 2012; North Korea in nuclear hysterics, 2013).

The third nuclear test, conducted by Pyongyang in February 2013 led to the strengthening of the UN sanctions and threats of retaliation from the North Korea. That prompted the international community to look at the North Korea more seriously than simply as a country that all the time something requests (Mansourov, 2013). In conjunction with the third nuclear tests and satellite launch a few months earlier, the North Korean threat to use nuclear weapons to the United States, the consolidation of nuclear status in the State Constitution and resumption of the plutonium-producing reactor in the Yongbyon had irreversible consequences not only for the Asia but also for the whole world. Many were concerned whether the North Korea was a full-fledged nuclear power and whether it was prepared to use nuclear weapons, as well as whether the DPRK had a warhead,

which can be applied to the intercontinental ballistic missile ([Corées..., 2013](#)).

In general, despite the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear problem, the picture was next. For the twenty years (since 1993 to 2013), the DPRK has made five test launches of medium-range missiles and space launch vehicles of different types. The truth is that, test holding has been hampered by the fact that in 1999 the DPRK declared a moratorium on the testing of missile weapons except for short-range missiles under the international pressure and in exchange for promises of aid. The official statements of the North Korea showed that country had intercontinental ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads. A small number of nuclear bombs and warheads (from 4 to 10) was based on plutonium, enriched at a small 5-megawatt reactor in Yongbyon before the 2007, when nuclear complex was closed. In 2010, it was an information about uranium enrichment plant in North Korea. Remained unknown, whether DPRK had nuclear weapons with depleted uranium warhead. It was still a mystery, why the leadership of North Korea renounced its plutonium production programmer and, instead that, made its priority the enrichment of uranium. The expert of the International Institute for strategic studies Mark Fitzpatrick speculated that "uranium enrichment complexes are easier to hide", and discovered complex in 2010 was not only. "In addition, certain types of uranium warheads are lighter to produce than other types of nuclear weapons... Probably, North Korea has purchased the technology for weapons manufacturing (based on enriched uranium) from the same Pakistan suppliers that sold nuclear technology to Libya and Iran" ([Fitzpatrick, 2013](#)). It was also known that the North Korean missile programmer developed in collaboration with Iranian and Pakistan programmers, and some tests could take place on the territory of these countries.

However, as whole, the development of nuclear programs has become an important part of the overall national security policy of the North Korea. At the same time, there were several reasons for the desire of the DPRK to develop and have its own nuclear weapons. First of all, the North Korean Government has been concerned about the regime security and the existence of nuclear weapons could restrain the United States and South Korea on the use of military force. The existence of nuclear weapons gave advantages on any kind of negotiations, including with the participation of the United States. In connection with a complex economic situation, the North Korea has always expected to get certain economic benefits from humanitarian assistance in exchange for phasing out its nuclear programmers. In any case, since the emergence of North Korean nuclear issue the DPRK political regime has sought to resolve it expeditiously, pursuing the main objective - to ensure the country's security through the elimination of any contradictions with the principal, including United States, potential adversaries.

At the same time, in the spring of 2013, North Korean threats of nuclear attack on the United States and the Republic of Korea have led to the intention to strengthen the United States missile defense in Alaska by 2017 through 14 interceptors ([North Korea in nuclear hysterics, 2013](#)). United States stated about placing at Guam anti-missile system, known as mobile ground-based complex for high-rise extra-atmospheric intercept medium-range missiles for the protection of US military bases, located there from North Korean medium-range missiles ([Barnes, Entous, 2013](#)).

Strengthening of the United States military presence at East Asia was supposed to come at the expense of the other regions. Once in November 2011, the administration of President Obama announced the "rebalancing" policies from wars at the Middle East "to the Asia-Pacific region," the new strategic balance, or pivot, it was supposed to provide by a "complex diplomatic, economic, budgetary and safety initiatives" ([McDevitt, 2012](#)). About billion supposed to get from the reduction of Europe missile defense development programmer.

The North Korea threats of nuclear attack on the United States and the Republic of Korea in the spring of 2013 have led to automatically launch a mechanism of preventive actions on the part of the US and South Korea, aimed to prevent a nuclear strike from the North Korea, including the buildup of United States military power at the region and the concentration of intelligence tools at the Korean peninsula in the area of the DPRK, not far from Northeast China and the Russian Far East.

Russian experts and politicians believed that without the normalization of inter-Korean relations, the settlement of the nuclear issue at the Korean peninsula could not be achieved. It was necessary to solve both tasks at the same time - "to freeze" and then dismantle the North Korean military nuclear programmer with the return of DPRK in Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and under the guarantee of the International Atomic Energy Agency; defusing political tensions at the Korean peninsula and the development of the relations between North Korea, on the one hand,

and South Korea and the other countries in the region, with another” ([Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia, 2015](#)).

In the spring of 2013, the North East Asia has become the center of a military confrontation, and developments on the Korean peninsula – an indication that the East Asia security and, in particular, North East Asia security system, had to include all states, geographically related to the region, including the United States, for which the "pivot" or "return" to East Asia, showed the importance of the region in foreign policy. In this regard, the effective collective security solution, multilateralism and openness of the negotiation process without blackmail and intimidation were vital for the states of the region.

East Asia security problems and the situation on the Korean peninsula directly affected the Russia vital interests here. Relations with the East Asian countries in the field of military-political and military-economic spheres, as well as the use of emerging opportunities for Russia inclusion in regional security structures, economic integration and thus ensuring its national interests in the East, remained extremely important tasks for Russia. Possessing a unique thousand-year experience of the interaction with the majority of East Asian countries, Russia "doomed" to be one of the key actors in the region.

As showed the process of the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue and split situation at the Korean peninsula from 2003 to 2013, Russia has consistently led the line on maintaining contacts with both Koreas in order to be able to influence on the situation in that volatile area. Significant lagging of Asian direction behind the needs and strategic interests of the Russia and passivity of the Russian presence in the East Asia at the beginning of the 1990s because of large-scale size reduction of the Russian armed forces at the Far East, as well as a departure from North Korea were clearly erroneous. The reduction of the level of Russian relations with North Korea, including military-technical relations, in general, had a negative impact on security in the North East Asia. Pyongyang began to rely on "absolute" means of defense, not hoping for support of the major powers, and in addition to the nuclear programmer, North Korea has accelerated work in the field of missile area. As the experience of the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue has shown, DPRK deducing from rigid isolation, including with the participation of Russia, was in the interest of all participants. This became especially important for the stabilization of the geopolitical situation in the face of the deterioration of the crisis at the Korean peninsula in the spring - autumn of 2017. «...It made the Kremlin once again consider the possibilities for Russia to influence the situation close to its borders»([Toloraya, 2017](#)).

At the same time, it became apparent that South Korea dependence on the United States in the military and military-economic field increasingly burdened this country. In this regard, Russia was considering very carefully the possibility of cooperation with the Republic of Korea in the technical sphere, as well as in the sphere of improvement of its military-industrial base.

Spring events of 2013 on the Korean peninsula and the aggravation of the crisis in the spring – autumn of 2017 indicate that Russian balanced policy here can be one of the key elements, governing the relations in this area of East Asia. Today, no one can take the place of Russia in these relations, even, United States, despite their attempts in some years, to engage in a constructive dialogue with the authorities of the DPRK. Domestic circumstances and the conventional image of North Korea as an enemy in the eyes of the American public opinion do not allow the United States to do so. At the same time, it would be highly desirable the holding of the United States and Russia agreed policies in the various areas on the Korean peninsula with a view to continuing this cooperation in the future.

It is necessary to consider the following: Russian proposals on political-diplomatic means of solving the North Korean nuclear issue and Korean problem are coordinated with the current South Korean approach, aimed at direct dialogue, multiparty talks, and the eventual creation of a collective security system in North East Asia. This is very similar to the position of Russia, the Republic of Korea and China, which they demonstrated, when the six-party negotiation format on the North Korean nuclear issue was only formed, - using this format after the settlement of North Korea nuclear crisis to address other security issues at North-East Asia. Former diplomat and Chair, Regional Programs, “Russkiy Mir” Foundation Georgy Toloraya considers that “a general discussion on the possible mechanism for the talks and principles of peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia should be conducted in the relevant working group of the former Six-Party talks (headed by Russia). This could be reestablished as an organizing bureau or secretariat for future

multi-party talks” (Toloraya, 2017).

4. Conclusion

It is not possible to return to the six-party negotiation format on the North Korean nuclear issue 2003-2010, nor form or nor content. It is not enough to solve the nuclear problem only, but it is necessary to consider a wide range of issues on security and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula in general. However, here, much depends from the normalization of inter-Korean relations.

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