

MULTILATERAL MATTERS

APRIL 2012

FEATURED COMMENTARY: SIX-PARTY TALKS AND THE FUTURE OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CSCAP STUDY
GROUP
MEETING 2

EXPERT TALK 2

ADBI-RSIS
CONFERENCE 3

PUBLICATIONS 4

EVENTS 4



By Ong Suan Ee

THE Seoul Nuclear Summit held from 26–27 March 2012 took place amidst global concerns over North Korea’s and Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Among other diplomatic means, the Six-Party Talks (SPT) is widely recognised as a principal forum in which these nuclear tensions may be resolved.

Described as an explicitly multi-national, track one, Northeast Asian forum to address an immediate crisis, the SPT was born out of North Korea’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in January 2003 after U.S. President George W. Bush labeled North Korea as part of the “Axis of Evil”.

Since then, the SPT’s objective has been to find a peaceful resolution to the various security concerns that have arisen as a result of the North Korean nuclear weapons’ program. The inaugural SPT which took place in August 2003 in Beijing, saw representatives from North Ko-

rea, South Korea, China, Russia, the United States and Japan attending.

After four years of discussions, the SPT in 2007 witnessed Pyongyang agreeing to shut down and seal its Yongbyon nuclear facility and allow access to nuclear inspectors. This did not last long as the North Koreans subsequently reversed its decision and reactivated the Yongbyon nuclear facility in September 2008.

In April 2009, Pyongyang’s unauthorised rocket launch of its Taepodong II missile was met with condemnation by the United Nations Security Council. Following this, the North boycotted the SPT and refused to participate in all attempts at the resumption of talks.

Since then, other incidences have continued to hinder progress towards resuming the SPT. Among them include the second round of North Korean nuclear and missile tests in May 2009, the Cheonan sinking incident, the revelation of

Pyongyang’s advanced uranium enrichment capabilities and a spate of artillery confrontation between the militaries of the North and the South stationed on Yeonpyeong Island in the Yellow Sea.

The recent “Leap Day Deal” between the United States and North Korea saw Pyongyang pledge to suspend all nuclear tests, uranium enrichment and long range missile tests, among others. The accord reignited hopes of resuming the SPT, but optimism was quashed following North Korea’s announcement to fire a satellite into orbit in commemoration of Kim Il-sung’s centenary this April. Not surprising, Pyongyang’s latest move has met with international condemnation. But if past events are any indication, Pyongyang’s leadership is unlikely to budge nor acquiesce to global pressures.

Ong Suan Ee is Senior Research Analyst at the Centre for Multilateralism Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

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CSCAP STUDY GROUP MEETING ON COUNTERING PROLIFERATION OF WMD

MORE than 60 participants from various Asia Pacific nations attended the 15th meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) on Countering the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) held from 6–7 March in Sydney. CMS Associate Research Fellow Benjamin Ho was at the meeting as part of the Honolulu-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Pacific Forum Young Leaders programme. Also at the event was Dr. Rajesh Basrur, Senior Fellow at RSIS and an expert in South Asia's nuclear policies.

The event saw a wide range of issues being tabled, which included: developments in the global nonproliferation regime, the future of Six-Party Talks on the Korean peninsula, nuclear security, export control measures, and the nonproliferation and disarmament of chemical weapons. Moreover CSCAP participants contributed to the drafting of a disarmament and nonproliferation memorandum as well as reviewed a handbook on preventing the proliferation of WMD in the Asia Pacific.



Participants at the 15th CSCAP Study Group meeting on countering the proliferation of WMD

(Pix: Gintare Janulaityte)

Continued on Page 3

WHAT THEY SAY:

We asked several experts on their take regarding the role and involvement of the United States and China on Six-Party Talks:

The **Six-Party Talks seem to be the only game in town**, so the talks are likely to be **on-again, off-again**. The leadership transitions in both China and the United States will mean that **both will help to stabilise the current situation, in order to ensure a smooth transition**. Based on the likely improvement in Sino-U.S. relations as a result of the leadership transition, it is likely that **major obstacles may not surface**, unless North Korea falls into domestic infighting in the new regime.

*Professor Gerald Chan,
Head, Department of Political Studies,
University of Auckland, New Zealand*

The overriding concern for both China and the United States is to **avoid doing anything that would destabilise relations on the peninsula** ... While there appears to be a smooth transition following the death of Kim Jong-il, **it is not at all clear who is really making the decisions in Pyongyang** ... The **Six-Party Talks are likely to be around for a long time** although the **likelihood of achieving anything substantive in resolving the conflict on the Korean Peninsula remains remote**.

*Carl Baker
Director of Programs, Pacific Forum
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Honolulu, Hawaii*

“The overriding concern for both China and the United States is to avoid doing anything that would destabilise relations on the peninsula ... it is not at all clear who is really making the decisions in Pyongyang.”

Carl Baker

If there is a resumption of the Six-Party Talks ... **it would not be like those of previous years**. There is **not much interest to resume the old format** and to talk about the same old issues (and to obtain the same old stalemate results). I think the **major parties may seek for a new format, and perhaps, may involve only the major parties for a more focused talk**.

*Dr. Choi Jor-Shan
Associate Director
Berkeley Nuclear Research Centre
University of California, Berkeley*

ADBI-RSIS CONFERENCE ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC ARCHITECTURE

A CONFERENCE entitled “The Evolving Global Architecture: From a Centralised to a Decentralised System” was jointly organised by the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at the Traders Hotel from 26–27 March 2012. Discussions revolved around the effectiveness and reforms of the G20, the global and regional financial and security arrangements, trade architecture as well as regional and global banking systems.

The Guest-of-Honor at the conference was Mr. Bilahari Kausikan, Permanent Secretary at the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In his opening address, Kausikan said that the Western global system was undergoing a profound change and highlighted that the imperative leadership of the West was no longer self-evident. He added that while rivalry between the United States and China was inescapable, conflict between both countries was not unavoidable.

The keynote luncheon as well as closing speech “Is Capitalism Dead?” was delivered by Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. In his speech, Mahbubani emphasised the importance of having both government and private businesses working together in order to overcome the current economic challenges the world faces.



Mr. Bilahari Kausikan giving the opening address



Professor Kishore Mahbubani giving his keynote luncheon speech at the ADBI-RSIS conference

“Asian governments know that if you want to attract industries to your countries, you have to go out and court [them]. This requires government involvement ... Western capitalism is in trouble ... because the state is often viewed as the source of problems.”

Professor Kishore Mahbubani,
In his keynote speech at the
ADBI-RSIS conference

CSCAP STUDY GROUP MEETING ON WMD

Continued from Page 2

As part of the Young Leaders programme, the 20 participants, representing countries which include the United States, China and Australia, also had the opportunity to engage with Ambassador Paw Lwin Sein, who is the Myanmar Ambassador to Australia at a breakfast meeting. Furthermore, the participants were involved in a series of roundtable discussions on the role of Middle Powers in Asia Pacific Security at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and had the opportunity to speak with Professor Alan Dupont, who is the Director of the International Security Development at UNSW.

Two post conference reports on the topics of “Managing the South China Sea” and “The Nuclear Question” will be produced by the Young Leaders. More information on the Pacific Young Leaders programme can be found at csis.org/program/young-leaders-program.



Young Leaders speaking with Ambassador Paw Lwin Sein at a breakfast meeting

(Pix: Gintare Janulaityte)

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES/SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

[Myanmar's China Policy Shift: Preparing for ASEAN Chair?](#)

Yang Razali Kassim, *RSIS Commentaries No. 43*, 14 March 2012.

[The North Korean Nuclear Moratorium: More of the Same?](#)

Ong Suan Ee, *RSIS Commentaries No. 37*, 8 March 2012.

[ASEAN Centrality: A Year of Big Power Transitions](#)

Benjamin Ho, *East Asia Forum*, 6 March 2012.

[The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Challenges in Cyberspace](#)

Alica Kizekova, *RSIS Commentaries No. 33*, 22 February 2012.

[The Road to Rio+20: Ambitious Goals for Sustainable Development?](#)

Ong Suan Ee, *RSIS Commentaries No. 27*, 16 February 2012.

[Renaissance of Asia: Evolving Economic Relations between South Asia and East Asia](#)

Pradumna B. Rana (ed.), *World Scientific*, 2012.

[Monetary Integration in ASEAN+3: A Perception Survey of Opinion Leaders](#)

Pradumna B. Rana, Wai-Mun Chia, and Yothin Jinjarak, *Journal of Asian Economics*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, February 2012, pp. 1–12.

IN THE MEDIA

Associate Professor Tan See Seng was interviewed by the *World Politics Review* on deepening U.S.-Singapore ties (28 February 2012).

Associate Research Fellow Benjamin Ho was interviewed by CNBC on the Seoul Nuclear Summit (26 & 30 March 2012).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Workshop on Northeast
Asian Regionalism
6 July 2012
Traders Hotel, Singapore

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ABOUT THE CENTRE

The Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS) is a research entity within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The CMS team conducts cutting-edge research, teaching/training, and networking on cooperative multilateralism in the Asia Pacific region. The Centre aims to contribute to international academic and public discourses on regional architecture and order in Asia Pacific. It aspires to be an international knowledge hub for multilateral cooperation and regional integration.