Restarting the Six-Party Talks: 
Russia’s Dilemmas and Current Perspectives

Stephen Blank*
Younkyoo Kim**

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*Stephen Blank is Professor of Russian National Security Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College in Pennsylvania. He has been Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute since 1989. In 1998-2001 he was the Douglas MacArthur Professor of Research at the War College. He has published over 700 articles and monographs on Soviet/Russian, U.S., Asian, and European military and foreign policies, testified frequently before Congress on Russia, China, and Central Asia, and consulted for the CIA, major think-tanks and foundations. E-mail: stephen.blank@us.army.mil.

**Younkyoo Kim is Associate Professor in the Division of International Studies, Hanyang University, Korea. He is the author and co-author of over 30 scholarly articles and monographs, and author or editor of four books, including The Arctic: A New Issue on Asia’s Security Agenda (2011) and Why Is Russian Energy Policy Failing in East Asia? (2011). His research interests have focused on issues of energy security and international relations in East Asia and Eurasia. E-mail: younkyookim@hotmail.com.
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**I. Introduction**

Since 2009 the six-party talks over North Korean nuclearization have been suspended if not moribund. Indeed, some analysts believe that the talks are dead (Swanstrom, 2010). They have been boycotted by North Korea since 2008 and now the U.S. and its allies refuse to return until Pyongyang apologizes for its reckless provocations of South Korea in 2010 and shows a genuine commitment to negotiate over denuclearization. Meanwhile, due to those provocations and South Korea’s determination to resist any future attacks, there were real fears of war. As the Obama administration has embraced its predecessor’s mantra of complete, verifiable, and irreversible disarmament as a precondition for negotiation, talks have stalled since North Korea appears unlikely to surrender its nuclear weapons.

The stagnation of the six-party process has produced great anxiety in Russia over the future of the Korean peninsula. Indeed, in September 2010, even before the attack on Yeonpyeong and the announcement of a uranium enrichment facility, Moscow’s representative to the six-party talks stated that Korea was on the brink of war. This anxiety reflects that perhaps Russia, of the external non-Korean members of the six-party process, has the most to lose. Russia lacks leverage on any other power and confronts the danger of marginalization. War would only aggravate all its concerns and derail any hope of developing the Russian Far East, a development that is the precondition for an effective Russian presence in Asia. For these reasons Russia, perhaps more than any other country, shows the greatest anxiety about the developing trends on the Korean peninsula.