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**“North Korea’s Nuclear and Missile Tests and Six-Party Talks:
Where Do We Go From Here?”**

**Testimony before the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade**

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Mr. Chairman, I am honored to be invited back to testify before the subcommittee regarding the ongoing challenge posed by North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear and missile capabilities. Specifically, I have been asked to provide an assessment of the future of Six Party Talks, suggestions on a U.S. and regional response, Japan’s views of North Korea’s motivations in conducting nuclear and missile tests, the impact of recent developments on U.S.-Japan, Japan-ROK, and ROK-China ties, and my predictions on how the situation may play out in coming months and years.

I appreciate the committee’s attention to these areas. North Korea’s nuclear development and the accompanying potential for nuclear proliferation to state and non-state actors are core national security interests of the United States, but I believe it will be impossible to effectively address these concerns unless the United States can mobilize a regional security-centered approach that involves significant supporting contributions from North Korea’s immediate neighbors. Such an approach must manage apparently conflicting security dilemmas of North Korea’s neighbors and should mobilize regional actors to act in a coordinated fashion both to address the threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear program and to assure long-term peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

The Six Party Process: A Regional Framework for North Korea’s Denuclearization

North Korea’s unilateral pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities over the last two decades has ironically been a primary catalyst for strengthened regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. But this cooperation has thus far been insufficient to deter North Korea’s nuclear development given the existence of longstanding regional security cleavages. The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), Four Party Talks, and Six Party Talks each represent stages in the development of a coordinated regional response to the challenge posed by North Korea’s nuclear development over the past two decades. But these regional efforts failed to meet the challenge posed by North Korea’s nuclear pursuits because the respective states placed their own immediate priorities and concerns above the collective need to halt North Korea’s nuclear program. No single actor, including the United States, can meet this challenge without cooperation and collective action from North Korea’s neighbors. But the concerned parties most

directly affected by North Korea's destabilizing actions have been least willing to challenge or block North Korea's nuclear development.

Following the April 13, 2009, UN Security Council (UNSC) presidential statement condemning North Korea's April 5th missile test, the North Koreans announced that they will "never participate in such Six Party Talks nor will it be bound any longer to any agreement of the talks." Just days ago, the North Koreans illustrated the depth of the challenge in their statement following the adoption last Friday of UNSC Resolution 1874, condemning North Korea's May 25, 2009, nuclear test. In that statement, the North Koreans asserted that "It has become an absolutely impossible option for North Korea to even think about giving up its nuclear weapons."

Regardless of whether or not North Korea returns to the Six Party Talks, North Korea's missile and nuclear tests have mobilized renewed commitment among concerned parties to a "six-party process" of policy coordination efforts in which the U.S. administration continues to work closely with North Korea's immediate neighbors to respond to North Korea's provocative actions. This emerging six-party process involves active coordination of six-party participants to deal with North Korean provocations regardless of the continuation of Six Party Talks. North Korea has become an object of the six-party process rather than a participant in the Six Party Talks.

The role of the six-party process has been enhanced by the establishment of a "P-5 Plus Two" working group at the UNSC in which South Korea and Japan—as members of the Six Party Talks—joined other members of the UNSC to negotiate UNSC Resolution 1874. North Korea's neighbors will also play critical roles in implementing the provisions of the resolution.

The six-party process builds on cooperation established through the painstaking efforts of the Six Party Talks. Its continued development in response to North Korea's missile and nuclear tests is important for the following reasons:

First, the six-party process signals a continued commitment by all concerned parties to four mutually shared objectives represented in the September 19, 2005, Six Party Talks Joint Statement: a) denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, b) normalization of bilateral relations among all the members of the Six Party Talks, c) economic development, including economic assistance to North Korea, d) peace on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. These four mutually shared objectives are limited, but they represent the essential ingredients necessary to ensure regional stability in Northeast Asia.

Second, the six-party process must continue as a symbol of a region-wide commitment to the objective of denuclearization of North Korea. Commitment to the six-party process has emerged as an indication that the concerned parties remain committed to the objective of North Korea's denuclearization. It is important that the United States continue to reiterate its commitment to the Six Party Talks as a way of signaling that it has not abandoned the objective of achieving North Korea's denuclearization.

Third, intensified policy coordination among concerned parties through the six-party process provides the best available means by which to increase pressure on North Korea to return to the Six Party Talks and to honor its commitments to denuclearization. Practical implementation of sanctions measures or inspection of suspect cargo in and out of North Korea under UNSC Resolution 1874 cannot be achieved without close coordination among members of the six-party process. In the event that Six Party Talks resume, the coordination measures through the six-party process should continue to implement provisions of UNSC Resolution 1874 so as to apply the pressure necessary to achieve a favorable outcome from the talks.

Fourth, the six-party process provides an umbrella under which concerned parties may conduct renewed bilateral diplomacy with North Korea with the objective of providing a pathway for returning to the Six Party Talks as a means by which to pursue North Korea's denuclearization. The Six Party Talks is the only venue in which the North Koreans have made a public commitment to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, so it is important that any renewed diplomatic efforts with North Korea be developed in ways that reinforce the implementation of the North's existing denuclearization commitments.

Fifth, the implementation of the six-party process reinforces practical coordination measures among members of the Six Party Talks, but unlike the Six Party Talks, the six-party process can not be paralyzed by a North Korean veto. The six-party process, unlike the possible announcement of a Five Party Talks format, does not explicitly exclude North Korea. Instead, ad hoc consultations among various combinations of states under the six-party process are focused on practical coordination and implementation of collective pressure designed to bring North Korea back to the Six Party Talks.

Sixth, the development of the six-party process involving enhanced coordination among the United States and North Korea's neighbors does not make assumptions about the future of North Korea's leadership or about the succession process, while at the same time providing a means of coordination among the United States and North Korea's neighbors in response to both North Korean provocations and possible internal instability. It does not prejudge whether or when the North Koreans might be willing to negotiate while providing a structure for negotiations designed to achieve the previously agreed upon objectives of the six parties, including denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

North Korea's Nuclear Threat: Implications for the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK Alliances

Pursuit of an effective six-party process will depend to a significant degree on the depth of common purpose and mutual trust reflected in the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK alliances. The Obama administration has given priority to assuring Japan and South Korea that it intends to strengthen and deepen alliance coordination as a cornerstone of its Asian strategy. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sent that message both by making her first foreign visit to Asia and by emphasizing alliance solidarity while in Tokyo and Seoul. Prime Minister Aso was the first foreign leader to visit President Obama in the White House in late February, a symbolic expression of the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The United States has emphasized its alliance commitment to protect Japan by reiterating its commitments to extended deterrence in the face of North Korea's nuclear threat. Likewise, Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Barack

Obama have taken steps to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance in their White House meeting yesterday. The Obama administration's written commitment to extended deterrence underscores that North Korea will gain no advantage by threatening non-nuclear neighbors who are protected by American security commitments.

The impact of North Korean missile and nuclear tests on Japanese threat perceptions--and its significance as a challenge and opportunity for alliance coordination--should not be underestimated. North Korea's 1998 Taep'odong-1 test showed that Japan was within reach of North Korea, and provided the Japanese public with a sense of vulnerability more tangible than the threat posed by Soviet missiles during the cold war. North Korea's threat seems all the more dangerous given the seeming unpredictability and unwavering hostility toward Japan held by the North Korean regime. A Japanese colleague described to me the psychological effect of North Korea's recent nuclear and missile tests in Japan by referring to the Cuban missile crisis.

This combination of Japanese vulnerability and the seeming unpredictability of North Korea's leadership poses a special challenge for the U.S.-Japan alliance because Japan's vulnerability has both a psychological and a geographic dimension. North Korea's threat is near and the United States is far away. The Japanese mainland is now directly threatened by North Korean missiles, while North Korea's capacity to threaten the United States remains indirect. Given these differences the burden and standard the United States must meet to provide effective reassurance is particularly high. For example, Secretary of Defense Gates came in for criticism in Japan when he announced in advance of North Korea's April 5th missile test that the United States would not shoot down a North Korean missile unless it were to threaten Japan. A decade of joint investment in missile defense following North Korea's 1998 test has provided a limited means of self-defense, but has not erased Japan's vulnerability to North Korea.

Following the first North Korean nuclear test in 2006, Japan has actively sought reassurance regarding the concept of extended deterrence and has sought a more detailed understanding of how the concept of extended deterrence would work in practice to meet Japan's security needs. The 2006 test stimulated a brief debate among Japanese political leaders regarding whether or not Japan needs to develop an offensive-strike capability and almost catalyzed a public debate over whether Japan should pursue a nuclear weapons option of its own, but despite Japan's gradual move in the direction of becoming a "normal" state, Japan's main efforts have been directed at how to defend itself from North Korean strategic threats by strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance.

North Korea's second nuclear test has stimulated a similar debate in South Korea over whether or not South Korea should pursue "nuclear sovereignty" by having its own independent capacity to pursue a nuclear weapons program and the possibility of delaying South Korea's assumption of sole operational control and the disbanding of the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command, currently set to take place by April of 2012. The Obama administration's assurances regarding extended deterrence are probably aimed in part at keeping these sorts of South Korean debates under control.

In contrast to the aftermath of the 2006 North Korean missile and nuclear tests, at which time the United States, Japan, and South Korea seemed to have divergent responses, the responses of the

three administrations appear to be converging following North Korea's 2009 provocations. The Obama administration's initial emphasis on reassurance and consultation with allies, the political transition in Seoul from the progressive Roh Moo-hyun administration to the more conservative Lee Myung-bak administration, and the emergence in Japan of a view that North Korea's missile and nuclear development must be dealt with alongside the abduction issue have opened the prospect for more intensive coordination on North Korea policies among the three governments. The deeper the consensus that can be achieved among the United States, Japan, and South Korea, the more likely the prospects that a firm and coordinated stance will be able to influence China and Russia to take a stronger position toward North Korea in the context of the six-party process. Effective policy coordination with Japan and South Korea is especially important as a prerequisite for any potential conversation between the United States and China regarding the future of North Korea.

New administrations in Japan and South Korea have for the time being been able to set aside chronic territorial and textbook disputes and have begun to seek practical forms of cooperation (e.g., joint development projects in Afghanistan). Trilateral dialogue and consultation among the U.S., Japan, and South Korea on practical forms of security cooperation might be expanded in response to the many challenges posed by North Korea. Effective implementation of UNSC Resolution 1874 will require enhanced intelligence and security cooperation between South Korea, Japan, and the United States. There is an urgent need to pursue more in-depth U.S.-ROK policy consultations on contingency planning in the event of North Korean instability; given Japan's likely rear-area support for efforts in this area, these consultations should be expanded to include Japanese participation.

Prospects for a Strategic Understanding with China Regarding the Future of North Korea

North Korea's missile and nuclear tests have been more effective in underscoring the threat that the North Korean regime poses to China's national security interests than years of American efforts under the Bush administration to convince China of the need for regime transformation in Pyongyang. For years, China has labored under the illusion that it is possible to prioritize North Korean stability over denuclearization, but North Korea's recent actions have proven that any Chinese choice between stability and denuclearization in North Korea is a false choice, and that a nuclear North Korea under the current leadership is inherently destabilizing to regional security in Northeast Asia. North Korea's tests provide it with a capacity that is contrary to China's global interests as a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as to China's regional interests, since North Korea's tests have catalyzed Japan's acquisition of new defense capabilities such as missile defense.

China faces a moment of decision in its own policies toward North Korea, given that North Korean actions continue to place Chinese strategic interests at risk. North Korea's nuclear and missile tests have driven it higher on the overloaded agenda of items in the U.S.-China relationship, but it remains to be seen whether the United States and China might engage in strategic policy coordination over how to deal with North Korea. Ultimately, the prospects for such a dialogue appear to be slim at this stage since such a dialogue would probably be successful only if the North Korea issue were to rise to the top of the U.S.-China agenda, either as a result of renewed conflict or North Korea's political collapse.

If such a dialogue were possible, it might change the context in which North Korea is operating and compel North Korean cooperation at the risk of its own regime survival. China in effect holds considerable leverage over North Korea and the effect of international sanctions has been to increase North Korea's economic dependency on China. The practical objective and result of U.S.-China strategic cooperation would be to change North Korea's strategic context in ways that would compel one of two possible scenarios: either the regime moves back to substantive implementation of denuclearization through negotiations or the conditions will be created under which a successor political leadership cooperates to pursue denuclearization.

Prospects for strategic coordination with China to shape the strategic context for dealing with North Korea would in principle be enhanced as a result of strengthened U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK alliance coordination toward North Korea. Advance coordination with allies would set the parameters for a U.S.-China dialogue so as to ensure that South Korean and Japanese interests, respectively, are taken into account. To the extent that China views Japanese and South Korean defense strengthening—or the prospect of a strengthened U.S.-led alliance system—as contrary to Chinese interests, the North Korean tests should catalyze Chinese cooperation through the six-party process.

A Final Note: Political Implications of Pyongyang's Inward Focus

North Korea has taken advantage of the moment to expand its nuclear and missile capabilities. The attainment of such a threat capacity has been a longstanding strategic objective of the regime, although some analysts argue that these capacities are simply tools by which North Korea can achieve its longstanding dream of Korean unification and great power status on its own terms.

An even more challenging aspect of North Korea's rapid series of provocations is that they appear to be connected to North Korea's attempts to lay the institutional and political foundations for a succession process from Kim Jong Il to a successor leadership. This is a complicating factor because it appears to make North Korea's elite more conservative and inward-focused. Or, North Korea's leadership may have made an assessment that the external environment is sufficiently unfavorable that North Korea's best strategy is to hunker down in the porcupine position as the best way to cover its vulnerabilities. Certainly, in light of his recent illness, Kim Jong Il personally must feel that time is not on his side.

These domestic factors complicate the task of engaging North Korea, either through dialogue or pressure, because the risks of engagement are heightened as long as North Korea prioritizes internal factors over the external environment. Such a situation invites the development of a policy response that is designed to influence North Korea's external context in ways that promote collective mutual interests, with no operative assumptions about when North Korea will return to diplomacy but with every intent to ensure that, if there is a return to the negotiating table, the fundamental objectives of the concerned parties are achieved. The prospects for success will be enhanced to the extent that all parties take collective ownership of the process, rather than rely on a single party to lead.