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The Six Party Talks: Dead, Reborn, or Irrelevant?

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I. Background: the Harvard/MIT– DPRK Nuclear Dialogues

Beginning in 2002, scholars at Harvard University initiated a series of meetings with officials from the DPRK for discussions on the nuclear issue. The series included an all-day, closed-door session with Amb. Han and meetings with a visiting delegation headed by Kim Myoung Gil. In July of 2005, I traveled to Pyongyang for 16 hours of meetings with DPRK officials, including 6 hours of discussions with Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gae Gwan. Before, during, and after this trip, I also met with senior American, Chinese, and ROK officials.

In late 2005 and throughout 2006, the Cambridge group attempted to arrange a visit by the Vice Foreign Minister but was unable to obtain the necessary visas. In the summer of 2006, the State Department agreed in principle to issue visas for a delegation led by Amb. Li Gun, but plans for that visit –as well as a MIT-led visit to the DPRK by members of the United States Senate– fell part with signs of an impending DPRK missile test. (Post-missile test, neither the US nor the DPRK have expressed interest in granting visas for Track II meetings related to the nuclear issue.)

Using insights collected from the DPRK nuclear dialogues, this paper attempts to assess the current state and likely future of the Six Party Talks (6PT). The paper begins with a discussion of the views articulated by DPRK officials in 2005 and proceeds with a review of subsequent developments in the 6PT process. It then considers the obstacles to further progress, a role potential for the EU, and possible developments in near-term.

II. The DPRK Position One Year Ago

In the summer of 2005, in anticipation of rejoining the 6PT, DPRK officials offered a consistent position to Western visitors traveling to Pyongyang. This position can be summarized in four points. First, the DPRK had made a "strategic decision" to seek a new relationship with the United States. After "100 years" of enmity, the Pyongyang was seeking a bold change in bi-lateral relationship – one that would lead to normalized and positive relations.

Second, the DPRK was willing to abandon its nuclear weapons program, if the US ended its hostile policy towards the DPRK. This claim was bolstered by remarks Kim Jong Il allegedly made to the ROK Minister of Unification asserting that it was Kim Il Sung's "dying wish" to see the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons. Indeed, DPRK officials went so far as to explicitly endorse the previously disparaged concept of CIVD or "complete irreversible, verifiable disarmament." In the DPRK version of CVID, demonstrating the absence of nuclear weapons was an obligation shared equally by the DPRK and the ROK.

Third, the DPRK was prepared to rejoin the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and submit to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection. The implicit and then explicit implication of this position was that the DPRK would insist on acquiring a nuclear light water reactor (LWR) for electrical power generation, consistent with the original provisions of the Agreed Framework.

Fourth and finally, the DPRK was seeking to increase trade and foreign direct investment.

III. Developments in the Past Year

In the July of 2005, the DPRK announced that it would return to the 6PT, and in September the parties met in what was, by all accounts, a serous attempt to make sub-

stantive progress. American diplomacy was reinvigorated by the appointment of Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, who led the US effort at the Beijing talks. Hill wisely began his efforts with a pre-conference private meeting with Kim Gae Gwan and a public statement that refrained from the negative rhetoric that has often characterized American statements. The parties engaged in intensive and professional negotiations, something that had been missing from DPRK-US interactions for some time. Nevertheless, progress was difficult. After a recess and with gentle and not so gentle prodding from China, the parties announced an Agreement on Principles and an intention to resume another round of talks in November 2005.

Unfortunately, the announcement of an agreement was marked by statements –first by the US and then by the DPRK—that augured increasing difficulties ahead. Assistant Sec. Hill was directed by Washington to read a closing statement at the closing ceremony that had the effect of calling into question Washington's commitment to the process. For its part, the DPRK pushed the divisive issue of an LWR and suggested that it was backing away from commitments in the Agreement on Principles – a statement that was quickly rejected by China and the other parties.

By the time of the abbreviated November 6PT meeting, it was clear the process was in trouble. When the US announced that it was imposing economic penalties on the DPRK related to banking and counterfeiting –part of an broader effort to squeeze the DPRK– Pyongyang made the unwelcome but not unanticipated announcement that it was withdrawing from the 6PT.

For the next seven months, until July 2006, negotiations on North Korean issues remained adrift, with the DPRK refusing to return to the 6PT and the US taking the opportunity to focus on other issues, particularly Iraq and Iran. During this period, the most significant events in the region involved a series of meetings between the President of China and Chairman Kim.

Events took a dramatic turn in early July 2006 however, when the DPRK conducted multiple missile tests, including an unsuccessful test of a long-range missile. This particular test marked an end to the self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile tests that the DPRK had been adopted in 1998. Not surprisingly, the other five parties reacted negatively, imposing various bi-lateral penalties on the Pyongyang. More importantly, all the parties –including China– supported a UN Security Council resolution criticizing the tests and imposing limited sanctions on the North. Reaction to the missile tests was particularly strong in Japan, where the "North Korean threat" strongly resonated and provided nationalist politicians with an irresistible opportunity to advance their domestic political agenda.

That same summer, reports began to emerge from the Pyongyang suggesting that rains and flooding had significantly reduced the food supply in the North and that the DPRK once again faced near-famine conditions. In the wake of these reports, South Korea reversed its post-test policy and announced that it would resume food exports to the DPRK as well as provide other humanitarian relief.

Heading into September, speculation abounded regarding two seemingly incompatible possibilities. One notion, suggested primarily by ROK commentators, was that the DPRK was prepared to re-enter the 6PT. The other, indirectly supported by satellite reconnaissance photographs, raised the specter of a DPRK nuclear test. Adding fuel to both conjectures were rumors that Kim Jong Il was traveling by train to meet with China's Hu.

IV. Looking Back: Paradoxes, Puzzles, and Frustration

The past year and a half in Northeast Asia has been anything but boring. It has also had its share of paradoxes. The rollercoaster ride began with talk of a DPRK nuclear test (Spring, 2005) and ended with talk of a DPRK nuclear test (Fall, 2006). The parties had traveled quite a distance to arrive back at the same place. This period witnessed the first substantive results of the 6PT process –the Agreement on Principles— but also the collapse of the talks and perhaps their demise. A final but little recognized paradox is that the promise of progress came in the very year that the US successfully pushed for death of KEDO, the one and only implementation-oriented institution that had the technical, legal, cultural, and political capabilities to translate diplomatic progress into tangible results.

The year has been marked not only by paradoxes but also puzzles and uncertainties, most of which center on the strategy and behavior of the DPRK. One such puzzle concerns the missile tests. Most observers view the tests as having mixed motives but being primarily a form of political signaling and an attempt to put the North Korean issue back at the top of the Americana and international agenda. Yet most analysts had also concluded that Pyongyang had written off the Bush administration and was biding its time, waiting for the 2008 presidential successor. But why would the DPRK take provocative actions aimed at jumpstarting a negotiating process when it had already given up on the prospect of a deal with this particular American government? Of course, there are possible answers –pride, frustration, a technical need for test data- but none seem particularly compelling.

Another puzzle concerns Pyongyang's refusal to return to the talks. The question here is the cost of the US economic penalties versus the economic benefits of participating in the 6PT. Hard numbers are elusive and often suspect, but some observers have conjectured that the cost of American sanctions is in fact smaller that the amount that the DPRK would be paid by the ROK and others for participating in the 6PT. This calculation is not based on some future economic benefit but rather on the upfront payments –some have called them bribes— that the DPRK demands as the price of participation.

Given the opacity of the North Korean regime, there are also a number of persistent uncertainties regarding the inner workings and thinking of the government. These uncertainties include the nature of the DPRK-PRC state visits (who took the initiative, was the purpose pressure or reassurance, was the focus the 6PT or economic reform), the role of the military (is it changing, what is the relationship between Kim Jong Il and the military), the DPRK's grand strategy (give up nuclear weapons in order to survive versus hold on to nuclear weapons in order to survive), the relationship between food shortages and DPRK 6PT policy, and the Pyongyang's theory of nuclear testing (what it sees as potential costs and benefits). In short, as has always been the case with the DPRK, there are more questions than data.

V. Looking Forward: Obstacles to Progress

So far, this paper has focused on reviewing and reflecting on the events of the past year and a half. The more important question, however, is "where are we headed?"

It is difficult to look to the future and not be struck by the number of obstacles that stand in the way of progress towards a settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue. For the US, paralyzing bureaucratic divisions between the engagers and the squeezers (represented respectively by the State Department and the Vice President's office

and its neoconservative supporters) persist. The result is that the US appears to have a policy, not a strategy. The policy is a bureaucratic compromise in which the engagers get to talk and the squeezers get to pressure, but neither side gets enough of what they want. Under these circumstances, stalemate and disappointment is the most likely outcome. Only a major external event or a political reorganization is likely to break the deadlock.

In addition there are a number of issues on the American side that will temper or constrain enthusiasm for a negotiated settlement. These include a refusal to accept the DPRK's demand for a LWR, the insistence that the issue of highly enriched uranium (HEU) is a priority issue, and a general skepticism about the possibilities for robust verification as long as the current government holds power.

Meanwhile, the DPRK has its own demands and concerns. A removal of the American imposed economic penalties and the provision of a LWR have already been discussed. In addition, the DPRK wants the US to participate directly in the provision of benefits rather than outsourcing this piece of a settlement to the ROK and Japan, as has been done in the past. The North Koreans view direct US participation in the provision of benefits as a confidence building measure, as a way to gauge US commitment to a negotiated settlement, and appropriate to an arrangement in which North Korea gets the full recognition it deserves. Finally, the DPRK worries that the US will attempt to undermine the process by piling on extra issues and "moving the goalposts," i.e., rewriting the rules of what is required of the DPRK before it can enjoy the benefits promised by an agreement.

The doubts and positions of the two main protagonists pose obstacles to progress in the 6PT, but unfortunately, there are other dynamics that may also complicate resolution of the dispute. Perhaps the most important of these is the recent deterioration in PRC-DPRK relations. The relationship between these two countries has always been more complex than most American pronouncements would have suggested. The DPRK has strong bonds to the PRC, bonds born in the blood of shared revolutions and anti-imperialist struggles, but the historical and emotional ties between the two countries are tempered by changes in the China (e.g., establishing relations with the ROK, an embrace of markets, etc.) and the natural concern on the part of Pyongyang that the big powers (mainly the PRC and the US) will cut a deal detriment to its interests. Differences in the relationship became even more pointed following the recent missile tests and China's surprising vote for the UN Security Council resolution condemning the DPRK tests. All this bears watching since it is all but impossible to imagine a negotiated settlement absent a strong and trusting relationship between the Beijing and the Pyongyang. Without such trust, the DPRK is unlikely to have the confidence required to take the difficult actions a settlement would require.

Other obstacles include **1**) the lack of political, institutional, and technical preparations that would make it possible to a implement an agreement, 2) rising nationalism in Japan and, 3) the shared and continuing history of false starts, which confirm the suspicions of the skeptics and undermine the political standing of the engagers. Finally, no discussion of barriers to progress could be complete without calling attention to the profound mistrust between the US and the DPRK. The mistrust is deeply corrosive and can have a cumulative effect as each side tallies the ever-lengthening list incidents where they were victimized or "done wrong" by the other side.

Given this depressing list of barriers to progress, it would seem as if all hope is lost. That conclusion would be premature, however. In point of fact, there has been progress in the past, including the Agreed Framework, the moratorium on long-range missile tests, and the Agreement on Principles. Moreover, changes in leadership and circumstances can provide the opportunities and impetus for change. Finally, from a purely functionalist perspective, both the US and particularly the DPRK need a resolution of the dispute. The US does not want the DPRK to possess nuclear weapons, and the DPRK cannot transform and therefore save its regime unless it settles up with the US. In short, progress is possible, but it will not be easy, and in the near term, the challenges loom larger than the prospects for success.

VI. Failure to Make Progress: the Costs

If the six parties fail in their bid to resolve the nuclear dispute through negotiation, they will bear significant costs, both individually and collectively. At its worst, the continued absence of a resolution increases the chances of proliferation, great power rivalry, and even war.

For the United States, the costs include an accelerated deterioration in the US-ROK alliance, as South Korea increasingly concludes that its interests differ from those of its long time patron. More generally, America may experience a decline in perceived relevance and influence if Beijing and Seoul decide to take the initiative and attempt mange the issue themselves.

The implications for the region are even less sanguine. An unhappy DPRK that periodically "acts out" will further fuel nationalist passions in Japan, with the effect of encouraging corresponding increase in nationalism in China and on the Korean peninsula. Regional tensions between the great powers might actually increase over the failure to resolve the dispute as individual parties blame other governments for the failure or come way from the process with less trust for their negotiating partners. At a minimum, the collapse of the 6PT will represent a missed opportunity for establishing a mechanism or architecture for great power management of Asian security issues – a mechanism that may be sorely missed as other security problems emerge in the years ahead.

More extreme but less likely scenarios are also possible. The most obvious and frequently discussed is the proliferation of nuclear weapons to Japan and South Korea. Another is war. It is highly unlikely that, short of provocation, the DPRK will up and decide to launch a war against the US and its ROK allies, and given US struggles in Ira and other constraints, it is unlikely the US will attack the DPRK. Nevertheless, each day that passes is another day that either party might make a mistake or miscalculation that results in crisis escalation and the possibility of war. Given the deep mistrust and lack of understanding –the DPRK may be the least well understood country in the world—the conditions for miscalculation would seem to be great. So, for example, if some officials in the US get their wish and the DPRK undergoes a so-called "hard landing," the ensuing uncertainty regarding DPRK intentions could create a very dangerous situation. Alternatively, if an American led PSI patrol attempts to stop and board a DPRK ship and several people get killed in the process, it could be a short climb up the escalatory ladder.

Finally, it has to be said that the continued nuclear standoff imposes significant hardships on the North Korean people. They are the ones who are currently paying the brunt of the cost. Their lack of food, economic resources, and human rights will

most certainly continue in the absence of an agreement that removes Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and enables the north's economy to open more fully to the outside world.

Taken individually or collectively, these costs cast doubt on the notion that time is on anybody's side –be it the US side or the DPRK side. The longer this goes on, the greater the costs and potential dangers for all involved

VII. Nuclear Testing: Coming to a Theater Near You?

As was suggested earlier, talk of a possible DPRK nuclear test first came to the fore in the Spring of 2005 and has now reappeared in the Fall of 2006. Many American analysts (including this one) doubted that North Korea would test in 2005, but by 2006 confidence in that claim has eroded.

Of course, as with virtually all issues involving DPRK decision-making, no one really knows what the Pyongyang's intentions are, but it is possible to identify some of the factors that point in one direction or another.

There are both signs and logic that suggest that a DPRK nuclear test is possible. The first and most important is the unconfirmed claim that the Pyongyang considered a test in 2005. Chinese officials assert such a claim and take credit for politically intervening and thus preventing a DPRK test. If true, this would suggest that the North has already come close to a test. Having come to the edge once, it is certainly possible that the DPRK could revisit the issue, especially given what are arguably worse circumstances than before.

In addition, there are small but nevertheless unwelcome "signs." One is that the Korean Central News Agency (KNCA) has now directly referred to nuclear testing. Another is the DPRK's withdrawal from political engagement and discussions of the nuclear issue in informal fora. A similar dynamic took place in the spring of 2005. When the DPRK later decided to rejoin the 6PT, it was accompanied by vigorous engagement and participation in nuclear-related fora. This is a weak correlation with very limited data, but it is a a correlation nonetheless.

Adding to the speculation about a nuclear test is the notion that a nuclear test could "make sense" given the view from Pyongyang. First, a test would doubtless alter the political context and would be consistent with previous DPRK attempts to reconfigure the politics of the standoff in a way that is more favorable to DPRK interests. The North's repeated and vocal rejection of the American conceptualization of the nuclear crisis as "judge versus criminal" (to use Pyongyang's idiom) is one example. Its attempt to cast the dispute as an issue of "arms control" and its unexpected adoption of the CIVD concept (where in the North Korean version all parties have reciprocal obligations) represent additional examples of the North's efforts to frame the political context on more equal terms. A nuclear test would be consistent with such a strategy in that it would a) lead to a review of policy in the US and elsewhere, and b) offer the hope that in the new formulation, the US and the DPRK would be on an equal playing field qua nuclear weapons states.

Such a conclusion may have been encouraged by the examples of India and Pakistan, which paid a rather modest and short-lived price for their nuclear transgressions. Alternatively, it maybe fueled by a sense of frustration from watching Iran being wooed with a package of benefits. In any case, it is at least conceivable that Pyongyang has concluded that it is better to go ahead and test now, pay whatever price

needs to be paid, and then come back to the table in two years with a new US administration and in a strengthened bargaining position.

An alternative short-range strategy, one that is more consistent with the missile tests decision, is that testing will send Japan over the edge, which will in turn cause concern in China and push the Seoul closer to Pyongyang. A hysterical Japan would result in pressure on the US, not only because China and the ROK would step up its demands, but because a) Japan would demand that something be done and b) fear in Washington that a Japanese over-reaction might ignite great power rivalry to the detriment of US interests.

Finally, it may be that a nuclear test is simply the last arrow in the North's quiver. Having broken the seals on its nuclear facilities, kicked out IAEA inspectors, restarted the plutonium reactor, reprocessed fuel rods, announced that it possessed nuclear weapons, and ended its moratorium on long-range missile tests, there is not a lot left the DPRK can do to be provocative other than conducting a nuclear test.

Of course, balanced against these possible rationales for testing, there are several robust reasons why it would hurt DPRK interests. Chief among the reasons not to test is that China has allegedly made testing a red line, and that following a test, the PRC would move to impose real economic sanctions on the North. Another reason for the DPRK to eschew testing is that it would immediately strengthen the political position of the US. Prior to the war in Iraq, Pyongyang might have feared that testing was an American red line and would provoke a US military strike, but subsequent events have given the DPRK reasons to doubt that the US would use military force. Still, a test would bolster the US political position to the detriment of Pyongyang's interests.

These concerns may have been strengthened by the reportedly poor summer harvest and resulting food shortages. A test would surely deepen the DPRK's economic isolation and would likely result in at least a temporary cutoff of even humanitarian aid. Given Pyongyang's dependence on external food aid, it may calculate that it would be better to wait for a more propitious time to test.

Finally, the most recent visitors to the DPRK report that the DPRK is threatening to remove more fuel rods and reprocess uranium for weapons. This is good news insofar as it represents an interim step that is shy of testing. On the other hand, it reinforces the notion that the DPRK will use an escalating series of provocations to try to pressure the US. This general logic is compatible with the prospect of a future test.

In this analyst's view, North Korean nuclear test is still more unlikely than likely, but the chances have increased, and they are not trivial. Given the range of potential consequences, it would be prudent to take the possibility of a test very seriously. Testing is a risky step for the DPRK, and one lesson from the missile tests should be that the consequences of these kinds of events are often hard to predict. In principle, the DPRK should be able to test at any time, and it is not clear to this observer why is *has* to be now. More likely is an attempt to *appear* as if it is going to test as a tactic for stepping up the pressure on the US and other parties.

VIII. A European Role in Northeast Asia?

Outside of a handful of area experts and EU parliamentary members and officials, there is little recognition for a EU role in the North Korean nuclear controversy. That is not to suggest that Europeans have been on the sidelines. Individual governments have taken a leadership role, for example in establishing diplomatic rela-

tions and embassies in the 1990s. Individual governments have also sponsored various development and economic projects. For their part, EU officials have sought to consult with all the governments in the 6PT. They have floated the idea of a more active role, only to be rebuffed by the United States. These initiatives notwithstanding, the Korean issue has not been a priority for the EU.

Some Europeans have suggested that the EU should take a larger role now, if only because once there is a negotiated settlement, Europe will be asked to open its checkbook. If Europe has to pay, it is said, then Europe should be able to play.

This is a perfectly reasonable point of view, but the rationale for European participation is actually deeper and more compelling. Indeed, it may be that Europe has a crucial role to play, if the parties are ever going to reach a settlement in the first place.

There are at least four reasons why Europe should consider playing a more active role in Northeast Asian affairs. The first is that history has repeatedly demonstrated the value of having a non-US Western player at the table. On other occasions, Canada, Europe, and even Australia have played this role and as a result, have facilitated diplomatic resolutions to pressing problems. This is particularly the case, when as with the North Korean issue, the US represents an aggressive view at one end of the spectrum.

As it currently stands, the US and Japan occupy one end of the negotiating continuum, while North Korea stands at the other end. China represents a mediator or facilitator that is sympathetic to DPRK, has the confidence of the DPRK, but also shares the US concern about a nuclear-armed DPRK. The ROK could conceivably play the facilitating role via-a-vis the US that China plays for the DPRK, but the fact of the matter is that the ROK is actually closer to the DPRK and increasingly does not enjoy the confidence of the American administration. Russia, for its part, is in no position to play the US-leaning facilitative role. It is a role that could be played by Europe, however.

Second, there is a group of European diplomats with deep knowledge of the DPRK. For some time now, several European countries (including Sweden and the UK) have maintained embassies in Pyongyang. The US, lacking diplomatic relations with the DPRK, has no presence on the ground. These countries have developed a small but important pocket of expertise and personal relationships with the North. Supplementing the diplomats has been a small group of European businesses and NGOS that have traveled to Pyongyang and established humanitarian and development projects. At this point, Europe has more experience and more direct, hands-on knowledge of the scene than the US.

Third, for many observers the only path to success in the DPRK is the so-called Chinese model - the path of economic engagement and growth followed by a gradual liberalization of the regime. European economic investment could play an important role. European economic participation would bring more resources and a better balance in terms of the source of investment. It might also have a political impact. American companies in South Korea would like to get into the DPRK and are worried that the Europeans will beat them to the punch. They bitterly cite Vietnam as a metaphor for being left out of investment opportunities until it is too late, and they do not want to be left out again. American businesses watch with envy and interest as European firms travel north, and a robust European economic initiative might well lead US businesses to become more of a player on American policy, i.e.,

as a constituency for engagement. In short, a happy ending to the North Korean crisis may depend on long-term economic transformation, and Europe can play a leadership role in promoting that outcome.

Fourth and finally, Europe should pursue a more assertive role in Northeast Asia, because it is in its interest to do so. If the 6PT process is successful, it will likely result in an ongoing multi-lateral mechanism that will continue to play role in the management of important security and even economic issues in Asia for years to come. It is clearly in Europe's interest to be part of that process as early as possible and at the very least to avoid being marginalized. Waiting for a settlement to be completed before taking the initiative increases the likelihood that Europe will have a diminished and less influential role on future great power arrangements.

The irony here is that while a European role might prove quite useful, there is little demand for Europe's services. Neither the US nor China welcome the prospect of another player at the table, one that might seek to influence their positions or be an economic competitor. For its part, North Korea has welcomed the renewal of European relations but remains focused on China, the ROK, and the US as the countries most intimately determinative of its future.

Given the lack of enthusiasm for (or in some cases opposition to) a larger European role in North Korea, it is unlikely that Europe will assume such a role unless it takes the initiative. Simply sitting and waiting to be asked is unlikely to be a successful strategy. Instead, it will require that Europe crash the party, most likely on the heels of an external event that creates a new opportunity or opening. Sadly, a nuclear test might represent an example of such an external shock. In the meantime, Europe needs to find a way to stay involved and prepare for the opportunity that will permit it to take a substantive role.

XI. The Future

A proper assessment of the near-term possibilities in the North Korean nuclear standoff requires attention to issues old and new. A perennial question regarding the 6PT has been whether the DPRK or the US is actually serious about arriving at a negotiated settlement. Years into this process, the answer remains unclear. The American Department of State seems sincere in its efforts to push forward with negotiations but it is far from clear that they have the support of the rest of the government. On the other side, American officials continually call into question whether Pyongyang is serious, and point to the DPRK's refusal to return to the 6PT as evidence for their claim. Further complicating matters is the fact that if one side doubts the commitment of the other side, then that side has no incentive to be serious. At a minimum, one can say that in the absence of clear signals from both the DPRK and the US that they are serious about negotiating, substantive progress seems unlikely.

The "seriousness" issue has dogged the 6PT from the beginning, but as we enter the final years of the Bush administration, there are additional issues that will have an impact on future developments. President Bush is a lame duck president in the final two years of his term, weakened by an unpopular war in Iraq, criticized by conservatives for being insufficiently aggressive with Iran, and facing possibly disastrous mid-term elections. It is difficult to imagine that under these circumstances that President Bush and the cadre of neoconservative officials in the executive

branch will wake up and decide to radically alter a North Korea policy they have clung to for six years.

It seems more likely, that America's policy towards the DPRK will hover in a holding pattern. The President will simply hand off the mess to whoever is unlucky enough to win the presidency in 2008. Further provocative actions by the DPRK, up to and including a nuclear test, are as likely to cause the current administration to dig in and hold firm as they are to catalyze a change in direction.
Still, these are probabilities, not certainties. The good news is that the continued drift in the 6PT is better than escalation and conflict. It may also give the EU the time it needs to position itself for a more assertive and more effective role as peacemaker. Let us hope so.