

**DEALING WITH THE “NORTH KOREA
DILEMMA”: CHINA’S RESPONSE TO
PYONGYANG’S ADVENTURISM**

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EAI Background Brief No. 323

Date of Publication: 1 March 2007

Executive Summary

The second phase of the fifth round of the six-party talks ended on 22 December 2006 with no substantial progress being made. Pyongyang's adventurism has further complicated the already difficult negotiation process.

Whether the forum can successfully denuclearize North Korea will be a crucial factor in Beijing's current review of its overall Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) policy. The key is whether the DPRK is a useful buffer or a liability. The nuclear test supports the latter argument.

The test took place when China-DPRK ties were deteriorating. The seriousness of the challenge to China is four-fold. First, it undermined China's status quo centered Peninsula policy of North Korea remaining nuclear-free and the US refraining from an agenda of regime change for Pyongyang.

Second, the nuclear test narrowed the space in which Beijing interacts with Washington. If the US tightens pressure on Pyongyang, Beijing's resistance will become less justifiable, bound by its commitment to the UN 1718 Resolution. Then its employment of the DPRK card will be less effective.

Third, it would be more difficult for Beijing to maintain a workable relationship with Pyongyang, as Beijing has to resort more to pressure-based measures to ensure the latter's compliance to denuclearization.

Finally, North Korea has listed more and tougher demands at the six-party talks as a "nuclear state". The US is firmer in its goal of denuclearizing Pyongyang. The irreconcilable conflicts may affect the six-party talks, a symbol of China's rise as a major world power.

China's current policy of accommodation, based on DPRK as a useful buffer, shows its perils but any substitution is hard to come by. To Beijing, the continued aids to an increasingly hostile neighbor contravene its strategic interests but the collapse of the Kim regime may cause even worse consequences.