

JAPAN'S ROLE IN THE SIX-PARTY NUCLEAR TALKS

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Abstract: Japan is one of the most dominant Asian economies and has regional disputes with North Korea. With the growing nuclear power of North Korea, the USA, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and North Korea itself were a part of negotiation talks, which were called the six-party talks. Using secondary qualitative data from authentic and reliable sources, the study has analysed the role that Japan has played in the six-party talks. Further, an analysis of the events that led to the origin of the talks has been effectively highlighted here as well. An understanding of the motives of Japan and the impacts of the talks has also been presented here. The study has concluded that Japan has mainly played the obstructionist role in the six-party nuclear talks, as the North Korean crisis is providing it with a chance to strengthen its national security.

Keywords – Japan, North Korea, six-party nuclear talks

1. Introduction

North Korea's nuclear program and the overall increase in the nuclear warheads in the country has been a major concern for the world. Especially, in the case of the USA, this is an alarming situation that can impact the country and the geopolitics of the region as well. Japan is one of the closest allies of the USA and has long-standing issues with North Korea, especially, because the rising nuclear power of North Korea can be harmful for the country [1]. Militarily, North Korea is strengthening its power and therefore, the concerns are massive in this regard. Therefore, under such scenarios, there is a rising focus of all countries on the nuclear program of North Korea and at this juncture, a six-party nuclear talk was formed to negotiate the issues around the program.

Initially, a four-party set-up was prevalent, but with the proposal of the then Japanese Prime Minister, Obuchi Keizo, the six-party set-up was formed. Initially, the participating countries were North Korea, South Korea, the USA and China [2]. However, as Japan was being driven by the fear that it would be left out of a multilateral dialogue that was of high importance for its national security, the proposal came in the year 1998. The study here has aimed at understanding the role that Japan has played in the six-party nuclear talk.

2. Methods and procedures

The collection of secondary data from various existing sources has been undertaken in the case of this study. The use of secondary data for the purpose of the study has increased the scope of the study significantly and has also ensured betterment in terms of generation of better factual understanding of the events. The use of secondary data here has been considered to ensure a more comprehensive view of the key events and the impacts that these events have had. Only qualitative data has been collected, which implies that only factual and theoretical data has been collected in the case of this study to ensure the best outcomes overall. The use of the secondary qualitative data collection method involves the use of data collection from existing sources of data, which are authentic and reliable. The same has been considered in this case as well, as the main focus of the study has been on the collection of only authentic and verified data, which is beneficial in meeting the end results associated with the study.

Another key area that has been considered while collecting data is the validity and reliability of the sources that have been employed in the study. The study has only made use of recent sources of data, which are only from authentic journals and newspaper articles. Besides, to ensure that all the recent developments of the study have been effectively captured, only recent data sources have been considered. Besides, the use of reputed sources that are peer-reviewed and relevant to the topic of the study have been considered. This is a critical requirement, which has helped in maintaining the quality standards that can be associated with the study. Further, multiple keywords have been framed to collect the most suitable data that can benefit the overall study and ensure better results.

Among these “Six-Party talks,” “Japan’s role in six-party nuclear talks,” “Japan’s motives in six-party nuclear talks” and “impacts of the six-party nuclear talks” are the main keywords that have been employed in the case of this study.

Further, the use of a stratified sampling technique has been employed to ensure better data collection. The use of stratified sampling method helps in collecting data based on certain strata’s, which are divisions associated with the topic. Here, the same technique has been employed to gain better insights about major areas that can be associated with the study. The main reason for undertaking such a style of sampling is it has allowed collection of the most authentic data and has helped in chronologically collecting data, based on the needs and requirements associated with the study. Thus, the selection here has been beneficial and has helped in generating better data collection and analysis.

3. Origin of the six-party talks

As mentioned earlier, the six-party talks on the nuclear program associated with North Korea, was the brainchild of Japan itself. The Japanese Prime Minister of 1998, Obuchi Keizo came up with the proposal for a six-party talks regarding the North Korean nuclear program. However, formerly, a four-party talk was already in place to negotiate on the issue, which has a compelling impact on the military relationships between the East Asian nations [3]. Especially, in the case of South Korea and Japan, it can be seen as an extremely threatening scenario. Even though South Korea was initially a part of the four-party talks, along with the USA, China and North Korea, Japan was the country that was left out. However, the nuclear program of North Korea was significantly problematic for Japan as well and therefore, out of fear of being left out from multilateral dialogue, which was of high significance for its national interest, Japan proposed the six-party set-up.

The key aspect of the proposal was to include both Japan and Russia in the talks with North Korea. However, initially, until 2002, no heed was paid to any such proposal. The leadership of the other countries that were participating did not recognise the need to include either Russia or Japan in the talks. Nevertheless, in 2002, the USA, which is a strategic ally of Japan, came up with a claim that North Korea had disclosed a uranium-based nuclear program[4]. It was after this claim that Japan’s request of joining the other countries was accepted and the country along with Russia, was included in the talks. The participation of Japan in the negotiation process was deemed essential for meeting appropriate results and ensuring betterment in this domain.

In September 2005, a pact saw Pyongyang agree to abandon its nuclear program and re-join the Non-Proliferation Treaty again. It also accepted the re-entry of IAEA monitors but demanded food and energy assistance in return [5]. Besides, it also was aimed at ensuring better relationships with both the USA and Japan and paved the way for peace in the Korean peninsula. However, a month later, the US treasury department came up with restrictions on a Macao-based organization named Banco Delta Asia, which was laundering money for North Korea. This led to the freezing of fifty accounts of North Korea by the government of Macau, which led to issues and therefore the peace talks hit a roadblock. Further developments followed, with no eventual success in this regard [6]. Therefore, the main aim of the multilateral talk was to ensure that North Korea’s growing nuclear power was curtailed, and it was ensured that appropriate results could be reached.

4. Japan’s roles and motives of involving in the talks

Japan played an important role in the generation of the six-party talks itself, as it was proposed by the then Prime Minister of the country. Further, the country has been closely monitoring various happenings in the Korean peninsula as it fears that the rising military power of North Korea can have grave security concerns for Japan and its national security [7]. Therefore, as it was against its national interest, the framing of a multinational dialogue, which included itself and Russia as well as stressed on by the country. However, certain studies have revealed the fact that Japan has taken the obstructionist stance in the case of the Six-party talks on the nuclear issue of North Korea and had deliberately played the spoiler in the talks. Even though the country cited North Korea as the most important threat to its overall internal security, the country also does not put priority on the area of nuclear weapon development. Rather the main concern of Japan with regards to North Korea, is the abduction of Japanese nationals by the spies of North Korea. Therefore, this is one of the key areas that makes it one of the forces that has a lukewarm response.

Further, another key area that can be considered in this case is the fact that the country is facing a massive threat from North Korea given the geographical proximity between the two nations. The two nations are regional neighbors and therefore, there is a growing possibility that Japan is at a greater threat than its ally, the USA. These issues were heightened when a North Korean missile by the name of Taepodong flew over Japanese territory in 1998 [8]. This suggests the threat that Japan faces and therefore, it provides Japan with an opportunity to come up with better defense systems. Therefore, the Japanese have been able to sense this small

opening and are trying to exploit the same. In the name of the issue, it is trying to strengthen its defense system and therefore, it is one of the major reasons that Japan is playing the spoiler here. Besides, its main focus is different from the other countries that are participating in the talks. The main aim of the country is to strengthen itself in the name of the threat that North Korea poses to its internal security. This can allow Japan to be more prepared in defending against China and establishing its power in the region.

Furthermore, there is a need to understand the fact that it is impossible as per the USA to negotiate with North Korea, without the economic aid that can be provided with Japan. The main area that North Korea wants is economic support in place of complete denuclearization and in this regard, Japan can be beneficial. Besides, Japan itself is following a policy of economic diplomacy to ensure that it remains in talks and further strengthens its position [9]. Therefore, the role that has been played by Japan can be that of a spoiler in the talks and North Korea had wanted Japan out of the talks as the main focus of the country was different. It is one of the main areas that can be associated with the Six Party talks that are to be held for denuclearization of North Korea.

5. Impact of the talks

The talks that took place on multiple levels did not yield any significant and fruitful results as North Korea is still building its nuclear arsenal and openly violating norms. Multiple sanctions have been imposed on the country, but with no impact whatsoever. The country is continuously coming up with more missiles and nuclear warheads and this has become a massive global concern in the modern times. More than a couple of times North Korea had agreed to dismantle its nuclear weapons and re-join the NPT [10]. However, each time one thing or the other came up and the efforts hit a roadblock. Besides, with changes in leadership in North Korea, the overall scenarios have become volatile, and this is one of the key reasons for the failure of the talks at all levels. One area that has been noted in the case of the talks is the differing approaches of the governments involved, which is another key area that contributed to the failure of the talks.

The nations involved had their own motives and agendas in undertaking the talks and therefore, even though a solution was met time and again, the issue failed to be resolved. This can be seen as a crucial setback of the overall talks that was held and thus, the end results that can be associated with the same were not fruitful enough. Besides, another major area that has been highlighted is the conflict of what to do and what not to do [11]. The main issue that was seen was the issue of diplomacy wherein, whether to manage the nuclear weapons of North Korea or to eliminate them were the main dilemmas. Therefore, this is a major area that can be considered as another potential aspect that has led to no results in this direction.

6. Analysis of Japan role in the six-party talks

An analysis of Japan's role in the six-party talks about the nuclear weapons of North Korea has effectively suggested the fact that Japan is playing the role of a spoiler in this case. The country proposed the six-party talks itself out of fears of being left out from a multilateral dialogue of such high importance for its internal security. However, these proposals made in 1998 were not paid heed to at any scale by the leaderships of the initial four nations that were involved in talks, the USA, China, North Korea and South Korea. Nevertheless, in 2002 the proposal was accepted and in 2003 the first round of six-party talks also including Russia was held [12]. However, even after the inclusion, Japan has taken the obstructionist approach in the talks. The country is being benefited from the crisis, largely because it can be able to build and strengthen its own defense systems against China by taking advantage of the situation that prevails. Besides, the country is also not largely concerned about nuclear warheads of North Korea but is rather concerned about the abduction of its nationals by the Korean spies, which is another crucial area that makes Japan a spoiler in this regard.

5. Conclusion

Japan's internal security can be seen to be facing a major threat in current times, as the country is in close geographic proximity to North Korea. Besides, the country is also facing worsening of relationships with the North as the latter continuously violates its international borders with Japan. However, the main issue that Japan tends to have with North Korea is the issue of abduction of its nationals. This has been pointed out as a major concern in the talks and therefore, it dilutes the overall cause of the talks as well.

The country instead of speaking of denuclearization, speaks of the abduction, which is against the needs of the other nations. Furthermore, Japan has been provided with a chance to strengthen its own security at the expense of North Korea and it is looking to completely exploit the same by building better defense mechanisms and coming up with better military set-ups. Therefore, it is evident that it is in its national interest that the dispute continues and therefore, it can be said that the role of Japan here is that of a spoiler.

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