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Editor: Luisa Sargsyan

Email: luisa.sargsyan@atlantic-council.ca

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Negotiations on North Korean Nuclear Program

Progress has been made in the negotiations over North Korean nuclear program. The country has agreed on July 12, after three-day long negotiations, to finish dismantling its main nuclear facility at Yongbyon by the end of October 2008 and allow international inspectors to visit the site for inspections and verifications. The agreement does not specify how the denuclearization process would be verified, and it does not include plans for full disarmament. But it's another step forward in the long process of getting the secretive North Korean regime to give up its nuclear program.

The talks that started last week by six countries (China, South Korea, U.S., Russian, Japan and North Korea) aimed at persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program are the first in nine months and come after Pyongyang produced last month a declaration of its nuclear activities dating back to the mid 1980s, one of the big steps pledged under a broad disarmament for aid deal. The declaration, a 60-page report that was originally due at the end of 2007, was handed over to the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei in Beijing in June. North Korea also televised on June 27 the destruction of its 19.8-meter tall cooling tower at Yongbyon to further demonstrate its intention of eliminating its nuclear program. U.S. officials welcomed the declaration but said that the information must be verified. In return, however, the U.S. said it would begin the process of lifting economic and political sanctions against North Korea including the designation of the country as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The North said it could not go ahead with the next stage of the disarmament deal until other parties speed up their promised energy aid. Under the current second phase of the deal, the North should get energy aid equal to one million tons of fuel oil and the lifting of some US sanctions, in return for disabling Yongbyon and documenting its nuclear activities. The third and final phase of the disarmament deal calls for the North to permanently dismantle its plants and hand over all nuclear material and weaponry. In exchange it would win diplomatic ties with the United States and Japan.

Experts thought that North Korea would sign off on an inspection program but would delay further disarmament steps for as long as possible to squeeze out concessions. "North Korea has no reason to reveal everything it's got," a South Korean analyst said. "Nuclear armaments are not only North Korea's "card" to play strategically at the negotiating table, but they are also a tool for Kim Jong-il to stay in power."

There were some differences between the parties during the negotiations as to how the verification process should proceed and who would take part in it. The question was whether the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should participate in the verification and what would be its role. As a result of the last week talks, Pyongyang broadly agreed to permit outside inspectors, including members of the IAEA, in exchange for the pledged aid.

Despite the differences, this round of talks did move forward beyond the subject of verifying the North's nuclear account and took up the issue of economic and energy aid for the impoverished and isolated state. North Korea is already receiving much-needed energy aid and was also promised improved diplomatic relations. Japan refuses to take part in supplying heavy fuel oil to the North under the disarmament deal and continues to stand by the position that until Pyongyang addresses its questions about its missing civilians, it cannot join in the energy aid.

A shipment of Russian food aid arrived last week in North Korea through the World Food Program (WFP). The North also began receiving food aid, in late June, from the United States - 37,000 tons of wheat as part of 500,000 tons of American assistance pledged to the impoverished country.

North Korea fails to produce enough food for its 23 million people, forcing the country to rely on outside aid. The usual shortages are expected to worsen this year, according to aid agencies and analysts, due to floods last summer that caused heavy damage to key farming regions. The WFP estimates that more than five million people will need food aid this year.

Also, for the first time in two years, UN humanitarian agencies have been granted access to two isolated provinces in North Korea. A mission, led by the UN Children's Fund, left the North Korean capital Pyongyang on July 12 for the North Eastern provinces of North Hamgyong and Ryanggang. It will assess the critical food and health needs of most vulnerable people. These areas have been off-limits to international aid agencies since the end of 2006. During the next 11 days, a 10-member team will visit hospitals, health facilities and institutions for children in county towns and villages. The experts will finalize arrangements to train doctors and caregivers in the treatment of malnutrition and monitor the use of supplies. According to the agency, 37% of children below the age of five are already malnourished; mortality rate for children in North Korea is 55 for 1,000 births. The UN Children's Fund had been active in the region since 1999, providing critical support and supplies for basic health, nutrition and water supply services.

The negotiators expect the details of the nuclear verification process to be worked out by early September. Observers say that North Korea is a tough negotiator and is always trying to squeeze for more. Given how frustrating the negotiations have been over the past, the endgame may not come as near as it seems. Knowing that the Bush administration want to see the results as soon as possible, North Koreans have been using this factor to get more concessions and more time until the U.S. elects a new president.

Some issues remain unresolved: how much of North Korea's actual stockpile was disclosed last month in the 60-page nuclear declaration and how much access is the country going to grant to inspectors. No details were given on the uranium enrichment program which the U.S. believes Pyongyang is running along the plutonium enrichment.

Russia's military and humanitarian contribution in Afghanistan

Moscow and Washington agreed a deal over a supply of Russian weapons to the Afghan army in its fight against the Taliban insurgency. The deal was signed in the Russian capital in June as part of the United States-Russia Working Group on Counterterrorism (CTWG), which works to improve bilateral cooperation between Russia and the United States, while also concentrating on Afghanistan, the fight against drug trafficking, the financing of armed extremist groups and weapons of mass destruction.

Russian Foreign Ministry officials said "We in the past have already provided military equipment to Afghanistan and we feel there is now a demand by the Afghan population and the ability of Afghanistan to take its security in its own hands". It's quite possible that Russia could increase the delivery of arms to Afghanistan in the future.

Afghanistan began receiving Russian arms in the 1970s prior to the Soviet invasion of the country. Although the supplies stopped with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, Soviet aircraft, tanks and armored personnel carriers, as well as the world-renowned Kalashnikov automatic rifle, have remained the basis of the Afghan army.

Russia expressed its willingness to resume military aid to Afghanistan during a visit of the country's defense minister to Moscow in May 2007. In December 2002, Russia's Defense Ministry signed a contract with Afghanistan to provide military-technical assistance to Afghanistan with deliveries of motor vehicles, fuel, communication equipment, topographic maps, repair workshops and automobile and armor equipment spare parts. However, deliveries were suspended in 2005 in order to avoid the duplication of U.S. aid to the country, which that year totaled \$929 million, more than 80% of which was earmarked for the military and police. Russian assistance to Afghanistan in 2002-2005 exceeded \$200 million.

Faced with an increase in the activities of the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremists, the Afghan authorities recently asked Russia to resume aid programs suspended in 2005. Russia also reacted to the food shortage following severe drought and a poor harvest in the country: it will send 15,000 metric tons of wheat following an earlier appeal by the Afghan government. In addition, Russia is planning to donate \$4 million to the multilateral Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) in 2008-2009, which supports the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to re-establish a fully functioning and representative government system. The fund is instrumental in promoting medium and long-term economic growth, making it the main vehicle for government outreach and services to Afghan citizens.

Russia had already made a significant contribution to the country's economic stabilization by writing off in August 2007 almost 90% of Afghanistan's Soviet-era debt, an amount totaling \$11.1 billion, with the remainder to be repaid over 23 years.

Denmark's presence in Afghanistan

A broad political majority in the Danish parliament decided on June 11 that Denmark would continue its current military and civic activities in Afghanistan to 2012 and would increase the number of its troops to 750. Some additional 12 to 15 Danish military training personnel will be deployed in the Helmand province in the Southern Afghanistan. Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen made this announcement at the NATO summit in Bucharest. As part of the agreement, the parties concurred that Denmark's military engagement in Afghanistan would be gradually reduced and replaced by civilian projects over the next couple of years.

Helmand is considered the ultimate Taliban stronghold. The province consists of an area of 58,584 square kilometers and is only slightly bigger than Denmark and has a population of around 750,000. It is the world's largest opium-producing region, responsible for approximately 40% of the world's supply.

"Denmark is strengthening its presence in Afghanistan at the time when the overall number of NATO troops may be reduced," Denmark's Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller said. "Our ultimate goal is to gradually reduce the number of Danish troops present until all Danish personnel are free from military involvement and our resources are directed more at civilian-related rebuilding and infrastructure projects." It will double the amount spent on civil projects in Afghanistan and it will also build a military field hospital in the area.

According to Danish minister of development Ulla Tørnæs, Danish aid focuses on state-building, on fighting corruption and on promoting democracy; the country's aid to education should also secure disadvantaged Afghan girls get a chance to go to school. According to the Foreign Ministry statements, Denmark will also request a more determined effort from the Afghan government, especially on the issues of human rights.

In Denmark, the decision to extend the country's mission to 2012 and strengthen its presence in Afghanistan was seen as preparation to the International Conference in Paris in support of Afghanistan held on June 12, 2008 that brought together 67 countries and 17 international organizations to further discuss political and economic reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The Conference issued a [Final Declaration](#). At least 17 billion dollars was pledged in future aid for Afghanistan, of which the U.S. will provide 10.2 billion dollars.

Since September 11, 2001, Denmark has been highly proactive in endorsing and implementing United States, UN, and EU-initiated counter-terrorism measures and has contributed substantially to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Its approach aims at creating development, good governance, and security. The security contribution is concentrated in the difficult Southern Afghanistan where the Danish troops operate alongside British and Estonian forces in Task Force Helmand and Canadian forces in Kandahar. The Danish forces are involved in security operations and capacity building of the Afghan security forces with the aim of empowering the Afghan authorities to take over responsibility for security operations in the long run.

Denmark opened a representation office in Kabul in 2002 and transformed it into an Embassy in May 2006. The Embassy works closely with the Government of Afghanistan, ISAF, UNAMA and the international community to help the Afghan government develop its institutional capacity to the benefit of the Afghan people through the implementation of the Afghanistan-Denmark partnership Strategy 2005-2009.

Recommended Reading

German Politicians Say AWACS Request Could Overburden Troops

Spiegel International

Berlin is facing another domestic conflict over the Bundeswehr deployment in Afghanistan. NATO is considering a request for the deployment of AWACS reconnaissance planes stationed in Germany. But the deployment would require parliamentary approval and is likely to spark a major debate in Berlin. *Read the full articles [here](#).*

Is the Collective Security Treaty Organization the Real Anti-NATO?

Richard Weitz, World Politics Review

Although Western attention has focused on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a potential threat to Western influence in Eurasia, another institution, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), currently represents a more serious near-term challenge. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Russian ships at the mercy of pirates

Simon Saradzhyan, ISN Security Watch

Maritime shipment accounts for 60 percent of Russia's foreign trade shipments and not a year goes by without pirates attacking a ship either owned by Russian businessmen or manned by Russian crews. Despite this, Russian authorities take a reactive rather than a proactive approach toward the threat: The navy trains regularly with NATO naval forces to fight pirates, but no ships are sent to patrol dangerous zones. *Read the full article [here](#).*

The Failed States Index 2008

Foreign Policy Magazine

When troops opened fire in the streets of Mogadishu in early May, it was a tragically familiar scene in war-torn Somalia. Except on this day, soldiers weren't fighting Islamist militias or warlords. They were combating a mob of tens of thousands rioting over soaring food prices. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Sources: AP, Reuters, AFP, DPA, RIA Novosti, Voice of America, Los Angeles Times, World Politics Review, Global Security www.globalsecurity.org, Defense News www.defensenews.com, CIDA <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca>, Embassy of Denmark in Canada www.ambottawa.um.dk, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs www.diplomatie.gouv.fr, U.S. Department of State www.state.gov, www.rin.ru, www.america.gov

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