

The North Korea Bottleneck: A Four-Power Solution

The picture provided in this package of the Asian nations cooperating with one another, to a degree unprecedented in recent history, is marred by one glaring hole—that of the continuing crisis over North Korea. But a solution is in sight.

The crisis began with the Bush/Cheney Administration in 2001, when North and South Korea were well on the way to building economic bridges—especially the successful start to rebuilding the North-South rail connections which eventually would have completed the Eurasian Land-Bridge, from Busan to Rotterdam. Secretary of State Colin Powell was committed to continuing the successful agreements reached among the U.S., South Korea, and North Korea, under the Clinton Administration, whereby International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors in the North oversaw the mothballing of the nuclear weapons program; a safe nuclear power plant under construction with international supervision; and other economic and cooperation between North and South. This was all scrapped by Bush and Cheney; and the North proceeded to build a nuclear weapon in response.

Now, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has overseen a revival of the U.S. policy of engagement, with U.S. special envoy to North Korea Stephen Bosworth visiting Pyongyang in December. Meanwhile, Russia and China have continued building the necessary

preconditions for integrating the Korean Peninsula into the broader Eurasian development perspective.

Russia has proceeded in building a rail link from the North Korean port of Rajin to Vladivostok, while China is building a new bridge over the Yalu River into North Korea, with road and rail connections to North Korean ports on the Sea of Japan. The northern Chinese province of Jilin is planning to use the North Korean port at Rajin to ship goods from the Chung-hun-Jilin-Tumen economic development zone, and develop the region into a modern industrial and agricultural base.

In August, Russia's envoy to the Far East District, Victor Ishayev, said, in regard to Russia's efforts in North Korea, that the South Korean government "is very pleased with the position of Russia, which shares South Korea's position and supports their actions. They are ready to participate in the tripartite cooperation we offer." He said that North Korea does "not object" to the ongoing plan to run a gas pipeline through North Korea to the South, nor to the Trans-Korean railway project, although the projects will not proceed immediately. "The economic interest pushes them to cooperate," Ishayev said.

North and South Korea are also taking steps to solve the imbroglio. The North issued a New Year's message stating: "The fundamental task for ensuring peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in the rest of Asia is to put an end to the hostile relationship between North Korea and the U.S.," adding that a lasting peace and a "nuclear-free Korean peninsula" could be obtained "through dialogue and negotiations."

—Mike Billington