

The Six-Party Talks, Effective or Not?
A Qualitative Analysis on the Independent Effect of Multilateral Diplomacy

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the causal process of how the Six-Party Talks affected the ROK government's position towards North Korea and the nuclear problem. In order to examine the causal effect and process of the Six-Party Talks to a state's (Republic of Korea) position and perception towards another state (North Korea), an analysis that compares the position of a government ex ante (independent variable) and its post-Talks position (dependent variable) is necessary. The baseline in this case would be, the perception, intentions, understanding of the ROK government and leadership regarding North Korea prior to the Six-Party Talks' inception. To examine the theory's validity, the research attempts to lay out the causal linkages of Six-Party Talks starting from ROK's initial view on North Korea before any indications of the Talks, the process of the Talks of leading ROK to enter the multilateral forum, the Talks' role as a venue for states to exchange, share, and expose information, and the resulting perspective of ROK in comparison with its initial position before the Talks. The research objective is to extract the Talks' systematic effect on inter-Korean relations and establish the role of the multilateral negotiation in the Korean context.

Lay Summary

2018 marked a turning point in the security environment of the Korean Peninsula with North Korea's abrupt 'peace offensive'. The gesture was well-received by leaders of the Republic of Korea and the United States and series of bilateral summits were held in response to the North's gesture. The phenomenon raises questions regarding the utility of multilateral diplomacy since the most prevalently held view in depicting the cause of the series of talks is that they were possible due to the will of state leaders. While this may be the case, a revisiting of an important diplomatic process of the past—the Six-Party Talks—which preceded recent progress and also laid the foundations for its inception could provide some additional perspective on the ongoing security dialogue. By systematically tracing the negotiation process, this thesis examines the Talks's effectiveness on state perception, particularly South Korea's understanding and policy on North Korea.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, and independent work done by the author, Hyoung Rark Cho.

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1. Introduction

As gunshots between the two Koreas and participating international forces ceased in July 1953, the security environment in the Korean Peninsula has been controlled by an armistice instead of a peace agreement ever since. The failure in fully resolving armed conflict has constructed a chronic state of tensions, uncertainty, and instability in the region. Hostility between the two sides seemed to reach its peak and be on the verge of unraveling altogether soon after the election of Donald Trump as US president and the ensuing antagonism between Pyongyang and Washington.

The beginning of 2018 marked an abrupt and unexpected turn in the geopolitics encompassing the Peninsula. Starting from North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un's gesture for peace by expressing his will to send a delegation to Seoul for the North's participation in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, North Korea's 'peace offensive' was followed by a reignition of inter-Korean dialogue and successful agreements to send North Korean athletes, high-level officials, performing groups to the Olympics and also to hold senior military talks after the games. The initiative for pursuing dialogue was synchronized between the two Koreas as the scope and level of dialogue gradually expanded into two inter-Korean summits held respectively in April and May. The multiple summits also effectively helped to shape the conditions for the first US-North Korea summit last June. Although the momentum for a follow-up summit has slightly weakened in midst of differing opinions regarding the specific process of North Korea's denuclearization and the US mid-term elections, progress is still in motion as the three states continue to hold working-level meetings in order to provide a peaceful solution to a security problem.

The phenomenon raises questions regarding the utility of multilateral diplomacy since the

most prevalently held view in depicting the cause of the series of talks is that they were possible due to the will of state leaders. While this may be the case, a revisiting of an important diplomatic process of the past—the Six-Party Talks—which preceded recent progress and also laid the foundations for its inception could provide some additional perspective on the ongoing security dialogue.

One reason for the necessity of an analysis on the Talks is that despite the difference in mode of dialogue, the same conflicting issues between North Korea and the United States which eventually led to the de facto disbandment of the Talks still persist and are undergoing fervent negotiations up to this day of writing. Although the scope of the research does not incorporate the task of specifying the relationship between the Talks and recent summits, it nevertheless can shed light on the significance of bilateral/multilateral diplomacy in the Korean context by closely examining the causal process of a historical event which was once regarded as a groundbreaking effort to solve the North Korean problem but has been in hiatus for almost a decade.

Another motivation for this study is to overcome the dichotomous question regarding the utility of the Talks and future multilateral negotiations that is frequented by policymakers and scholars alike: Was the Talks useful or not? The main goal of this research is to provide an answer to a *prima facie* similar but essentially different question related to the Talks: Did the Talks have an independent effect or not?

Kim's analysis on the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit provides some insight regarding the causal effect of bilateral talks in the Korean context by indicating an effect of the Summit on the Republic of Korea (ROK)'s perception towards North Korea, which is also the point of analysis in this research. However, the research postulates that it was North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il's

political status and determination that caused the summit and thus a change in state perception to occur while the role of the South Korean government was assumed to be consistently pro-engagement and pro-North, failing to provide an explanation of the summit's own effect.¹

Tan also specifically reviews the effectiveness of multilateral engagement on the North Korean nuclear issue through a comparison between the Talks and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with the conclusion that the former is in fact more effective in facilitating cooperation and achieving North Korea's denuclearization, albeit with several necessary adjustments. Cotton gives a similar account with an emphasis on the development of the negotiation process followed by policy solutions for the Talks's revival. Nevertheless, both analyses in essence regress to the aforementioned focus on the Talks's utility while an examination of its specific causality, or independent effect, is excluded.²

In this paper, I attempt to shift the focus from the typical normative argument regarding the Talks's utility to a qualitative analysis on the process of its causal effect on state perception. While this paper's primary intent does not remain on providing an ideal policy solution to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem, it does aim to provide guidance to the future diplomatic processes of bringing peace and stability to a region that has been haunted by the specter of the Cold War for decades by verifying the independent effect of the Talks on a state, in this case, South Korea.

¹ Samuel S. Kim, "North Korea in 2000-Surviving through High Hopes of Summit Diplomacy," *Asian Survey* 41, no.1 (2001): 12–29, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2001.41.1.12>.

² Ming Hui Tan, "Multilateral Engagement of North Korea: An Assessment of the Six-Party Talks and the ASEAN Regional Forum," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 5, No. 2 (2017): 307–24.; James Cotton, "North Korea and the Six-Party Process: Is a Multilateral Resolution of the Nuclear Issue Still Possible?," *Asian Security* 3, no. 1 (2007): 27-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799850601138906>.

The structure of this research is as follows: I first provide a brief rundown of the historical process that led to the inception, expansion, and dormant of the Six-Party Talks and the second South-North Korean Summit to provide historical context and a general overview on the complexity of resolving Korea's security problem. The following section assesses the Talks's causality through process tracing and counterfactual analysis in order to confirm the independent effect it imposed on the South Korean leadership's perception on North Korea. Lastly, after having constructed the Talks's causal mechanism, I review its equifinality by examining two alternative theories that go against the hypothesis of the Talks affecting South Korea's judgement on the North.

2. Diplomatic History of the North Korean Nuclear Problem

The genesis of the Six-Party Talks originates in the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993 when North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). As tensions between the United States and North Korea rose, diplomacy was the main means of resolving the problem as the two states began the painstaking process of negotiating on the nuclear issue. On October 21 1994, both states reached an Agreed Framework which was far from being a declaratory document and codified specific actions necessary in the resolution of the nuclear issue.³ The Agreed Framework was significant in the sense that despite it being an agreement between the two states, it also became the foundation on which future multilateral efforts on the issue were based. Bilateral interaction persisted between the two states until October 2000 during which the Joint Statement on International Terrorism and Joint Communiqué were announced.

US-North Korean bilateral efforts were paralleled with multilateral approaches. The Four-Party Talks in 1997 that included South Korea, US, China, and North Korea was arranged for the purpose of negotiating a peace agreement among states affected by the 1953 Korean War Armistice. Initiated by China, trilateral talks between the US, North Korea, and China were also held following North Korea's official withdrawal from the NPT in 2003 in order to solve the nuclear issue through dialogue. Although North Korea's non-compliance and refusal to participate in multilateral settings rendered these efforts to be inconclusive, this reaction was also countered by the overall agreement that the varying security considerations of states in the region

³ Robert L. Carlin and John Wilson Lewis, *Policy In Context: Negotiating with North Korea : 1992-2007* (Stanford, CA: Center for International Security and Cooperation, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, 2008), 1-3, http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/22128/Negotiating_with_North_Korea_1992-2007.pdf.

could not be decoupled with North Korea's nuclear disarmament which in effect continued the diplomatic drive that led to the commencement of the Six-Party Talks.⁴

After strenuous negotiation processes from the first round of talks in August 2003, the Six-Party Talks finally reached a turning point through the agreement on a Joint Statement in September 19 2005 and the Initial/Second Phase Action for the Implementation of the Joint Statement in February 13 and October 3 2007. The agreements addressed selected issues of significance to both state and regional security such as normalization of relations, sequential process of denuclearization, security and economic assurances, and the establishment of an enduring peace and security mechanism in Northeast Asia. The South Korean government saw the agreements as an opportunity to improve inter-Korean relations and struggled to facilitate the peace process through a summit. The South's endeavor to engage the North bore fruit and contributed to generating the October 4 "Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace, and Prosperity."⁵

Nevertheless, the innovative but fragile accomplishments of the Six-Party Talks and the summit were severely damaged after the North's refusal to allow international inspectors free access to all nuclear sites in 2008, multiple nuclear/missile tests, rejection to be bound by any agreements from the Talks, and its frequent pronouncements of having completed nuclear weaponization and thus having obtained the status of a nuclear weapons state.

The Talks have been in a prolonged recess in large part due to the rigidity of differing

⁴ Hideya Kurata, "A Conceptual Analysis of the Six-Party Talks: Building Peace through Security Assurances," *Asian Security* 3, no. 1 (2007): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799850601141926>.

⁵ Mi-yeon Hur, *The Six-Party Talks on North Korea : Dynamic Interactions among Principal States* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 168-9.

positions and distrust between the US and North Korea. For the US, its obstinacy in imposing a 'complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID)' on North Korea allowed little room for any compromise and hence was one of the core reasons that stalled progress in the Talks. It was generally perceived that only when the US decided to loosen its tenacity on the concept were agreements such as the Joint Statement possible.

On the other hand, North Korea remained persistent on the acquisition and documentation of a security assurance from the US prior to going through any dismantling process of its nuclear program. Dissatisfaction in negotiations provoked the North to display provocative and antagonistic behavior to which the US reacted through increased international/unilateral sanctions. The conflation of antagonism ultimately lent the stage to a rehash of Cold-War-style containment and gradual escalation of tensions.

3. Examination of the Independent Effect of the Six-Party Talks

3.1. Assessing causality: How did the Six-Party Talks have an effect?

Next, the research concentrates on providing an answer to the following question: Did the Six-Party Talks have a causal effect? As shown in the question, the main point is to examine the causal effect of a treatment or causal variable, the Six-Party Talks, on an independent variable—the ROK, or South Korea. The dependent variable in question would be the ROK’s perception and action on their main interlocutor, and also enemy, the North Korean regime.

The chapter tries to illustrate a specific function of the Talks of providing information to the party state while tracing the detailed processes of its informational mechanism as well as the linkages that led to the progress and outcomes of the Talks. The overarching task is to closely analyze the Talks’s effect of functioning as a crucial venue for party-states to exchange, share, expose information and providing diplomatic progress in resolving the nuclear problem which eventually affected a change in South Korea’s perception, understanding, and policy on the North Korean regime.

3.1.1. Methodology

The means of analysis in conducting the task is causal inference through process tracing. By framing a historical fact which has more or less been perceived in excessively general or structural, and thus narrow terms, I attempt to identify the specific types of explanations and mechanisms that support my main hypothesis of the Talks’s effect.⁶ The basic framework of

⁶ Matthew Evangelista, “Chapter 6: Explaining the Cold War’s End,” in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed. Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge; New York; Cambridge University Press,

research incorporates testing the validity of my hypothesis by verifying whether the cause affected the outcome, i.e. whether the Talks brought a change in the South's judgement or understanding of the North.

Causal mechanisms are inferred through observable implications that embody information such as personal testimonies or statistical data in order to delineate the connection between the intervening steps from the initial cause to final outcome.⁷ The objective is to make a deductive argument in which 'the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion'.⁸ Alongside such goal, the validation of a causal relationship and the Talks's effect within will strengthen the significance and independent effectiveness of the process of diplomatic negotiations. While Pouliot's argument concentrates on the negotiation process and relevant technical practices of diplomats, his emphasis on the analytical necessity of closely investigating the dynamic processes of negotiations and identifying the key set of explanatory factors through them is applicable to this study on the Six-Party Talks as well.⁹

3.1.2. Defining the evidence

To examine the causality of the Talks, an initial criterion for assessing its effect and comparing

2015), 184.

⁷ Mahoney defines observable implications or Causal-Process Observations (CPOs) as "diagnostic pieces of evidence—usually understood as part of a temporal sequence of events—that have probative value in supporting or overturning conclusions about descriptive and explanatory hypotheses." James Mahoney, "The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences," *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (2012): 571, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124112437709>.

⁸ Mahoney, "The Logic of Process Tracing," 574-86.

⁹ Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10-12.

it with the result after the treatment is necessary. Casting the analytical net as widely as possible, I include to such criterion any piece of information that is germane to a state's conception on a subject: former President Roh's publicized and informal position on North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il and his regime and any other governmental statement, document or testimony of former government officials that represent the ROK's understanding on North Korea prior to, during, and after the Talks. Survey data which were accumulated by multiple institutions during the same time period are also included as evidentiary material of the South's perception towards the North. Press releases are excluded from examination due to the fact that major South Korean newspapers have a strong propensity of being ideologically biased and thus fail to produce an objective representation of the public's opinion on the issue.¹⁰ The dependent variable would be the same criterion ex post, that is, the same indicators of the South Korean government and populace after the Talks had taken place. The research puts additional emphasis on confirming two propositions in proving the validity of the alternative hypothesis on the Talks's effect:

- Proposition 1: There was an informational mechanism present in the Talks that prompted a change in South Korea's perception.

- Proposition 2: The South-North Summit was a representation of the Talks's independent effect on South Korean perception.

In Proposition 1, it is important that the linkage be able to illuminate a contrast between the ROK's position pre-/post-Talks. Two conditions need to be established in order for this to be valid; first, the Talks generated an informational effect; and second, the observable change in

¹⁰ Jae-Hong Kim, "Editorial Tone of Major Korean Newspapers toward the Sunshine Policy during the Kim Dae Joong Government," *Korean Political Science Review* 37, no. 2 (2003): 197-99.

the South's position or sentiment towards the North was triggered by information which was hitherto unknown to the government and specifically acquired through the process of the Talks.

The informational mechanism in this case is crucial in identifying the process of state perception which makes the multilateral setting of the Talks especially important in this sense due to the possible presence of an 'information asymmetry' between the negotiation team on the ground and capital governments. According to Pouliot, this information asymmetry increases the maneuverability of national delegates and hence has the potential of providing new information necessary for the making of policy which would have been otherwise unobtainable had the multilateral setting not been present.¹¹ The paradoxical fact of bilateralism being the key source in building coalitions that facilitate the implementation of state policy during multilateral negotiations increases the complexity of the mechanism.¹²

This was observed in the Talks where the very success or failure of the multilateral setting was dependent on the negotiation results between Washington and Pyongyang. South Korea's role of mediating the two states' positions so as to expedite progress provided the delegate with numerous private small-group or one-on-one meetings in between sessions which most likely disseminated new information that differed from or changed the government's initial position toward the North. Garthoff also assessed that an important aspect of the SALT negotiations between the Soviet and the US was 'the informal probing and exchanges between authorized representatives' which later became 'a principal channel for negotiating many of the most

¹¹ Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*, 131-34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 141.

difficult issues’.¹³

On the other hand, despite the Talks’s primary purpose of clarifying common knowledge and coordinating difference of opinion, misperception and misinterpretation can also be a different form of informational mechanism that affects change in state policies. Grynawiski counterintuitively argues that it is ‘false intersubjective beliefs’ and imagined intersubjectivity that promotes cooperation in international politics. As Grynawiski postulates, “Not knowing that there are broad, philosophical differences in the way that others understand the world can promote cooperation by allowing actors to coordinate their behavior with each other through a process of policy adjustments to meet the demands of the imagined other.”¹⁴ This was in fact frequently displayed throughout the negotiation process of the Six-Party Talks where multiple agreements were drawn out despite the evident fact that party states failed or at times intentionally refused to read the meanings and expectations that other party states incorporated.¹⁵ Both types of informational mechanisms are reviewed in the forthcoming section.

Proposition 2 stands under the condition that the agreements of the Talks caused South Korea to change course and pursue a summit with the North based on a shift in perceptions, both in the leadership and public. The summit, in this case, becomes a strong indicator of the Talks’s independent effect. Another condition necessary for the proposition to hold is evidence that the

¹³ Raymond L Garthoff, “Negotiating with the Russians: Some Lessons from SALT,” *International Security* 1, no. 4 (1977): 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538619>.

¹⁴ A False Intersubjective Belief (FIB) is an erroneous belief that a certain belief is shared. Eric Grynawiski, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation*, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.7591/j.ctt1287f2s>.

¹⁵ Hur, *The Six-Party Talks on North Korea*, 342-43.

summit and the Talks were in fact linked. If evidence is capable of showing that the process and progress witnessed through the Six-Party Talks prompted a change in ROK perception towards the North, and that such change was the foundation upon which the inter-Korean summit's occurrence was based, its probative value in verifying the Talks's effect would increase.

3.1.3. ROK President and public's initial perspective ex ante

The newly elected South Korean government remained at the core of the North Korean nuclear crisis starting from its inauguration in 2003. Amid tensions surrounding the Korean Peninsula, President Roh Moo-Hyun maintained a principle of resolving the nuclear problem through dialogue and strongly opposed any military option. He understood the crisis in political and strategic terms, stressing the fact that North Korea's denuclearization hinged upon regularizing its relationship with the US. His initial perception towards North Korea leader Kim Jong-Il was also aligned with this strategic thought. Although he evinced during an interview soon after his election that Kim was responsible for the North's human rights and food problem, he also perceived North Korea's decision to develop its nuclear program to be based on rational choice in reaction to external threats.¹⁶

The Six-Party Talks was also an assignment that the new President inherited from the previous government. Song Min-Soon, former ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs and also the delegate to the Talks at the time, attests to such fact that "while not having contributed to the formation of the Talks, the Roh government nevertheless had no choice but to proceed with

¹⁶ Chong-sök Yi, *Peace on a Knife's Edge: The Inside Story of Roh Moo-Hyun's North Korea Policy* (Stanford, CA: The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2017), 33; 293.

resolving the security issue through an expanded negotiation table.”¹⁷ Song’s testimony on the government’s preference of bilateralism also provides a counterargument to the assertion that the Talks was one of the many means for the state to project its will of engagement: “Although at times multilateralism is useful in managing the divided Peninsula, a smaller number of participants is favorable in performing the task of overcoming division and changing the status quo.”¹⁸ As such, despite the Talks having been imposed upon the new government, the ROK leadership nevertheless assessed that utilizing the Talks as the main source of diplomacy was realistically the feasible option to put North Korea and the US in the same room with an audience and enforce cooperation in line with the South’s principle of peacefully settling the nuclear problem.

The ROK government’s perception on Pyongyang remained neutral and mostly strategic in the initial phases of the Six-Party Talks. Reacting to the failure of the first round of talks in August, 2003, President Roh expressed his dissatisfaction with the North in a security staff meeting on October by stating that “if this kind of behavior goes on, the North will break down the Talks entirely. Our government needs to make them understand the fact that we will not support their each and every need.”¹⁹ He also criticized the North’s insistence in developing nuclear weapons and made it clear that the South will not unconditionally side with the North every time to a North Korean delegation visiting Seoul in August, 2005 even at a time when progress in the Talks in the form of an agreement was imminent. His strategic positioning in dealing with the North was based on his belief that in order to manage the security situation and

¹⁷ Min-Soon Song, *The Iceberg Moves* (Paju: Changbi, 2016), 91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

¹⁹ Yi, *Peace on a Knife’s Edge*, 269; Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 146.

prevent mistrust between parties from obstructing progress, maintaining a balanced approach throughout the Talks was an utmost necessity.²⁰

Such sentiment of neutrality towards the North at the time of inauguration could also be observed in a 2003 public survey conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) in which 52.5% of respondents perceived North Korea as an entity to support or cooperate with, while 39.7% also regarded it as either an opponent or antagonist.²¹

3.1.4. Examining Proposition 1: Tracing the informational mechanism

The conceptualized role of the South Korean government as it participated in the Six-Party Talks was ‘peace-maker’ in the Korean Peninsula and ‘balancer’ of the larger Northeast Asian region.²² Such role conception was evidently observed throughout the Talks in which the ROK actively assumed the role of mediator mainly between North Korean and the US. In the process of balancing different opinions and positions of its interlocutors, certain types of information were revealed that affected South Korea’s course of action and understanding regarding North Korea and the nuclear problem.

The South’s first acquisition of information took place soon after the first round of Talks failed to produce any meaningful outcome. Despite disappointment in the results, the ROK tried to rekindle negotiations by sending a special envoy to deliver a letter from President Roh to

²⁰ Moo Hyun Roh and Si-min Yu, *Unmyŏng Ida* (Kyŏnggi-do P’aju-si: Tolbegae, 2010), 250.

²¹ “2003 National Unification Poll,” Korea Institute for National Unification, accessed March 11, 2019, <http://www.kinu.or.kr/www/jsp/prg/stats/PollQuestionView.jsp?no=6#n>.

²² Hur, *The Six-Party Talks on North Korea*, 162-66.

Kim Jong-Il in November 2003. The envoy returned with Kim's message that "the best way to solve the nuclear issue is putting a stop to the hostile North Korean policy of the US and establishing a principle of simultaneous action."²³ It was through this clear statement by the North Korean leader that the ROK government was able to acknowledge the long-held conflicting issue that hindered and currently hinders progress in North Korea-US negotiations on denuclearization: the North demands a security assurance and peace treaty before giving up its nuclear weapons while the US maintains that they can be provided only after a complete dismantlement of its nuclear capability. Despite other issues that constituted the Talks's agenda, it was this particular issue that determined progress.

As the ROK government continued to embark on its role as mediator of the two states, it also came to realize that the structural impasse stemming from both states' conflicting issue intensified due to their disparate perspectives regarding one another. As mentioned above, Roh at times partly understood the North's rationale of maintaining its nuclear capability; 'to obtain its own security assurance by fortifying its military basis as a nuclear power'.²⁴ Lankov explains, "North Korean decision-makers are not only remarkably careful but also remarkably ruthless in their political planning. They care only about regime survival above all, treating all other considerations secondary."²⁵ Therefore, from the ROK's perspective, North Korea's actions during the Talks were based on a rational calculation of the history and geopolitical terrain of the Peninsula, contrary to the belief that the actions originated in the North's

²³ Yi, *Peace on a Knife's Edge*, 265-67.

²⁴ Kurata, "A Conceptual Analysis of the Six-Party Talks," 23.

²⁵ Andrei Lankov, "Why Nothing Can Really Be Done about North Korea's Nuclear Program," *Asia Policy* 1, no. 23 (2017): 104-9.

ideological orientation.

In contrast, ROK-US summits in between the Talks allowed the South to realize that the US perspective regarding North Korea was heavily ideological and philosophical. In the November 2004 summit, US President George W. Bush's shared his view on Kim Jong-Il that he could not be trusted because he was a tyrant who starves his own people. Roh responded to the remark by explaining that "negotiations are necessary not with the people you trust but the people you don't trust. It seems that Kim Jong-Il is more afraid of his moral legitimacy being challenged rather than his trustworthiness."²⁶ Despite the original purpose of the Talks which was to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear crisis, US efforts to expand the scope of the Talks to include regime legitimacy such as its human rights situation and hence critically hindering diplomatic progress fell within such ideological disposition. This was made clearer in the summit of 2005 during which Roh said to Bush straightforwardly, "it appears that it is difficult for you to accept Kim philosophically, rather than approaching him from a strategic or tactical perspective."²⁷

As the Talks progressed and the South strenuously tried to narrow the gap or at least mediate a compromise between the two interlocutors' perspectives, it also became aware of the fact that the fundamentally opposing views were also reflected into each state's strategy in dealing with the issue at hand. Song, the chief ROK negotiator for the Talks, assessed that the desired end-state of the US on the North Korean nuclear problem was general and simple; transforming the 'evil' to 'good' and 'wrong' to 'right'. This was derived from both the ideological tendency of

²⁶ Yi, *Peace on a Knife's Edge*, 269.; Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 295.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 220-5.

the US leadership and US action of trying to add additional issues such as the North's uranium enrichment program, missile technology development, money laundering, and human rights issues to the Talks's agenda.²⁸

While the South Korean government was well aware that North Korea would refuse to accept such endeavor, it was through the intensive and extensive negotiation process of the Talks that the South was able to acquire more accurate information on North Korea's strategy and position. Frequent meetings with North Korean delegate Kim Kye-Gwan allowed Song to realize that because the issue was equated to regime survival, the nuclear problem was highly prioritized and perceived by the North as a complex problem to which a simplified resolution was inapplicable. To North Korea, each and every process of the negotiation—not only the content but also the mode of process—mattered and was meticulously calculated, hence requiring a prolonged period in resolving the issue. Witnessing the North's obsession on limiting the scope of nuclear inspection and obtaining a light water reactor, the South was able to clearly assess that North Korea's paranoiac risk-aversion and defensive negotiation strategy were rooted in its will to survive and lack of diplomatic leverage.²⁹

South Korea assessed that bridging these two discrepancies was essential in generating an agreement and concentrated on constructing a conditioned framework that could satisfy both states' needs. Despite the 53-day painstaking process of intense negotiations and pertaining friction among states, South Korea's effort significantly contributed to extracting the September 19 Joint Statement in 2005 from the complication of differing positions. Song's recollection

²⁸ Ibid., 116.

²⁹ Ibid., 117-141.

explicitly reveals that the Joint Statement was possible only after ‘information on all perceptions and bargaining chips of the key players was thoroughly exposed’ owing to the multilateral platform of the Talks.³⁰

While leaving the specific process to future negotiations, the Joint Statement explicitly addressed the conflicting views that the ROK strived to consolidate; North Korea committed to abandon all nuclear programs while preserving the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and the US assured that it has no intention of attacking or invading the North.³¹ An immediate assessment would suggest that the varying perspectives between the US and North Korea were coordinated throughout the negotiation process and that this mutual understanding was the reason cooperation in the form of an agreement was possible to reach.

The disappointing fact, especially to the South Korean government, that this was not the case surfaced through both states’ official interpretation of the Joint Statement shortly after its making. The US delegate Christopher Hill’s reading of the Statement indicated that ‘there was no change in the fundamentals of the US position’ and reiterated its intent to link the normalization of relations with North Korea on not just the denuclearization of its existing nuclear capabilities but other issues like ‘human rights abuses, biological and chemical weapons programs, ballistic missile programs and proliferation, terrorism, and illicit activities’.³²

North Korea’s reaction came two days later, preconditioning further progress and the dismantlement of its nuclear weapons program on the provision of a light water reactor. As

³⁰ Ibid., 187.

³¹ Carlin and Lewis, *Negotiating with North Korea*, 47.

³² “Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill’s Statement at the Closing Plenary of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks September 19, 2005,” available at: www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53499.htm.

Cotton accurately explains, both states were “interpreting the agreement according to their own predilections.”³³ Rozman assesses that the lack of a common understanding was also replete in the discourse of the agreement: “The document is rife with signs of distrust between the two.”³⁴

Simultaneously, South Korea realized through the chain of events ensuing the Joint Statement— from individual readings of the agreement to North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006— that an information asymmetry between the US administration and negotiating team, coupled with a trilateral imagined intersubjectivity among the ROK, US, and North Korea, was significant in inducing an agreement in spite of profoundly different perspectives.

In particular, Seoul’s wishful thinking that North Korea would meet its obligations of allowing international inspections and eventually return to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) was short-lived due to the ‘functionally incompletely theorized’ agreement and disclosure of the North’s actual principles.³⁵ As Grynawski indicated, the assertion that more information may lead to less cooperation seemed to apply in the aftermath of the Joint Statement.³⁶ Having witnessed North Korea’s nuclear test and missile launches soon after the agreement was reached, Seoul’s perception of the North remained relatively neutral and balanced while at times lingering towards a negative perspective as evinced in the ROK President’s comments during the October summit with Japan in 2006 on reconsidering South Korea’s official engagement policy towards

³³ Cotton, “North Korea and the Six-Party Process, 30-32_

³⁴ According to Rozman, “language choices in the Joint Statement revealed how far the two protagonists remained from a roadmap for resolving the crisis. Instead of agreeing to dismantle its nuclear weapons programs, the North accepted the term ‘abandoning’. The fact that the words ‘existing programs’ were added offered some compensation. In turn, the United States rejected language calling on it to ‘normalize’ relations, agreeing only to ‘take steps to normalize’. Gilbert Rozman, *Strategic Thinking about the Korean Nuclear Crisis: Four Parties Caught between North Korea and the United States*, 2nd ed., (New York; Gordonsville; Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 23-24, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230116399>.

³⁵ Grynawski, *Constructive Illusions*, 36-37.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

North Korea in its entirety.³⁷

Public sentiment also maintained its initial perspective of perceiving Pyongyang as both a friend and foe. A KINU Poll in 2005 indicated that despite a slight rise in the positive perspective ratio compared to 2003 (64.9%), 31.1% of the respondents nevertheless maintained a negative view towards North Korea even after the Joint Statement.³⁸ Consecutive polls conducted by the National Unification Advisory Council in 2005 and 2006 also reflect ROK public's support for the government's cautious neutrality in perceiving North Korea.³⁹

Thus far, a tentative conclusion on Proposition 1 is that although it is difficult to clearly determine the presence of an informational mechanism's independent effect that drastically altered South Korea's perception on North Korea during the Talks, it evidently clarified new information on party-states which contributed to ROK's maintenance of its balanced role, preventing it from deviating from its strategic perception on North Korea, and further enhancing such conceptualized role.

3.1.5. Examining Proposition 2: Identifying the Inter-Korean summit as the Talks's effect

The most significant part of the Talks's causal effect on the ROK arrived in the form of a follow-up agreement to the Statement; the February 13 Initial Actions for the Implementation of

³⁷ Yi, *Peace on a Knife's Edge*, 269; Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 507-17.

³⁸ "2005 National Unification Poll," Korea Institute for National Unification, accessed March 11, 2019, <http://www.kinu.or.kr/www/jsp/prg/stats/PollQuestionView.jsp?no=6#n>.

³⁹ In 2005, 55.8% of total respondents perceived North Korea as a friend, 25.4% as a frienemy and 9.1% as an enemy, while in 2006 the ratio was 47.9%, 32.3%, and 8.8%. "2006 National Unification Poll," National Unification Advisory Council, accessed in March 11, 2019, http://www.nuac.go.kr/actions/BbsDataAction?bbs_idx=538243&menuid=G060103&bbs_id=G060103&cmd=view&template=01.

the Joint Statement. Animosity and escalation of tensions in the Peninsula notwithstanding, South Korea managed to retain its position of strategic balance under the consideration that its policy functions as a weather vane to which stakeholders in the Peninsula refer.⁴⁰ This was possible due to the South's experience of assuming the role of mediator during the Talks which allowed it to continuously work to revive the momentum for cooperation amid the fragile state of regional security. Contrary to Grynaviski's assertion, Grzelczyk explains that "regular interactions led to increased knowledge and familiarity with each actor's position," and the negotiation process under the auspices of the Six-Party Talks "led to the drafting of agreements that were reached despite extremely different understandings of situations, roles and seemingly insurmountable crises such as North Korea's nuclear test."⁴¹

The Action Plan was significant because it was the causal linkage that directly triggered a distinct change on Seoul's policy in engaging Pyongyang. The relationship between the Talks and the summit was clearly stated in Roh's 2007 New Year's Speech: "There cannot be any summit without a closure to the Six-Party Talks. But the door will always remain open."⁴² In actuality, the ROK's immediate reaction after the agreement was agreed upon was filled with optimism as evinced in its Presidential Statement that, "we have definitely entered the road to a peaceful resolution to North Korea's nuclear problem."⁴³ The Action Plan provided the ROK leadership with the opportunity to now focus on improving South-North relations through a

⁴⁰ Yi, *Peace on a Knife's Edge*, 301-9.

⁴¹ Virginie Grzelczyk, "Six-Party Talks and Negotiation Strategy: When Do We Get There?," *International Negotiation* 14, no. 1 (2009): 98-111.

⁴² Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 365-69.

⁴³ "Presidential Archives: North Korean Nuclear Problem and the Six-Party Talks," accessed September 12, 2018, http://16cwnd.pa.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=peacekorea2&page=2&category=279&id=a578c1c8059639f1d71de832.

summit. After having been reported the negotiation results, Roh specifically ordered his administration to synchronize the Talks with South-North relations in the upcoming senior-level meetings since ‘progress in the Talks were beneficial to the interest of South-North relations’.⁴⁴ To Roh, the main reason an inter-Korean summit was not held lied in the lack of progress in the Talks.⁴⁵ The series of agreements from the Talks in effect removed such obstacle and allowed the ROK government to actively pursue a summit with the North.

Such change in perspective was also observed among the ROK populace. The 2007 Unification Perception Survey published by the Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies revealed that 78.4% of the total respondents perceived North Korea positively while the negative perspective ratio was significantly reduced to 18.4%.⁴⁶

After a brief delay due to a flood in North Korea, the Inter-Korean Summit was held in October 4 2007, a day after another agreement in the Talks—Second-Phase Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement— was announced. Although the nuclear issue was not an official agenda of the summit, Article 4 of the October 4 Declaration affirmed the implementation of the 2005 Joint Statement and 2007 Action Plan of the Talks to shape the conditions for a peaceful resolution.⁴⁷ This was a successful reflection of the ROK government’s will to link the Talks with the summit and hence facilitate the achievements of the former while grafting them onto inter-Korean relations in spite of North Korea’s reluctance to

⁴⁴ Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 369.

⁴⁵ Roh and Yu, *Unmyŏng Ida*, 262.

⁴⁶ Philo Kim et al., *Unification Perception Survey 2007* (Seoul: Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, 2007), 24-29.

⁴⁷ Youn Hwang and Kim Soo-Min, "The Outcomes and Problems of the Second Inter-Korean Summit Meeting: An Evaluation and Issues of the 10.4 Joint Declaration," *Unification Strategy* 7, no. 3 (2007): 293-327.

codifying the agreement into the Declaration.⁴⁸

The ROK President's understanding of Kim on an individual level was also affected. Contrary to his pre-summit position of an objective assessment on North Korea and Kim Jong-Il, Roh came to perceive Kim as "a conversable person who is capable of being very flexible on detailed issues whereas other members of the regime were quite rigid."⁴⁹ The consolidation of these state/individual-level realizations and statistical data following the summit signifies an evident change in South Korea's state policies and priorities.

3.1.6. ROK's perception ex post

Up to the point leading to the summit, the ROK government's strategic balance between the US and North Korea was fairly well-maintained. While heeding caution to prevent isolating the North, the South's diplomatic efforts in closely cooperating with the US under its long-held military alliance remained the center of its negotiation strategy and foreign policy despite some disagreement in priorities. However, indications of change in this balanced position were made clear in the ROK's post-summit behavior. One example was the ROK government's concentration on the summit's follow-up measures and thus prioritizing relations with the North over the US and framework of the Talks despite internal advice to relay the outcomes and information acquired from the summit to the US through a final summit given the limited time

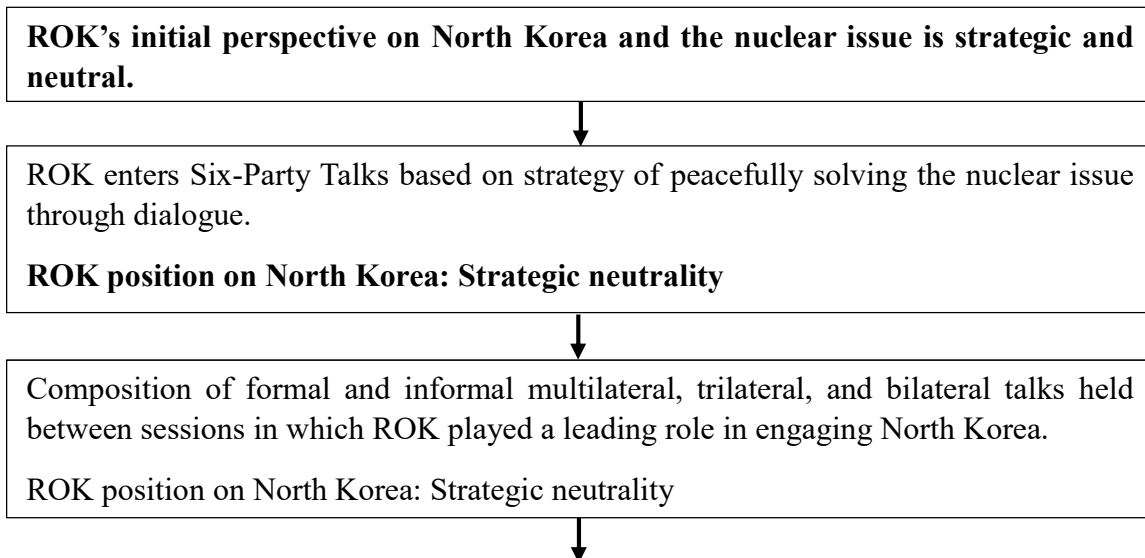
⁴⁸ Sung Bae Kim, "Rebuilding the Inter-Korean Relations: Prospects for an Inter-Korean Summit in the Post-Chonan Incident Era," *Peace Studies* 18, no. 2 (2010): 111-24.

⁴⁹ Roh and Yu, *Unmyŏng Ida*, 253-62.

of Roh's remaining term.⁵⁰

Additional evidence implying this change was the ROK's decision to abstain from the vote for adopting the North Korea Human Rights Resolution in the United Nations. As a result of vigorous discussion within the government, the ROK mission to the UN voted in favor of the North Korea Human Rights Resolution in 2006, the previous year. While it was expected to follow the same course in 2007, inter-departmental opinion to vote for abstain emerged and became prominent after the summit. The biased and somewhat illogical decision of a sovereign state to vote on a resolution which its subject fully rejects constitutes substantive proof that South Korea's hitherto neutrality had been compromised and shifted to a pro-North Korean position.

Overall, the posited sequence of events and process analyzed above can be summarized by the following arrow chart:



⁵⁰ Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 433-7.



Figure 3.1. Process chart of sequence of events

3.2. A Counterfactual Examination of the Six-Party Talks

The counterfactual analysis focuses on determining the plausibility of whether the informational mechanism (Proposition 1) and South-North summit (Proposition 2) that prompted a change in ROK policy and understanding would have still been present in the absence of the Six-Party Talks. The section examines possible scenarios where the observed effect could or could not have occurred in the absence of Talks. The main goal is to determine whether the

informational mechanism and summit which were key intervening variables to a change in the ROK government's standpoint would have taken place without the Talks or through other pathways such as bilateral negotiations instead of a multilateral setting.

3.2.1. Review of Proposition 1

Proposition 1 can be reviewed through the alternative scenario in which there was no means or channel to address the North Korean nuclear crisis in 2002. The mostly likely case would have been for North Korea and the US to pursue bilateral negotiations which is what the former strongly aspired, interspersed with the mediation of the South Korean government. Seemingly, the scenario is plausible and increases the probability of a similar informational mechanism's presence which would affect South Korean decision-making in the same way that it did in the Talks-scenario.

However, this hypothesis can be impugned by the fact that the North declined to consult the South regarding the nuclear issue. North Korea's perception on the issue was clearly defined in a statement announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "The nuclear problem was caused by the US and the only state that is threatening our autonomy and right to live is the US. We oppose any effort to globalize the nuclear problem and will not take part in any kind of multilateral negotiation."⁵¹

The exclusion of the ROK from the main argument would have substantially limited its role as balancer and mediator. The process of acknowledging states' intended takeaways from

⁵¹ Dong-won Lim, *Peacemaker: Twenty Years of Inter-Korean Relations and the North Korean Nuclear Issue* (Stanford: Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2012), 538-44.

negotiations, witnessing and clarifying imagined intersubjectivity, and inducing cooperation among states enhanced the South's strategic neutrality and allowed it to maintain its balanced position throughout the Talks. However, the loss of such role would confine South Korea's diplomatic maneuverability while rendering it completely dependent on the progress of US-North Korea cooperation and thus weaken the informational process's influence which was necessary for the ROK to retain its strategic perception. This limited role prompted by the absence of the Six-Party Talks, in effect, would have easily led the ROK to choose an exclusive path of either engaging North Korea or further enhancing policy coordination with the US, the former being the most likely scenario given the Roh government's internalized proclivity of leaning towards engagement.

The multilateral framework also provided frequent trilateral meetings which were crucial in facilitating information sharing and clarifying common knowledge. The internal information obtained through informal meetups between sessions enabled the ROK government to acknowledge the importance of maintaining its neutral position and it was this belief that prevented the South from reverting to a more pro-North stance. For instance, Hill's confession following a trilateral meetup with the two Koreas six weeks before the emergence of the Joint Statement that it was the first time the US could clearly understand North Korea's specific aspirations further convinced the ROK government to uphold its strategic neutrality.⁵²

3.2.2. Review of Proposition 2

The probability of an inter-Korean summit is also low in the counterfactual situation. In his

⁵² Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 135-41.

memoir, Roh explains that “the main reason a summit was impossible to pursue lied in the lagging progress in the Six-Party Talks.”⁵³ ‘Progress in the Talks’ implied a successful resolution to North Korea’s nuclear problem and it was this linkage on which a summit was predicated; there could be no summit without any substantive development on the nuclear issue and such development would have been nonexistent in the absence of the Talks.

Roh’s skepticism on holding a summit with the North was also expressed in his public remarks. In a press conference after the ROK-UK summit in 2004, he openly commented that a South-North summit was unlikely to occur during the Talks. He also anticipated that North Korea’s conception of the Talks as a means to pursue bilateral negotiations with the US would force it to decline any proposal for a summit and referred the Talks as the only available means to resolve the nuclear issue.⁵⁴

The counterfactual scenario then leads us back to the series of bilateral negotiations among states. Postulating the absence of the Talks, bilateral progress between North Korea and the US on the nuclear issue could be tantamount to actual progress represented by the Talks’s agreement which would possibly shape the conditions for a South-North summit. However, this was unlikely since the function of the Talks was critical in realizing actual progress in negotiations. The greatest weakness in bilateralism is that it is more vulnerable to breaking down by one state’s withdrawal from dialogue. This was the ROK’s precise assessment on US-North Korea relations during the prelude leading to the Talks’s initiation.⁵⁵ The grossly contrasting perspectives and subsequent conflict between the two states contained little potential for

⁵³ Roh and Yu, *Unmyǒng Ida*, 262.

⁵⁴ “Presidential Archives.”

⁵⁵ Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 258.

producing a groundbreaking agreement such as the Joint Statement or the Action Plan.

Therefore, it can be concluded that progress in the nuclear negotiations which was a precondition for a summit was unlikely in the counterfactual case of the Talks's absence. This, in effect, significantly neutralizes the identifiability of a change in the ROK's position and thus makes it difficult to infer the Talks's independent effect.

The counterfactual scenario can be surmised by the following arrow chart:

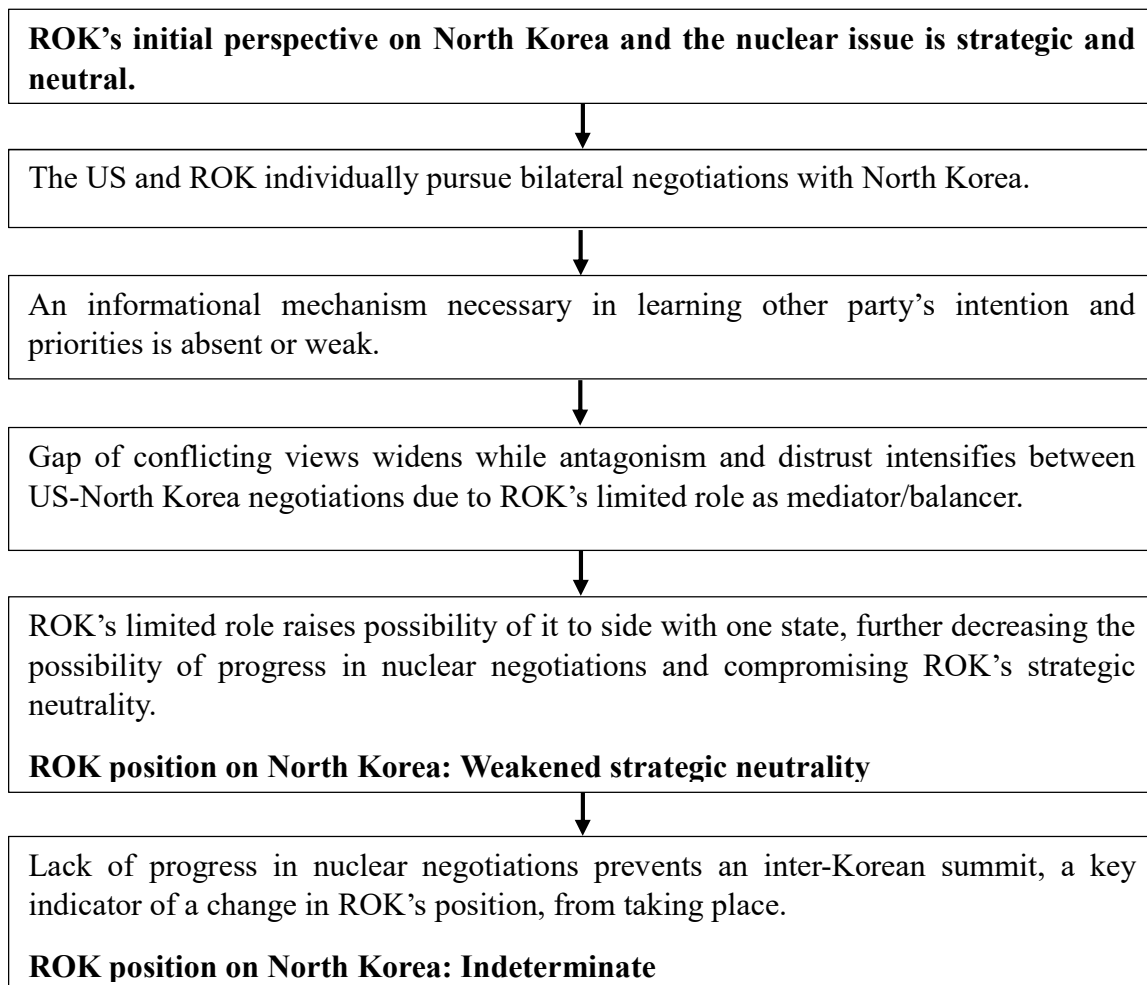


Figure 3.2. Process chart of counterfactual scenario

4. Examining Alternative Explanations and Equifinality

4.1. Alternative 1: Political Propensity Theory

In the final chapter, I review the issue of equifinality by examining alternative explanations with different paths and factors that may have affected ROK's change after the Talks. First, I address the political propensity theory which claims that the ROK government's political disposition is the main causal factor that prompted the leadership's ex post actions. The theory goes so far as to disregard any change in the ROK's perception towards North Korea notwithstanding the whole process of the Six-Party Talks. The main argument is that the outcome would have occurred even in the absence of the Talks and the causal variable is the ROK government's political tendency rather than the Talks, denying its independent effect; the Talks were a medium through which a state leader's belief was projected.

Hur supports such theory by asserting that the Roh government in reality embarked on pursuing an inter-Korean summit and "did not want progress in denuclearization of the North to be a precondition for its engagement policy toward Pyongyang."⁵⁶ The likely scenario under such hypothesis would be the South's consistent position of engaging and appeasing North Korea, undergoing the Talks as an intermediate process and in the end resulting in an inter-Korean summit. The theory particularly accentuates the state leader's belief system as the 'ultimate source of influence' and the causal factor of the whole process leading to the summit; Roh's political belief is the independent variable, not the Talks.⁵⁷

This, however, is directly contradicted by the evidence presented in the previous chapter.

⁵⁶ Hur, *The Six-Party Talks on North Korea*, 169.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 320-9.

Roh's public and private convictions conform to the specific connection between progress in denuclearization and relations with the North in the sense that the latter cannot be advanced while the former stagnates. The Talks provided a valuable venue through which the South conceptualized its role, acquired new information and development in negotiations was achieved in the form of official agreements. To simplify, engaging the North and holding a summit would have not been possible without significant process in denuclearization and the likelihood of such progress being observed would have been low had the Talks not occurred.

Evidence also points to the possibility of the experience in the Talks, coupled with North Korea's obstinacy of continuing to develop its nuclear/missile capability, prompted the South to adhere to a more conservative perspective on Pyongyang. This was the situation of 2006 where tensions surrounding the Peninsula escalated. Expressing the ROK's frustration in having to tolerate Pyongyang's brinkmanship, Song conveyed Roh's will to execute heavier sanctions on North Korea if final efforts for dialogue were to fail in a private discussion with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.⁵⁸ Although a military option would not have been implied in such remark, the evidence reveals that Seoul's patience in dealing with the North was withering as time progressed, pushing it closer to the US position. Hence, it is erroneous to assume that the summit's foundation originated from a constant pro-North perspective of the South if one were to consider the Six-Party Talks's effect on the ROK's retention of strategic balance and diplomatic progress which specifically caused the ROK to pursue a summit.

4.2. Alternative 2: Geopolitical Theory

⁵⁸ Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 268-72.

The other theory for review is the geopolitical explanation. This theory contends that the power dynamics of the Peninsula, mainly the influence of regional powers' foreign policies, determined the course of negotiations which affected the actions and perception of the ROK government. The theory particularly cites the position of the US as the decisive factor that shaped the diplomatic process on North Korea's denuclearization. According to this logic, each variable and linkage of the aforementioned process of the informational mechanism and summit was a representation of the United States' intention; the Six-Party Talks meetings were held, agreements were reached, and the inter-Korean summit was possible due to the US' willingness.

One of the observable implications cited by the theory is the informal meetups between US and North Korea which were understood as the cornerstones for the advent of the Action Plan. Carlin and Lewis specify that the Berlin meeting in January 2007 between the two states helped to clarify and coordinate the disparate viewpoints, laying the foundation for the agreement the following month.⁵⁹ The theory also assumes that the level of progress of the negotiation process was contingent on the US position; if the US remained hard-line, the Talks advanced; if it softened, the Talks progressed. In this case, the Talks is epiphenomenal in that it was merely one of many means which the US utilized to reach an agreement with the North regardless of its presence.

However, the geopolitical theory's emphasis on the causal influence of the US is invalidated by a close examination of the process which led to agreements. The prelude to the Action Plan in 2007, for instance, indicates that the US position during the Berlin meetup was far from being cooperative. Although the meeting was possible because US changed its original position from

⁵⁹ Carlin and Lewis, *Negotiating with North Korea*, 10-21.

refusing to hold bilateral dialogue with the North, Hill nevertheless reiterated its principled position on lifting its sanction on Banco Delta Asia—Pyongyang’s precondition to resuming the Talks— by stating that, “all problems can be solved if there is progress in North Korea’s denuclearization. However, the administration will still maintain the bridle in certain areas.” During a phone call with Song after the Berlin meeting, Rice also conceded that ‘the domestic situation in the US prevented it from taking initiative for diplomacy’.⁶⁰ Such evidence is significant to disprove the theory’s assumption that negotiations and agreements were based on “the warming of relations between Washington and Pyongyang.”⁶¹

In the case of the Joint Statement in 2005, it becomes even more difficult to posit the theory’s hypothesis since the Statement passed despite the Bush administration’s hawkish and conservative stance toward North Korea and the statement’s content. US’ constant objection to include any content relevant to the provision of a light water reactor to North Korea and acknowledging its right to use nuclear energy even for peaceful purposes in the Statement, along with its closing remarks which enumerated the preconditions necessary for actual progress, disproves the assertion that any agreement on which the US disagrees could not have been generated.

Due to an indeterminate causal mechanism and evidence that directly contradicts the validity of the geopolitical theory’s independent variable, the US’ determination hardly even constitutes a necessary condition for progress in the Talks to have been possible and can be excluded as a candidate variable with an independent effect. In addition, because the contradictory evidence

⁶⁰ Song, *The Iceberg Moves*, 350-60.

⁶¹ Hur, *The Six-Party Talks on North Korea*, 130-43.

proves that it was hardly the willingness of the US that brought about development in the Talks, it becomes even more difficult to infer any connection or linkage with South Korea's perception and behavior toward the North. To sum up, the informational mechanism and progress in the Talks necessary for the ROK to have changed its North Korea policy and perception were acquired separate from US' volition.

5. Conclusion

The likely scenario of the absence of Talks can perhaps be inferred from the ongoing diplomatic process of bilateral summits among the three protagonists in the Korean Peninsula. Despite pairs of multiple meetings and summits with both the US and North Korea, the radically pro-North Korean sentiment of the current ROK government under President Moon Jae-In has intensified while a counterweight strategy to offset such imbalance in approach is nonexistent.

The structure of current efforts to address North Korea's nuclear problem can be characterized as parallel and cacophonous on both issue and state relations; conflicting perspectives between the US and North Korea on the specific process of denuclearization is hindering progress, disharmonious policy coordination between the US and South Korea leaves fundamental disagreement unresolved, all the while South-North relations have rapidly improved. The current perception of the ROK government is far from being strategic or neutral and has been consistently lopsided toward engaging the North throughout the whole series of bilateral summits and meetings. The research tried to infer that this would also have been a possible situation that the Roh government would have gone through due to the fact that its internalized proclivity also leaned more toward engagement in the absence of the Six-Party Talks.

Relating to this, both process tracing and counterfactual analysis on the Talks were able to illuminate multilateral diplomacy's effect on state perception. While the Roh government's initial genuine belief system during its candidacy was pro-engagement, the process of the Talks enabled it to assume and maintain a strategic role as a balanced mediator. Information on the priorities and perspectives of states, especially those of Pyongyang and Washington, was significant in deterring Seoul from adhering to a preponderant perspective. The negotiations of the Talks

strengthened South Korea's strategic neutrality as time progressed, allowing it to contribute to producing agreements.

The second effect of the Talks pushed the ROK in the other direction of initiating improvement in North Korean relations. The main achievements of the Talks lifted Seoul's precondition—progress in Pyongyang's denuclearization—upon which a pursuit for an inter-Korean summit was dependent. The key implication in this part of the process was that the summit was indicative of a change in ROK's position from neutral to engagement. The decision-making process of Seoul's policy to vote abstain on the UN Resolution for North Korea Human Rights also confirms this change in perception and priority.

As such, it can be concluded that the Six-Party Talks was in fact a causal factor that affected a change in South Korea's perception on North Korea. Seoul's balanced perception on Pyongyang would have been difficult to obtain without the Talks's multilateral structure through which it acquired information on states' views and assumed the role of an objective mediator based on this information, while a summit with Pyongyang was specifically possible as an effect of the Talks's progress.

Up until the beginning of the year, progress in North Korea's denuclearization has constantly remained in a standstill, if not worsened. However, the North's peace offensive in the beginning of the previous year has now snowballed into a frantic development of diplomacy in Northeast Asia which is still in progress. This is a decisive moment for the regional security in Northeast Asia as the results of the summit diplomacy remain to be determined albeit discordant perspectives persisting. The complexity of the Peninsula's security problem has demanded a complicated solution. Fortunately, the Six-Party Talks have accumulated information and

progress in this respect, including the independent effect analyzed in this research. Thus, taking into consideration its beneficial effects, it may be worthwhile to contemplate continuing the ongoing negotiations under the framework of the Six-Party Talks.

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