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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI SCHOLARS EXPRESS CONCERN OVER DELAY IN SIX-PARTY

TALKS

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Beede, Political/Economic Chief, U.S.

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

썩 1. (S/NF) Summary: xxxxx are concerned about the current impasse in the Six-Party Talks, but each varies in his diagnosis of its causes and prescriptions for U.S. policy. xxxxx claims that a debate has emerged within the Chinese leadership over the merits of quick U.S. delisting, as a result of Pyongyang's allegedly incomplete nuclear declaration. These xxxxx agree that, for the moment, none of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's three sons is likely to be tapped to succeed him. xxxxx, North Korea in August questions the World Food Program's (WFP) forecast of an imminent famine there. END SUMMARY.

썩 2. (U) xxxxx Korean politics and the ongoing Six-Party Talks. xxxxx.

Deadlock over verification

썩 3. (C) xxxxx are concerned about the current

impasse in the Six-Party Talks, but each varies in his diagnosis

of its causes and prescriptions for U.S. policy. xxxxx

view, Washington is primarily responsible for North Korean foot-dragging. Under the "action for action" framework, xxxxx argues, the United States promised to remove North Korea from the State Sponsors of Terror list and Trading with the Enemy Act

(TWEA) restrictions in return for a complete nuclear declaration

from Pyongyang. After forty days, it became legally possible for

Washington to delist the North Koreans in August, but this did not occur. xxxxx continues, the United States seems to want international inspectors to be able to access North Korea's nuclear sites virtually "at whim," and to meet with its nuclear

scientists. These conditions have given Pyongyang "an excuse for

their present inaction." xxxxx North Korea is "truly disappointed" with this development -- its leaders believe "they

did something" and are owed something in return -- and, xxxxx opinion, it is "difficult for the other Six-Party states to blame them."

썩 4. (S/NF) xxxxx, on the other hand, dissents from this view.

According xxxxx, the nuclear declaration North Korea submitted in May was incomplete. xxxxx claims that critical information about secret underwater nuclear facilities located on North Korea's coast. For this reason, a debate has emerged within the

Chinese leadership over the merits of quick U.S. delisting, xxxxx

continues. One camp believes that continued momentum in the

Six-Party Talks is critical to their success, and has concluded

that Washington must adopt a more flexible attitude. The other camp, however, has taken the incomplete nuclear declaration as evidence that the regime in Pyongyang is truly "a ticking time bomb," and regard Washington's tough stance on verification as a

potential opportunity to finally deal with a persistent regional

irritant. xxxxx does not believe the United States should delist

North Korea yet, though he argues Washington needs to find some

token action it can take now to demonstrate its good faith.

썩 5. (C) xxxxx is confident that, if the United States

removes North Korea from the State Sponsors of Terror list and the TWEA -- even absent progress on a verification protocol -- its negotiators will act quickly to reciprocate and permit some

form of verification. That North Korea has been labeled a state

sponsor of terror is "an ongoing source of embarrassment" for the regime, xxxxx argues, and Washington must not underestimate

its "desire for face." xxxxx agree that, despite North

Korea's recent moves to apparently renew its activities at the Yongbyon nuclear complex, including its removal of International

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) seals on equipment, Pyongyang's threats are largely for show. As part of the Six-Party process,

the regime has already taken significant steps toward nuclear disablement, xxxxx out, so North Korean leaders cannot

actually accomplish very much in the short term.

Kim jong-il's health

썩 6. (C) Regarding Kim Jong-il's (KJI) purported ill health, xxxxx

admit they have been unable to divine what has actually happened, noting such information is "top secret" even to North

Koreans. xxxxx claims that KJI has a long history of recreational

drug use that has resulted in frequent bouts of epilepsy and contributed to his poor health overall. xxxxx recalls

hearing an unconfirmed report that, in the last several weeks, a

team of five Chinese physicians traveled to Pyongyang, perhaps to tend to KJI. xxxxx cautions against reading too much into what

he considers "pure speculation." Even if KJI suffered some medical emergency, illness "does not necessarily mean he is dying or has lost political control, or that regime collapse is

somehow imminent."

썩 7. (C) At the present time, xxxxx considers it "likelier than not"

KJI remains in charge and is making political decisions. xxxxx is

less certain, quoting reports that long time consort and former

secretary Kim Ok may be caring for Kim and overseeing policy on

his behalf. KJI puts a lot of confidence in Kim Ok, notes xxxxx,

recalling that she was a member of the North Korean delegation led by General Jo Myong-rok that visited the Clinton White House

in October 2000.

Contenders for future leadership

썩 8. (C) There is consensus among xxxxx that, at least for the moment, none of KJI's three sons is likely to be tapped

to succeed him. xxxxx considers the two youngest sons, Kim Jong-chol and Kim Jong-un, far too inexperienced and incapable of effective governance. xxxxx, observing that KJI's oldest son, Kim Jong-nam, is "too much of a playboy," Kim Jong-chol is "more interested in video games" than governing, and Kim Jong-un is simply too young. Additionally, KJI had been

groomed for many years to replace his father and former North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung before the latter passed away. In contrast, xxxxx, none of the sons has received similar preparatory treatment.

썩 9. (C) The most likely scenario for succession, xxxxx, is a group of North Korean military leaders, including civilians

with close military connections, taking the helm from KJI. xxxxx

also believes the military is probably best situated to run the

country, at the present time. Still, if KJI remains in charge

for another five or ten years, Beijing might then prefer to see

Kim Jong-nam -- who is more of a known quantity than an ad hoc lineup of civil-military elements -- rise to power, xxxxx.

썩 10. (S) xxxxx that Kim Yong-nam (KYN) -- the president of North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly and second in command --

seems the likeliest candidate to lead a new regime. In recent months, KYN has received foreign leaders and represented North Korea at many of the same events KJI would normally attend. xxxxx

also reports that a younger brother of KYN's currently heads the

Propaganda Department -- a position once held by KJI during his

ascent to power -- while another relative runs North Korea's intelligence outfit. KYN is over 80 years old, xxxxx, so even a caretaker leadership role that fell to him would be short

lived. xxxxx, it is interesting that KYN's family is seeded in the same "power positions" long considered important by the current ruling Kim family.

Perils and promise of external exposure

썩 11. (C) xxxxx that North Korea is struggling to resolve the contradiction between its need for international engagement and

desire to maintain ideological purity. Objectively speaking, exposure to the outside world -- its ways of thinking and quality of life -- is necessary to the regime's survival, xxxxx

points out. From Pyongyang's perspective, someone who has seen

the world as KJI's sons have might best be equipped to undertake

reform in North Korea "on his own terms." At the same time, the

regime has traditionally feared external influence, valued ideological purity, and prized ongoing closeness to the regime in its prospective cadres. As a result, xxxxx, those who

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have traveled internationally are often marginalized within the

insular North Korean leadership or ousted altogether. In this

respect, xxxxx, the regime actually resembles China

during its ideological heyday. It is "no coincidence" that Zhou

Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, who both had over **sea** experience, were

later the victims of purges at home, xxxxx.

A glimpse beyond the yalu

썩 12. (C) xxxxx extremely poor quality of the main road into Rajin, despite

its role as the key route into that city, one of North Korea's special economic zones (SEZ) during the 1990s (the Rajin-Sonbong

SEZ) that is also equipped with a harbor. xxxxx recalls watching a

television news program commemorating a North Korean military holiday that coincided with his stay, and found it strange that

only "still photo footage" aired of KJI reportedly visiting a

military unit that day.

썩 13. (C) xxxxx not have the opportunity to engage ordinary North Korean citizens -- he spoke "only with his minders" -- but remembers observing many people walking on the streets, riding bicycles, and generally appearing healthy and happy. xxxxx recognizes that xxxxx took him only to a small corner of North Korea, he claims he saw "no signs of starvation" during this time. xxxxx skeptical of the World Food Program's (WFP) recent assessment that North Korea may soon be hit by a harsh famine, perhaps its worst since 1997. xxxxx, argues that whatever happens regarding the food situation, a famine will certainly not threaten the regime's political stability, asserting that North Koreans will sooner "die quietly" of starvation than defy Pyongyang.

Comment

썩 14. (C) Although difficult to verify xxxxx, our discussions suggest a variety of Chinese opinions regarding how best to approach