

Merkel Suggests Germany Should Join North Korea Talks

BRUSSELS — In what the Germans themselves are calling a “sleep campaign,” Chancellor Angela Merkel, seeking a fourth term in office in elections on Sept. 24, has moved to highlight her international status by calling for a new round of negotiations with North Korea — including Germany.

Already hailed by some in the era of President Trump as the main defender of the West and its values, Ms. Merkel has stepped forward to suggest a diplomatic alternative to the aggressive language being exchanged between Washington and North Korea.

As ever, she made her point by responding to a question. “If we were asked to join talks, I would say yes immediately,” Ms. Merkel said in an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* published on Sunday.

She made a parallel to the multilateral talks with Iran over its nuclear program. Those talks were begun by the Europeans and later expanded to include the permanent five member states of the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany, and chaired by the European Union’s foreign policy chief.

In the end, the Iran talks became predominantly a negotiation between the United States and Iran. But they were supported and confirmed by the others, which gave Washington cover for sensitive talks with Tehran.

Ms. Merkel called that negotiation period “a long but important time of diplomacy” that ultimately had a “good end” last year, referring to when the deal was put in place.

“I could imagine such a format being used to end the North Korea conflict,” she said. “Europe and especially Germany should be prepared to play a very active part in that.”

President Trump has called the Iran deal “the worst deal ever,” and during the presidential campaign he said his “number one priority” if elected would be “to dismantle the disastrous deal.”

In office, Mr. Trump has talked about not recertifying Iran's compliance. But the other signatories, like Ms. Merkel, regard the deal as a breakthrough, halting Iranian progress toward a nuclear weapon for at least a decade.

Many experts think the Iran parallel is a false one, in any case, since "Iran had a nuclear program but always pretended it was not for military use and didn't have a bomb, while North Korea already has the bomb," said Volker Perthes, the director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin and an expert on Iran.

The real comparison, he said in an interview, is Germany's willingness to push for and take part in a new multilateral negotiating format with North Korea in contrast to military threats and bluster. "It's about multilateralism, nonproliferation and international participation," Mr. Perthes said.

Ms. Merkel said she believed that the only way to deal with North Korea's nuclear program effectively is to come to a diplomatic solution, adding, "A new arms race starting in the region would not be in anyone's interests."

North Korea has always said that its nuclear weapons program is not negotiable.

Europe should stand united in trying to bring about a diplomatic solution and "do everything that can be done in terms of sanctions," Ms. Merkel said.

She has already spoken about North Korea to leaders including President Xi Jinping of China and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, and is also expected to talk to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

In general, Europe has little economic leverage with North Korea, which is isolated and highly dependent on one country, China, for its economic life. But China, like the United States, may find it easier to deal with North Korea in a diplomatic context involving other countries as well.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/world/europe/germany-merkel-north-korea-talks.html>

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