



# THE ASPEN INSTITUTE CONGRESSIONAL PROGRAM

## Finding a Diplomatic Solution to the North Korean Crisis

March 2-4, 2018  
Stanford, California



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# Finding a Diplomatic Solution to the North Korean Crisis

## Rapporteur's Summary

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*The views expressed here are not the author's, rather the rapporteur's effort to reflect the discussion.*

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### Introduction

Under the auspices of the Aspen Institute Congressional Program, a bipartisan group of thirteen members of Congress convened from March 2 to March 5, 2018, at Stanford University to discuss policy options regarding the current North Korea crisis. The members of Congress deliberated with scholars and practitioners to acquire a better understanding of North Korea and its ruling regime and regional actors, assess the range of potential solutions to the crisis, and determine the role of Congress on this issue.

The participants were mindful that the state of affairs on the Korean Peninsula remains fraught. The U.S. has continued its “maximum pressure” campaign against North Korea in an effort to isolate the country and force it to adjust its strategic calculus in favor of denuclearization. Despite this pressure campaign, North Korea has continued its determined effort to develop its nuclear and missile programs, conducting its sixth nuclear test and first ICBM tests in 2017. American officials have cautioned that time is running out, explaining that diplomacy is preferred but military options remain on the table.

Following North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's surprise overture to South Korea in his 2018 New Year's Address, South and North Korea undertook diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions during the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Subsequently, South Korea dispatched special envoys to meet with Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang, North Korea. Aspen meeting participants discussed whether the inter-Korean dialogue had provided a window of opportunity for the U.S. to successfully engage with North Korea. [On March 8<sup>th</sup>, three days after this meeting, President Trump provided his own answer to that question when he accepted Kim Jong-un's proposal to meet.] Kim Jong-un reportedly conveyed to South Korean envoys a willingness to discuss denuclearization in a dialogue with the U.S. and agreed to a moratorium on nuclear and missile testing for the duration of talks. As the U.S. and North Korea prepare for a possible Trump-Kim summit by the end of May, thoughts and reflections from the Aspen meeting contained herein may help to inform U.S. policy as it tackles these new developments.

### Understanding North Korea under the Kim Jong-un Regime

Throughout the meeting, members of Congress expressed great interest in learning more about

the notoriously closed society of North Korea. The conversation often returned to questions about Kim Jong-un's personality, the political objectives of his regime, and the nature of daily life in North Korea.

Participants stressed that we know very little about what Kim Jong-un actually wants, how he thinks, and how he would react in various scenarios. Judgments about him and his goals are based on speculation. A number of participants suggested, however, that it is relatively safe to assume that Kim Jong-un is a rational actor. At the same time, he may be locked in a poor information environment and surrounded by "yes-men", which could impair his decision-making process.

Participants discussed a "theory of dictatorship" as a lens through which to understand Kim Jong-un. One participant posited that if Kim Jong-un is like other dictators, he is not crazy but in fact intelligent, capable, and bold. Furthermore, it is likely that eventually he will overreach externally, sparking a conflict. Another participant pushed back against this theory, arguing that while dictators are horrible to their own people, they don't always spark external conflagrations. This participant did not think that war with North Korea would be inevitable, but expressed concerns that the theory of dictatorship made war falsely appear unavoidable.

Some participants underscored the relevance of Kim Jong-un's parallel development of nuclear weapons and the economy as stemming from a deep tradition in East Asia of "creating riches along with a strong military." For the first five years of his rule, Kim Jong-un focused on the first track of nuclear development. But unlike his father and grandfather, he also faces pressure to perform on the economic front. His announcement about "completing the state nuclear force" may have given him the political room to shift resources to the economy. To improve the economy, North Korea will need better relationships with the U.S., South Korea, and China. Kim Jong-un faces a dilemma where the nuclear track poses the biggest obstacle in the way of sustained economic development

because it diverts and consumes scarce resources. One participant concluded that North Korea would not be able to pursue both tracks simultaneously and would continue to jump back and forth between the two.

The discussion also touched on the current state of the North Korean economy. Participants explained how it was decimated by the Korean War, rebuilt with the help of the Soviet Union, and suffered in the 1990s following a reduction in foreign economic aid. North Korea endured a famine in the 1990s, which gave rise to small scale working units engaging in entrepreneurial behavior to procure food. The limited marketization of some elements of the North Korean economy has not been a top-down process, though Kim Jong-un has relaxed certain policies to allow for some market activity. In recent years, the economy has generated greater inequality and the general population continues to suffer from a chronic lack of food. The North Korean people are in survival mode, but hope that the limited economic reforms will provide some opportunity.

### **North Korea's Nuclear Capabilities**

Participants reviewed the present state of North Korea's nuclear capabilities given its significant advancements in 2017. According to one participant, North Korea has demonstrated the capability to produce fissile material in the form of plutonium and highly enriched uranium, the ability to weaponize this material through its six nuclear tests, and in 2017 demonstrated the rocket technology necessary to reach any part of the United States.

One participant concluded that North Korea could reach Japan and South Korea with nuclear-tipped short and medium range missiles, but remains unable to reliably target the U.S. If it wants to attain that capability, North Korea must do more tests, "perhaps five or six missile tests as well as another nuclear test or two," over the next two years. Another participant pointed out that the most pertinent question is whether the U.S. can be guaranteed that if North Korea launched a nuclear-tipped ICBM, that it would not reach and destroy a target on the U.S.

mainland. If that guarantee is not certain, then it should be recognized that North Korea has a credible deterrent. Another participant stressed that North Korea's short-range missiles are already sufficient to deter the U.S. because they can inflict unacceptable damage on U.S. allies and assets in the region.

Discussants also devoted attention to discrepancies in estimates of North Korea's nuclear capabilities. Participants pointed out that the U.S. intelligence community has assessed that North Korea is months, not years, away from being able to field a nuclear-tipped ICBM. Moreover, Kim Jong-un claims that he already has a nuclear ICBM capability. Some participants issued a reminder that U.S. intelligence community assessments about North Korea have been wrong in the past and could be wrong now, though another participant felt that the intelligence community had recently been in the business of overestimating North Korea. It was also suggested that Kim Jong-un may be making this claim for deterrence purposes and his own internal propaganda, as he has to look strong and successful to his own military.

Responding to congressional concerns about a potential Electro-Magnetic Pulse attack (an EMP is an atmospheric nuclear explosion that could ostensibly disrupt and damage electronic devices on a wide scale), one participant explained that a few years ago, claims that North Korea could launch a devastating EMP attack were "nonsense." But now, from a capabilities standpoint, such an attack may be possible although it is not a high level concern.

### **North Korea's Nuclear Intentions**

The discussion occasionally highlighted disagreements about North Korea's nuclear intentions. Participants voiced differing views about the potential defensive and offensive aspects of North Korea's nuclear pursuit.

Participants understood that North Korea is locked in what it perceives as a hostile environment and widely agreed that the fundamental reason for North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons is to preserve the

security of the regime through deterrence. The weapons are an economical way for it to offset the asymmetry between its own forces and U.S.-South Korea conventional forces on the peninsula. In addition, some participants noted that nuclear weapons provide North Korea with prestige and status on the international stage, and also provide domestic legitimacy for the regime. The state can explain the deprivation of its people by pointing to the resources that it must devote to the nuclear program.

Disagreements arose when the topic moved to the potential offensive aspects of the nuclear program. Some participants underscored that North Korea could utilize its nuclear weapons for "coercion and blackmail" to facilitate the decoupling of the U.S.-South Korea alliance and the eventual reunification of the Korean peninsula on North Korea's terms. Others pushed back against this theory, noting that Kim Jong-un must realize that such revisionist goals are unrealistic. But, as some participants noted, all nuclear weapons states use their capabilities to pursue their interests, and it is not implausible that Kim Jong-un would engage in increasingly coercive measures once he attains the requisite capabilities.

Ultimately, participants generally agreed that there is no hard evidence in favor of any particular theory about Kim Jong-un's nuclear intentions. He may become more aggressive, but he may also ramp down provocations if he feels more secure. Even if Kim Jong-un has serious revisionist intentions, one participant found that North Korea would not be able to force the concessions that it wanted simply because it possessed nuclear-tipped ICBMs.

### **Status of Sanctions**

Participants discussed the efficacy of sanctions and understood that the current sanctions regime is unlikely to compel North Korea to denuclearize any time soon. One participant explained that there are reasonably tough sanctions on paper, but that enforcement remains a problem. The international community has had some success interdicting certain activities, but

North Korea has been able to procure cash through other avenues, such as cybercrime.

Participants were interested in whether sanctions have had a noticeable effect on the North Korean economy. One participant explained that the black market exchange rate for North Korea's currency and the price of rice remain flat, whereas conventional economic theory holds that if the economy was in distress, values would be expected to rise. There is simply not much evidence that the sanctions are having a big impact. Some argued that additional sanctions could continue to increase the pressure on North Korea's economy, though others expressed concern that the pressure campaign may have peaked because enforcement is already difficult and China and Russia remain relatively unwilling partners.

### **Policy Options for Engagement and Pressure**

From the outset of the meeting, participants considered to what extent the U.S. should utilize various engagement and pressure policies to address the present crisis. The conversation addressed policy objectives and strategies for both the short and the long term, including the need to consider deterrence and containment policies in the event that denuclearization of North Korea proves unattainable.

There was general agreement that denuclearization of North Korea is an unlikely outcome.

Although complete, verifiable, and irreversible disarmament remains the objective of the U.S. government, some participants concluded that the U.S. would need to learn to live with the status quo of North Korea as a nuclear power. Some participants explained that North Korea eventually wants to be accepted into the nuclear club and join negotiations as an equal to the U.S. to discuss arms control, not denuclearization.

In contrast, many participants stressed that the U.S. must find ways to do deal with North Korea without accepting it as a nuclear weapons state. One participant suggested that the only viable way to get North Korea to denuclearize would be to first get back to the negotiating table with

Russia and pull other countries, including North Korea, into a multilateral disarmament dialogue.

Some participants expressed a preference for immediate talks with North Korea to take steps to avoid miscalculation and lower the risk of war, and recommended building on the window of opportunity provided by the new inter-Korean dialogue. These participants argued that the immediate goal of U.S. policy should be to reduce the risk of accidents or miscalculations that may lead to war. These risk reduction talks could establish security protocols and hotlines to avoid conflict. Such talks could also address North Korea's command and control of its nuclear weapons, as the U.S. does not know if Kim Jong-un "practices the art of nuclear surety" in the same way as other nuclear powers. In addition to risk reduction talks, the U.S. could also seek an immediate freeze of North Korea's nuclear activity with verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency. One participant noted that North Korea had made demonstrably less progress on its nuclear program when international monitoring was in place.

Others supported the goal of the current U.S. pressure campaign, which is to compel the regime to change its strategic calculus in favor of denuclearization. A number of participants supported the continued application of pressure by the U.S., preferably with international backing but unilaterally if necessary. One participant noted that this pressure could change the incentive structure of the current regime to favor denuclearization or lead to new leadership in Pyongyang that supports denuclearization. But even if this outcome is unlikely, sanctions remain important for symbolic reasons, demonstrating support for regional allies and global nonproliferation principles.

One member of Congress voiced support for President Trump's approach to North Korea, including his sometimes caustic and insulting rhetoric directed at Kim Jong-un. The member noted that Ronald Reagan was able to defeat the Soviet Union because "he scared the hell out of them." While some participants stressed that it was important for U.S. policy to remain coherent



and predictable, an argument was made that the predictable nature of past administrations had failed to solve the issue and that President Trump was right to take a new approach to the problem.

The conversation often reflected the view that North Korea has never been serious about engagement. If there were chances for diplomatic resolutions in the past, that door has certainly closed now. Some participants argued that the concessions and incentives provided to North Korea over the years failed to work. North Korea used engagement as a cover for continuing its nuclear development and consistently failed to take negotiations seriously. The Four Party Talks were cited as one such case where North Korea refused to have substantive discussions on measures related to a peace treaty, instead desiring a “meaningless piece of paper” that it could use to force the removal of American troops from the Korean Peninsula. For the North Koreans, the question since the 1940s has been why shouldn’t they have nuclear weapons? They have had a long time horizon to exercise patience and outmaneuver the U.S.

Other participants defended a more nuanced and charitable interpretation of interactions with the North Koreans. One expert argued that there is at least some ambiguity about what actually happened during previous periods of engagement, and the U.S. and North Korea share some of the blame for the failure of past agreements. Furthermore, there have been periods of engagement where North Korea seriously diminished its nuclear capabilities. Another participant encouraged a distinction between North Korean cheating behavior and North Korean hedging behavior. North Korea often hedges because it cannot trust the U.S., and the U.S. interprets this as cheating, resulting in a cycle of distrust. It is important not to “demonize” North Korea, in the view of one participant, because “demons do not compromise.”

The conversation occasionally touched on broader questions that challenged traditional assumptions about U.S. interests. One member

of Congress advocated for patience, arguing that the status quo favors the U.S. and that the U.S. is “in a far better position than North Korea in the long run.” The U.S. can afford to wait out the situation. Some participants even urged discussants to take a step back and examine assumptions about why it is important for the U.S. to be involved on the Korean Peninsula at all. Would the American people be willing to trade Omaha to save Seoul? A participant suggested that perhaps the U.S. needs a “Trump moment” on this issue where it admits there are no good plays and steps away from the table.

Lastly, the conversation frequently turned to the ways in which the U.S. could live with a nuclear North Korea by employing a long-term containment and deterrence strategy. One member of Congress explained that if Kim Jong-un is rational, then the U.S. could deter him and coexist with North Korea in the same way that it deters and coexists with China and Russia. Together, the military and diplomatic objective should be containment, deterrence, and conflict avoidance. A participant concluded that the time for a preventive strike is over, denuclearization is unrealistic, and deterrence is the “best and only reasonable option” for reducing the present dangers.

### **Military Options and Consequences of War**

The conversation routinely focused on the possible uses of military force to resolve the crisis and their potential consequences, with most participants expressing strong disapproval of any U.S.-initiated conflict on the peninsula.

Participants were cautioned at the outset to be cognizant of the distinction between preemptive and preventive war. Launching war when under an imminent threat is preemptive action. But one participant emphasized that the threat from North Korea is not imminent, meaning that the present conversation in the U.S. is about preventive, not preemptive, war. A preventive war with North Korea would be illegal and raise a host of strategic and ethical questions.

Some participants concluded that it is appropriate for the U.S. to keep military options

on the table. The most likely scenarios involve the so-called “bloody nose” option, including a limited surgical operation to destroy North Korea’s nuclear facilities or some other politically symbolic target. One expert explained that without a military option—which could be pursued as a last resort and with international backing—North Korea could not face a “life or death” choice and could not be compelled to give up its nuclear pursuit. One participant proposed that the U.S. prepare to shoot down the next North Korean missile test. If successful, this could slow down North Korea’s program. If not, the U.S. would at least learn more about its missile defense systems. And either way, this type of limited kinetic action might not compel North Korea to retaliate.

Participants further discussed why some might favor a “bloody nose” or other preventive strike. If Kim Jong-un is rational, he would not respond to a limited strike if doing so would escalate the conflict and precipitate the end of his regime. According to this argument, North Korean retaliation would be very limited or nonexistent, and escalation could be controlled. A “bloody nose” strike could accrue political benefits, forcing North Korea to realize that the current administration is fundamentally different and prepared to issue serious responses to North Korean provocations. If North Korea has never been tested before, the argument goes, then the U.S. must teach it a lesson that would force it to change its strategic calculus and return to the negotiating table.

The conversation frequently reflected strong opposition to any type of U.S. preventive action, with one participant expressing “bewilderment” that anyone would consider this policy. Some felt that there remains a significant chance that Kim Jong-un, whose legitimacy is strongly based on standing up to the United States, would have to respond, which could lead to catastrophe. According to one participant, as long as we agree that there’s a nonzero chance that North Korean nuclear weapons are used on Japan and South Korea in response to a U.S. strike, then we must also agree that there isn’t a real military option because the risks of massive loss of life and major destruction are too high.

Participants generally agreed that it is unlikely that North Korea would use nuclear weapons first, but could not rule out that possibility. North Korea would not have obtained the weapons at such great cost if it were unwilling to ever use them. It is plausible that North Korea would launch first when faced with a “use it or lose it” scenario, such as the imminent end of the regime.

Furthermore, one participant expressed concern that a successfully executed preventive strike would not address the concerns of the U.S. government. Even if North Korea does not retaliate, the U.S. would be worse off. South Korea and other allies would be upset, China might refuse to go along with the sanctions, and North Korea would conclude that it needs nuclear weapons now more than ever.

The discussions underscored that even a conventional conflict on the Korean Peninsula that does not rise to a nuclear exchange would have devastating consequences. One participant explained that a limited attack from North Korea designed to isolate Seoul is “absolutely feasible.” In three to five days, North Korea’s army could quickly march down the corridor from the Demilitarized Zone, eliminate about half of South Korea’s ground forces, and surround Seoul. At this point the ground fighting would stalemate, though the U.S. would be able to bring its air superiority to bear on the conflict. Another participant questioned this scenario, arguing that many things would have to go wrong in sequence for this to be the outcome and that it therefore is not the most likely result. However, at a minimum, North Korea would be able to fire many artillery rounds into Seoul—one participant estimated 600-700 North Korean artillery pieces lining the DMZ—which would result in serious destruction. If a war occurred, one participant estimated that about 140,000 Americans living full time in South Korea and about 100,000 passing through at any given time would need to be quickly evacuated, which would be a tremendous test of airlift capacities.

Participants also considered the economic consequences of war, noting that the private sector is unprepared for the shocks that would

transmit through the global economy. Financial markets would take a hit to the extent that shipping lanes through South Korea are disrupted. War on the Korean peninsula would hurt the supply chain from South Korea to China and Japan, adversely affecting production in both countries and in turn hurting the U.S. economy. If China becomes involved in the conflict and severs trade with the U.S., this would lead to a recession in the U.S. The participant noted that if destruction in South Korea were on the same scale as the U.S. bombing campaign in Japan during World War II, it would take at least \$2.5 trillion to rebuild South Korea.

### **Regional Perspectives**

Participants often stressed that it is important for the U.S. to align and coordinate its North Korea policy with the interests of South Korea. Multiple participants explained that the immediate goal for South Korea is to avoid a conflict. While the South Korean people have many differences of opinion, they fundamentally agree that war should not occur. The South Korean government has made it clear that it opposes U.S. military action, especially without consultation.

South Korean leader Moon Jae-in has continued to make a serious effort to engage with North Korea, but Moon faces both internal and external challenges that make engagement a political “gamble” for him. Participants noted that South Korean public opinion is divided on the issue and that the younger generation in particular is skeptical of engagement.

Participants assessed the state of the U.S.-South Korea relationship with varying degrees of approval. President Trump’s speech in South Korea was well received, helping to assuage some initial concerns about the state of the alliance. But participants noted that the government’s recent protectionist policies, including President Trump’s stated disapproval of the free trade agreement with South Korea, and open questioning of U.S. alliances contribute to ongoing uncertainty in Seoul. The lack of a U.S. ambassador to South Korea has

sent a poor message about the value that the U.S. attaches to the alliance.

The discussion often touched on the issue of reunification, with some participants noting that reunification seems inevitable at some point in the future given the obvious success of South Korea and the “hollowness” of the North Korean state. One participant explained that the official position of the South Korean government is to achieve a union of two states in the long term, and the U.S. has long desired a gradual and sustainable reunification with a unified Korea that remains in a military alliance with the U.S.

The conversation occasionally reflected concern that South Korea may at some point pursue its own nuclear weapons program. One participant downplayed these concerns, explaining that there has been pressure from conservative institutions in South Korea but the government remains against it. Other participants disagreed, stating that the desire for nuclear weapons is more widespread among the population. It was noted that the acquisition of nuclear weapons would “not be economically or politically viable” in South Korea because of the economic harm that would follow and the loss of grounds to demand the denuclearization of North Korea. However, a member of Congress suggested that the future acquisition of nuclear weapons in South Korea and Japan would not necessarily be a bad development, and another participant proposed that South Korea could use the threat of going nuclear as leverage against North Korea and China.

China’s role as a key player in the North Korean crisis loomed large during the meeting. Participants explained that China’s official policy on North Korea is threefold: to achieve peace and stability, denuclearization, and the peaceful resolution of pending issues through dialogue and negotiation. In China’s view, both the U.S. and North Korea must soften their rhetoric and standards and take a pragmatic approach to diplomacy. One participant suggested that if North Korea does not adhere to UN sanctions and enter into denuclearization negotiations, then China would support

international military action to achieve denuclearization.

Participants understood that China has no interest in North Korea collapsing and remains a reluctant supporter, but would prefer North Korea to refrain from provocations. One participant believed that the role for China could only be a limited one, since North Korea primarily wants a dialogue with the United States. North Korea has a historically based suspicion of Chinese overreach and the current relationship between the two countries is strained.

Some participants contended that China has very limited influence over North Korea. China wants North Korea to denuclearize but it also does not want to exacerbate humanitarian problems by cutting off all economic ties. Another participant argued that although China has some limited influence through trade, it is reluctant to cut off economic ties because it wants to maintain what little influence it has. But some participants, including members of Congress, felt that there was room for China to do more to influence North Korea and that the U.S. should prioritize its diplomacy with China in pursuit of that outcome. There was agreement among some participants that China would not link the North Korea problem with other issues in its relationship with the U.S., including trade and the recent tariffs.

One participant clarified that the Abe administration in Japan supports U.S. policy and agrees that all options should remain on the table. But while Japan wants to maximize pressure against North Korea, ultimately it does not want war. Some participants pointed out that the shaky relationship between South Korea and Japan would continue to be an impediment to trilateral cooperation. South Korean leaders always have domestic constraints on improving relations with Japan because the public has not forgotten the colonial experience. The U.S. has limited ability to improve this rift.

## **Role of Congress**

Members of Congress discussed ways through which they could inform the American public about the crisis and the potential costs of war on the Korean Peninsula. Ideas included convening town hall meetings with outside experts to educate constituents and holding hearings on Capitol Hill about the costs of large-scale conventional war on the Korean Peninsula, the risks and consequences of a nuclear exchange, and the viability of a diplomatic solution. Members could also request bipartisan classified briefings from the Pentagon so that they fully understand what war on the Korean Peninsula would look like.

The conversation touched on the fact that Congress should prepare for the future by making investments in missile defense. Members of Congress stated that it would be “prudent” to make such investments to defend against a nuclear North Korea and prepare for proliferation of nuclear weapons to other states. A number of participants expressed concern about a future with increased proliferation, with one participant noting that “proliferation is the word of the day.” Some participants agreed that the U.S. should make a missile defense program a “national priority” and could pursue it on the scale of the Manhattan Project.

Members of Congress also discussed bipartisan ways through which they could provide greater coherence and clarity to U.S. North Korea policy. Ideas included legislative action, such as a joint resolution, that would express Congress’ views about the priorities for U.S. policy on North Korea. Congress could also sensibly exercise its jurisdiction over some U.S. sanctions on North Korea. Instead of approving sanctions for sanctions’ sake, Congress could ensure they are embedded in a more comprehensive policy.

Lastly, members discussed how Congress could play a role in ensuring that U.S. policy is expressed and carried out as effectively as possible. Congress could come together in a bipartisan fashion to fund initiatives and programs, such as the Voice of America, that

expose Kim Jong-un's weaknesses and the depravity of his regime to his people. Congress could also ensure that the State Department is

staffed and resourced effectively in order to be able to carry out the diplomacy necessary to resolve the North Korean crisis.



# Finding a Diplomatic Solution to the North Korean Crisis: Historical Context

Kathleen Stephens

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*“(Chinese President Xi) then went into the history of China and Korea. Not North Korea, Korea. And you know, you’re talking about thousands of years . . . and many wars. And Korea actually used to be a part of China. And after listening for 10 minutes, I realized that it’s not so easy.”*

— President Trump, interview with the Wall Street Journal, April 12, 2017

This remark by President Trump after meeting with the Chinese President last year sparked outrage among Koreans over the alleged assertion by Xi (later semi-denied by the Chinese government) that Korea “used to be a part of China.”

Indeed, history is “not so easy.”

Perhaps President Trump is now looking more to U.S. experts for history briefings. In any event I welcome his recognition that history matters.

Of course, historical narratives diverge, sometimes wildly. Nowhere is this more true than in Northeast Asia. Having a sense of those differing narratives is also part of understanding the historical context. I want to highlight several areas where historical context and varying narratives, between North Korea and South Korea, and among the neighbors and the U.S., continue to shape behavior, public opinion and policy.

## A Tale of Two Koreas

Koreans in both South and North are taught to be, and generally are, fiercely proud of their history of survival as a homogeneous linguistic, cultural, ethnic and political entity, despite pressures through the millennia from the larger powers surrounding them. Korea was often the battleground for competition between great powers, China and Japan, later Japan and Russia, and then in the crucible of the early Cold War.

Koreans see themselves as innocent victims: First of 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese imperialism, a Japanese colony from 1910 until 1945, then split in half at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in a temporary demarcation line proposed by the liberating Americans to stop the advance of Soviet troops after the Japanese surrender. That line solidified as two rival Korean governments established themselves with respective Soviet and U.S. backing, and then froze into place after a long and bloody war that split millions of Korean families and wreaked destruction on the entire peninsula.

## The Battle for Legitimacy

The year 2018 marks 70 years since the establishment of two rival Korean states, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south. It is 65 years since the Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty. Like the initial division of Korea in 1945, the

armistice has had a longer history than any foresaw at the time.

To observe that the two Koreas have been on stunningly divergent courses over these years is to state the obvious while also to be reminded of just how extraordinary their journeys have been.

The rise of the Republic of Korea – South Korea – remains one of the most inspiring, and unlikely, stories of the twentieth century. It has coupled rapid economic development with the nurturing of a vibrant democracy and growing clout on the world stage.

The DPRK has lost the competition to define what it means to be a successful Korean state in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What remains is an obsession with the survival of the regime – the dynasty founded by Kim Il Song and now led by his grandson, Kim Jong Un.

In this respect, the nuclear ambitions first pursued by his grandfather and father have taken on even more salience. Kim Jong Un has doubled down to achieve “nuclear state” status as his best option to counter the far greater U.S. and South Korean conventional capabilities. The nuclear program is also, increasingly, an important source of domestic legitimacy for a regime that is no longer able to block out the reality of South Korean wealth and success, but can argue that as a “nuclear state” it is respected and feared in the world and has again (as it argues about the Korean war) kept the U.S. at bay.

### **The Role of the United States**

The United States looms large in modern Korean history. Its partnership with South Korea has deepened and broadened over the decades, with South Koreans widely recognizing and appreciating the U.S. role as a guarantor of South Korean security and an open market for its export-driven economic growth. The large and successful Korean-American community, the continued popularity of the U.S. higher education system, and a sense of shared values

and sacrifice all undermine a strong and healthy alliance.

But South Koreans are also sensitive to the U.S. role in dividing the peninsula. Unwilling to give up the goal of reunification in 1953, the ROK’s first president, Syngman Rhee, refused to sign the armistice in 1953 and demanded a mutual defense guarantee from the U.S. as the price of ROK acceptance of an imperfect peace. Over the decades South Koreans have worried about U.S. abandonment, for example post-Vietnam under Nixon and during the Carter years.

Since normalizing relations with China in 1992, the ROK-China economic relationship has boomed, but the bloom is off the political relationship given tensions over North Korea, THAAD deployment, and worries about the implications of China’s growing assertiveness in the region.

In North Korea, the regime’s foundational myth and continued legitimacy is tied to the notion that 1) it successfully repelled the United States to protect the true Korean nation during the Korean War (Little mention is made of the role of China, and South Korea is portrayed as an American colony), and 2) the United States seeks the destruction of North Korea.

This notwithstanding, North Korea has at various times been eager to engage the United States as its true partner and equal (as opposed to South Korea). The most extensive and substantive exchanges have been over its missile and nuclear programs, in the 1990s leading to the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, and during the George W. Bush administration through the Six Party Talks.

During these periods of diplomacy, and subsequently, the U.S. and its partners demanded that North Korea abandon its nuclear weapons and missile programs, and in exchange offered a variety of security guarantees and economic assistance, including commitments to normalize relations, negotiate a peace treaty to replace the armistice, and provide economic and energy assistance.



Opinions vary on the main reasons for the failure of these efforts, including whether North Korea was ever prepared to trade away its nuclear weapons program and whether the regime could actually survive the kind of reform and opening that a more normal relationship with the United States, South Korea, and the outside world would imply.

What all agree on is that the problem is much more difficult now, given the advanced state of the nuclear and missile program.

### **Reunification**

Reunification remains the stated goal and constitutional imperative of both Seoul and Pyongyang. In earlier decades, North Korean leaders sometimes saw South Korea's tumultuous political scene as offering opportunities to subvert and foster instability to the North's benefit.

South Korea's prosperity and democratic resilience has probably made current North

Korean leaders realize they can hope at most to play a spoiler role, though some speculate that Pyongyang sees the development of a nuclear and missile capability threatening the American homeland as a means of neutralizing the U.S. and blackmailing the South into reunification on the North's terms.

In my view this scenario seriously underestimates the South's resilience, and what I believe will be continued U.S. commitment.

For the South, the stated aim is for peaceful, gradual reunification, perhaps under some kind of interim system of confederation. As the older generation of Koreans passes from the scene, their grandchildren feel little kinship with the Koreans of the north. They know reunification would be expensive and difficult, and that the richer South would pay the cost. But they also realize they may have no choice, that the status quo cannot continue. Hence they are eager to find a way to avoid a ruinous war, and to identify ways to reduce tensions and promote as gradual a process as possible.



# What We Really Know About North Korea's Nuclear Weapons, And What We Don't Yet Know for Sure

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In January 2004, the director of North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center handed me a sealed glass jar with plutonium metal inside in an effort to convince me that his country had a nuclear deterrent. To make the same point last week, Pyongyang lofted a missile 2,800 miles into space and declared it had a nuclear-tipped missile that could reach all of the United States. Has the country's nuclear program really come that far?

As global anxiety over North Korea grows and the war of words between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un escalates, it is more important than ever to be precise about what we know, and what we don't, about Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program and delivery systems. In 2004, nothing I saw on my visit persuaded me that Pyongyang could build a bomb and deliver it. But more recent visits, along with several kinds of open-source analysis, leave little doubt of North Korea's impressive progress in producing bomb fuel, building powerful nuclear devices, and test-launching a wide variety of missiles—and its determined efforts to integrate all three into a nuclear-tipped missile.

Extensive experience with shorter-range missiles and 11 years of nuclear tests most likely enable North Korea to mount a nuclear warhead on missiles that can reach all of South Korea and Japan. That capability, along with massive artillery firepower trained on Seoul, should be enough to deter Washington. By my assessment,

however, North Korea will need at least two more years and several more missile and nuclear tests before it can hit the U.S. mainland.

## What It Takes

A credible nuclear deterrent requires not just fuel for a nuclear bomb, but also the ability to weaponize (that is, design and build the bomb) and to field delivery systems that can get the bomb to a target. It also requires demonstrating these capabilities—and the will to use them—to an adversary. There may be little doubt of Kim's willingness to use a nuclear weapon if the situation required it. Assessing his exact capabilities, however, has been a greater challenge, even for the U.S. government.

Pyongyang has often aided such efforts by allowing peeks at its key assets. It has built much of its nuclear and missile complex in full view of satellites and routinely released footage of its leaders' inspections of weapons and facilities. It has also allowed foreign, nongovernment specialists to visit those facilities. My assessment of North Korean capabilities is based on my own seven visits and ongoing analysis of all open-source information.

There are two basic types of nuclear fuel: plutonium, which is produced in reactors, and uranium, which is enriched to weapon grade in centrifuges. North Korea's plutonium inventory can be estimated with high confidence because the design details of Yongbyon's 5-megawatt

reactor are well known, and its operation is easily monitored by commercial satellite imagery. International teams have inspected North Korea's reactor complex during times of diplomacy, and I have visited the plutonium facilities and met Yongbyon's very capable technical staff several times. I estimate that North Korea has 20 to 40 kilograms of plutonium, sufficient for four to eight bombs.

Estimates of highly enriched uranium are much less certain. Centrifuge facilities are virtually impossible to spot from afar. Yet in November 2010, during my last visit, North Korea allowed me to view its recently completed modern centrifuge facility. (To my knowledge, no outsider aside from those on our small Stanford University team has seen this or any other North Korean centrifuge facility.) Based on that visit, satellite imagery, and probabilistic analysis of the import and production of key materials and components, I estimate that North Korea has 250–500 kilograms of highly enriched uranium—sufficient for roughly 12 to 24 additional nuclear weapons. (This assumes the existence of one or more covert centrifuge facilities, necessary for testing technology before deploying it in the large-scale facility I saw.)

North Korea also likely has the ability to produce a small number of hydrogen bombs. These require heavy forms of hydrogen—deuterium and tritium—for the fusion stage of the device, which is triggered by a plutonium or uranium fission bomb. North Korea has demonstrated the ability to produce deuterium and tritium, as well as a lithium compound, Lithium-6 deuteride, which can produce tritium *in situ* in the fusion stage of a hydrogen bomb's detonation.

### **The Making of a North Korean Bomb**

Since 2006, North Korea has conducted six underground nuclear tests. Seismographs around the world have picked up the tremors, allowing estimates of the likely explosive power of each bomb. Two of the most recent tests, in 2016, have had a destructive power of 10–25 kilotons, equivalent to the bombs that destroyed

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The sixth test, on September 13, 2017, was 10 times stronger, with a probably explosive power of 200–250 kilotons—suggesting the successful detonation of a two-stage hydrogen bomb. (Pyongyang's claims that its fourth test, in January 2016, was a hydrogen bomb did not appear credible at the time.) A few hours earlier, the government had released photos of Kim with a mock-up of such a device. Though such designs are generally considered to be among any government's most closely guarded secrets, North Korea has publicized them more than once.

This record of tests conclusively demonstrates that North Korea can build nuclear devices with the power of the fission bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as bombs with the destructive power of modern hydrogen bombs. Given that record, and estimates of nuclear materials inventories, I estimate that the upper range of nuclear materials inventories is sufficient for roughly 25 to 30 nuclear weapons, with an annual production rate of 6 to 7. (David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security has come up with a similar estimate: 15 to 34 weapons and annual production rates of 3 to 5.) This assessment is lower than a leaked U.S. intelligence community estimate of 60 weapons.

### **The Missile is the Message**

It is another question whether those weapons are small enough to fit on short- and long-range missiles. (Official photos of nuclear devices are strategically positioned in front of diagrams of re-entry vehicles, but there is no way of being sure that the photographed devices are really identical to those tested, whatever the claims from Pyongyang.) For many years, North Korea's missile program appeared to lag far behind its nuclear advances. Although the acquisition and development of short-range missiles dates back to the mid-1980s, work on longer-range systems has started to speed up only recently. In the past two years, North Korea has test-fired more than 40 missiles, most of which were of intermediate or long range.

Today, missile tests are the most visible part of North Korea's nuclear weapons quest. Successful launches are easily picked up by international monitors and featured in official North Korean photos and videos, many showing Kim Jong Un present and in charge. In July 2017, North Korea passed an important milestone with the test of two Hwasong-14 missiles—intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, that have a range greater than 3,400 miles. Last week, it tested an even more powerful missile, a Hwasong-15, with an estimated range of 8,000 miles, capable of reaching the entire continental United States. Such tests have been accompanied by diversification of North Korea's missiles, allowing it to progress toward a stated goal of launching at any time and from any place, including submarines.

Such impressive progress at producing fuel, building devices, and launching a wide variety of missiles begs the question of whether North Korea can put it all together in a single package that can deter Washington. At the time of my 2004 visit, the leadership in Pyongyang may have believed that a handful of primitive bombs was deterrent enough. By 2009, it felt the need to conduct a second nuclear test to prove it had a working bomb. More recently, it has focused on missile delivery of growing reach. And this year, as leadership in Washington changed, it focused on a more ambitious goal: demonstrating the ability to reach the entire United States with an ICBM, possibly one tipped with a hydrogen bomb.

There is little doubt that North Korea could mount a nuclear warhead on a missile that could reach South Korea or Japan. But ICBMs require smaller and lighter warheads that are nonetheless robust enough to survive the entire flight trajectory, including re-entering the atmosphere. And acquiring that capability will, by my estimate, take at least two more years of tests.

## **Ready to Talk?**

How has North Korea, one of the most isolated countries in the world, been able to make such progress? It got some outside assistance. Beginning in the 1960s, the Soviet Union helped Pyongyang pursue peaceful applications of nuclear technologies and educated its technicians and scientists. After 1991, collaboration with Russian and possibly Ukrainian missile factories continued for some time, and North Korea has also taken advantage of a leaky international export control system to acquire key materials for the production of fissile materials, particularly for gas centrifuges to enrich uranium. But for the most part, Pyongyang has built its nuclear facilities and bombs on its own. Its program is now mostly self-sufficient.

After the most recent missile test, North Korea declared that it had achieved its “goal of the completion of the rocket weaponry system development” needed to deter U.S. aggression. Domestically, this was an important milestone, because the regime had stated in 2013 that it would develop a nuclear deterrent so it could turn its focus to economic development. With this achievement, will Kim be ready to engage in diplomacy with Washington? Although he needs more time in order to be able to credibly threaten the entire continental United States, the fact that Kim can already inflict enormous damage on American allies and bases in Asia may give him sufficient assurance to start a dialogue, in an effort to reduce current tensions and head off misunderstandings that could lead to war.

Washington should be ready to reciprocate—or if necessary, to initiate the discussion. Talking would not represent a reward or concession, or a signal of U.S. acceptance of a nuclear-armed North Korea. It would instead be a first step toward reducing the risks of a nuclear catastrophe and developing a better understanding of the other side. Ultimately, that understanding may even help inform a negotiating strategy to halt, roll back, and eventually eliminate North Korea's nuclear program.



# DPRK National Strategic Considerations, Objectives

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*Note: This is a working draft written for Harvard University.  
It will be a chapter of a larger study of policy options regarding North Korea.*

In the 1930s American policymakers debated the intentions of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan: Was a conflict inevitable or could Berlin and Tokyo be appeased with territorial adjustments and diplomatic concessions? From the 1940s to the 1980s, they debated the intentions of the Soviet Union: Could it peacefully co-exist with the United States and its allies or were its leaders committed to the conquest of the West? From 1991 to 2003 another such debate raged about Iraq: Was Saddam Hussein contained or was regime change necessary? Now the most urgent debate in Washington concerns North Korea: Is it only developing weapons of mass destruction for regime survival and as a negotiating lever in order to be rewarded for ending or freezing its program? Or is North Korea developing nuclear weapons and intercontinental delivery systems for offensive purposes—to chase the United States out of South Korea and eventually to extend its police state control across the entire Peninsula? Running alongside the debate over North Korean goals and intentions is the debate over Kim Jong-un’s rationality. Is he a cold-blooded but calculating strongman who, like his father and grandfather, can be deterred from using his growing arsenal of nuclear weapons against North Korea’s neighbors and the United States? Can Kim, moreover, be deterred from proliferating nuclear weapons, which the Trump administration sees as perhaps the single greatest risk of a U.S. “contain and deter” policy? Or is Kim a callow and irrational megalomaniac who thinks that he could win a war against the United

States and will willingly proliferate nuclear weapons that could end up in the hands of terrorists?

As usually happens in these types of high-stakes debates, positions have become polarized and the question of Kim Jong-un’s intention has become a very personal and emotional one for many Korea scholars and watchers. For now, whatever the motives of Kim Jong-un, the Trump administration has not uniformly settled on a path forward other than continuing to press the North through a “maximum pressure” sanctions policy. If, however, the North is able to test a successful re-entry vehicle—the next major inflection point in its nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program—it would effectively confirm its capacity to strike the U.S., and the Trump administration will have to decide whether the U.S. is prepared to live with a nuclear North for the long-term. Getting “what does North Korea want?” right has never been more critical. It is the question upon which the peace and security of Northeast Asia—and of the United States itself—may hang.

## **Background: Minnow between two (or now four) whales**

*“The DPRK is small in its territorial size and population, but it has successfully safeguarded the sovereignty of the country and nation and right to existence with its self-defensive nuclear deterrent in the showdown*

with the U.S. styling itself as the “only superpower,” and materialized its people’s dreams and ideals one after another.”<sup>1</sup>

To assess North Korea’s intent, we should first consider its strategic situation as a minnow surrounded by whales. Even a cursory glance at North Korea reveals a worldview molded by its geography and history of being surrounded by powerful neighbors. Situated at a strategic crossroad in Northeast Asia, the Korean peninsula has at various times throughout its history been used by China, Japan, Russia, and the United States as a buffer and vassal state, stepping-stone, colony, and battleground. When one power dominated the Korean peninsula, it has also dominated Northeast Asia.

Today, North Korea is one of the poorest nations in the world with a distorted economy that spends billions of dollars in armaments while watching its people go hungry. It has the world’s largest military in terms of manpower and defense spending proportional to its population and national income. The costs of that kind of military commitment have been too great for the North’s economy to bear. In late 1993, Pyongyang officially conceded that it faced a “grave situation”<sup>2</sup> with worsening food shortages at the same time as a brewing international crisis over its unacknowledged nuclear sites. With a few cards left to play, the North signed the Agreed Framework on October 1994, agreeing to freeze its plutonium production program in exchange for an American-led consortium providing ten years’ worth of heavy oil deliveries and the construction of two electricity-generating light-water nuclear plants at an estimated cost of approximately \$4 billion.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “DPRK Advancing along Road of Independence, Songun and Socialism,” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, September 9, 2017. September 9 is the Foundation Day of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

<sup>2</sup> “North Korea Admits ‘Grave Situation’,” *The Washington Post*, December 9, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> “The U.S-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance,” *Arms Control Association*. August 2017.

Despite the 1994 nuclear deal with Washington, however, the North’s economic situation became increasingly dire. When Kim Il-sung died in the summer of 1994, he left his son, Kim Jong-il, an economy that was in shambles. The devastating rains and floods that summer broke dams, collapsed bridges, and washed away food stocks. From 1994 to 1998, North Korea was gripped by a famine that killed several million people.<sup>4</sup>

South Korea’s “Sunshine Policy” of 1998-2008, launched by President Kim Dae-jung and continued by his successor, President Roh Moo-hyun, did little to improve the North’s internal situation even though Seoul pumped approximately \$8 billion in economic assistance into the North.<sup>5</sup> The “Sunshine Policy” went into eclipse under President Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013), whose Unification Ministry called it a failure.<sup>6</sup> But neither the discontinuation of the South’s subsidies, nor the death of Kim Jong-il on December 19, 2011, has led to North Korea’s collapse. The North Korean state under Kim Jong-un staggers along, having benefitted from Chinese subsidies, the sales of missile and nuclear technology, and various illicit criminal activities such as counterfeiting, drug dealing, and money laundering. North Korea is able to maintain its tenuous stability not because of the state-directed command economy but because of the functioning of informal, unofficial, or “black,” markets. North Koreans earn more than 70% of their gross income in these private markets.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> W. Courtland Robinson et al., “Mortality in North Korean Migrant Households: A Retrospective Study,” *The Lancet* 354, no. 9175 (July 24, 1999). An exact statistical number of deaths during the acute phase of the crisis will probably never be fully determined. Some estimates are lower between 800,000 to 1.5 million people.

<sup>5</sup> Evan Ramstad, “Studies Ponder Reunification . . . Some Day,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 22, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> “South Korea Formally Declares End to Sunshine Policy,” *Voice of America*, November 17, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Kim Byung-yeon, “Strong sanctions against North Korea lead to denuclearization negotiations: Data-analyzing North Korea,” *JoongAng Ilbo*, January 22, 2018.



With South Korean foreign assistance to the North having ceased with the end of the “Sunshine Policy,” only China is left as a substantial supporter of the regime. China is the North’s major supplier of food (an estimated 45% of the total consumed), energy (90%), and consumer goods (80%). Two-thirds of North Korea’s trade turnover, less than \$9 billion, is with China. China also provides about half of all North Korean imports, including mineral fuels and oil, machinery, electrical machinery, vehicles, plastic, iron and steel.<sup>8</sup> Overall, Beijing provides Pyongyang what amounts to a trade subsidy of approximately \$1 billion per year.<sup>9</sup>

There are indications, however, that China’s patience with Pyongyang is wearing thin. China has not only signed onto tougher U.N. Security Council sanctions since last year, but it began to enforce them to a greater degree than many Korea watchers had expected. Between 2016 and 2017, North Korea’s exports to China declined 37%, and if the sanctions are fully implemented (granted, a big if), the decline could be over 90% this year.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese even agreed to ban work authorizations for North Korean workers overseas. All countries, including China, have now agreed to expel all North Korean laborers, some 50,000, who work abroad in conditions that amount to forced labor to earn hard currency for the regime. The vast majority of them are in China and Russia, laboring in mining, logging, textile, and construction.<sup>11</sup>

In six-plus years since coming to power, Kim Jong-un has yet to visit Beijing even as China welcomed South Korean presidents to its capital many times. Chinese President Xi Jinping

<sup>8</sup> “The World Factbook: North Korea,” CIA, accessed January 26, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Mark E Manyin and Mary Beth Nikitin, “Foreign Assistance to North Korea,” *Congressional Research Service*, R40095, June 1, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Byung-yeon, *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Edith M Lederer, “UN investigator: North Koreans doing forced labor abroad,” *Associated Press*, October 29, 2015. Marzuki Darusman, the special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, stated in a report to the UN Assembly that these workers were providing up to between \$1.2 billion and \$2.3 billion annually to the regime.

reportedly despises Kim.<sup>12</sup> Xi has even publicly stated that China’s 1961 treaty with the North will not apply if North Korea provokes a conflict with the United States. Beijing was undoubtedly unsettled by Kim Jong-un’s actions since he came to power in December 2011, including the execution of Jang Song-taek, who was not only Kim Jong-un’s uncle and the second-most powerful man in the North but was also the North’s chief envoy to China and a proponent of Chinese-style reforms. In early 2017, the high-profile assassination of Kim’s half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, who lived under Chinese protection, further alarmed China. China finally decided to take a tougher stance against the North when it exploded a hydrogen bomb on September 3, 2017.

While none of this may be sufficient for Beijing to entirely abandon its longstanding strategy of subsidizing North Korea as a buffer against the encroachment of U.S. power on its border, a fundamental rethinking of China’s North Korea policy is possible if North Korea becomes more of a strategic liability--particularly as the Trump administration intensifies pressure on China. Secondary sanctions imposed by the Trump administration last September have hurt Chinese banks that do business with North Korea, and, even for China, if the choice is between trading with North Korea and trading with the U.S., the answer is obvious.<sup>13</sup> The Trump administration has reportedly told Beijing that the Treasury Department is ready to impose further sanctions on its entities if Beijing does not act.

<sup>12</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, “Why China Won’t Rescue North Korea: What to Expect If Things Fall Apart,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Jay Solomon and Jeremy Page, “U.S. Asks China to Crack Down on Shadowy Firms That Trade with North Korea,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2017. In mid-June, 2017, the Trump administration asked Beijing to take actions against some 10 Chinese companies and individuals to curb their trading with North Korea as a part of a strategy to put an end to the key Chinese networks that support Pyongyang’s nuclear programs; Jonathan Soble, “U.S. Accuses Chinese Company of Money Laundering for North Korea,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 2017. In addition, the U.S. accused a Chinese company of laundering money for North Korea and asked for \$1.9 million in civil penalties.

These moves are in line with the Trump administration's sanctions strategy of targeting North Korea's sources of hard currency.

In such a bleak political and economic environment for North Korea, the key to nearly all its core challenges is the United States. If North Korea eventually succeeds in reshaping relations with the United States, it will have significantly reduced, if not removed, the threat from the U.S. and improved its deteriorating relationship with its neighbors, notably China. But how will it reshape its relationship with Washington? The path that makes the most sense for the North is to bolster its strategic position by acquiring the capacity to strike the U.S. with a nuclear weapon.

### **Regime preservation**

*“The development and advancement of the strategic weapon of the DPRK are to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country from the U.S. imperialists’ nuclear blackmail policy and nuclear threat . . .”*<sup>14</sup>

*“To make it clear again, the DPRK’s nuclear buildup is just a self-defensive measure to cope with the decades-long U.S. nuclear threat to its sovereignty and dignity, security, and right to existence.”*<sup>15</sup>

The highest priority of the North Korean state has always been regime preservation in the face of what it perceived, and still perceives today, as an extremely hostile security and economic environment. The Kim family regime views its nuclear and missile programs as essential to preserving the regime and even reversing its embarrassing inferiority compared to South Korea on most indices of state power.

Gaining international acceptance as a legitimate and full-fledged nuclear power is the North's utmost priority because its leaders are

convinced that no other nation, not even a superpower such as the United States, would challenge a state armed with the ultimate weapon. This is the reason why Pyongyang has relentlessly and systematically pursued nuclear weapons in the face of international condemnation and sanctions. The North also sees nuclear weapons as essential for its national identity and security as well as achieving power and prestige on the international stage—and, as we shall see, it also vital for its desire to accomplish long-nurtured dreams of unification.

Thus, the North's decades-long pursuit of a nuclear program can't be explained away only as a defensive reaction to external threats and stimuli, such as the so-called “hostile” policies of Washington. In fact, North Korea's long history of nuclear development, culminating in its first nuclear test in October 2006 and the sixth “hydrogen” bomb test in September 2017, strongly suggests that the leadership in Pyongyang is unlikely to be cajoled or persuaded into giving up its nuclear arsenal. Kim will not make concessions on the nuclear and missile programs unless he is confronted with a credible threat that convinces him that he will pay a higher price for possessing nuclear weapons than for giving them up. But it will not be easy to present such a threat without running the risk of a conflict spiraling out of control.

Ample historical evidence indicates that the North Korean leadership did not embark on the nuclear path on a whim, nor does it treat nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip.<sup>16</sup> The germination of Kim Il-sung's nuclear aspirations dates back to the 1950s,<sup>17</sup> when North Korean scientists gained basic nuclear knowledge by cooperating with Soviet and Chinese counterparts.<sup>18</sup> The North's nuclear program expanded at a rapid rate in the 1970s and 1980s, when the North began accumulating what we would call today “sensitive nuclear

<sup>14</sup> “DPRK Gov't Statement on Successful Test-fire of New-Type ICBM,” *Rodong Sinmun*, November 29, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> “UNSC serves US hegemonic ambition,” *Pyongyang Times*, September 26, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Pollack. *No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and International Security* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> “Fact Sheet – North Korea's Nuclear Program,” *American Security Project*, August 2012.

technologies,” including spent fuel reprocessing techniques, plutonium, and facilities for the fabrication and conversion of uranium. The North built a significant nuclear complex, including a second five-megawatt reactor near Yongbyon, in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>19</sup> The North’s thinking regarding the need for nuclear weapons further hardened when the Cold War came to an abrupt end. With the collapse of its patron, the Soviet Union, nuclear weapons became an even more important tool of regime preservation.

North Korea temporarily suspended its nuclear program in 1994 after a tense standoff with Washington. The 1994 Agreed Framework appeared to stop the North’s program for six-plus years, but Washington later found out that Pyongyang cheated on the agreement when it pursued an alternative path to the bomb using uranium fuel. Pakistan, through its former top scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan, supplied key data on uranium enrichment in exchange for missile technology.<sup>20</sup> Confronted with the evidence in October 2002, the North acknowledged the program, leading the George W. Bush administration to suspend the Agreed Framework.

North Korea’s first nuclear test in October 2006, however, painted the Bush administration into a corner. In response to stinging criticism that it was his “hardline” policy that led to the North testing its first nuclear weapon, President Bush made important concessions in the Six Party Talks, a series of multilateral negotiations held intermittently since 2003 and attended by China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the U.S. The Bush administration, for example, abandoned an effective policy of financially squeezing the North Korean elites’ cash flows, which began with the imposition of sanctions on Macau-based Banco Delta Asia (BDA) in September 2005. The U.S. Treasury ordered U.S. companies and financial institutions to cut links with BDA, where the North reportedly kept \$25 million in various

accounts,<sup>21</sup> thereby blocking one of the regime’s key sources of hard currency. A North Korean officer told a U.S. official that the U.S. has finally found a way to hurt the Kim regime. The North eventually returned to the talks and agreed to give up its nuclear weapons program after the U.S. agreed to return the funds to the Kim regime. Unfortunately, after this important leverage was traded away, the talks fell apart over verification: North Korea refused to allow IAEA inspectors access to its facilities.

In 2009, North Korea shifted its policy away from the Six-Party Talks and toward a more concerted effort to develop its nuclear weapons capability. The North launched a long-range rocket in April, conducted a second nuclear test in May 2009, and yet another one in February 2013, which, by some assessments, was 2½ times larger than the previous test, with a yield between 5 and 15 kilotons.<sup>22</sup> Between the second and third nuclear tests, the U.S. and the North reached an agreement, the 2012 Leap Day Deal, in which the North committed to a long-range missile testing and nuclear activities moratorium in return for the U.S. aid. The agreement collapsed in less than three weeks when the North launched a satellite in violation of UNSC resolutions. North Korea’s response to the Obama administration’s “strategic patience” approach was to double down—and that approach continues to this day.

In six-plus years since he came into power, Kim Jong-un has conducted four nuclear tests and nearly 90 ballistic missile tests, more than double the number of his father and grandfather

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> “Khan ‘Gave N Korea Centrifuges,’” *BBC News World*, August 24, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> David Lague and Donald Greenless, “Squeeze on Banco Delta Asia hit North Korea where it hurt - Asia - Pacific - International Herald Tribune,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2007. The BDA sanctions were considered a notable use of Section 311 of the USA Patriot Act to crack down on the use of the international financial system by “rogue states” and “state sponsors of terrorism.”

<sup>22</sup> “North Korea’s New Nuclear Test Raises Universal Condemnation,” *NPS Global Foundation*, May 25, 2009; Rachel Oswald, “North Korean Nuclear Test More Than Twice as Powerful as Last Blast,” *NTI Global Security Newswire*, February 19, 2013.

combined. In July 2017, North Korea passed a major threshold when it successfully launched its first intercontinental ballistic missile powerful enough to reach the West Coast. On September 3, 2017, it tested its most powerful bomb yet—what it claimed was a hydrogen bomb with a yield of up to 250 kilotons, nearly 17 times more powerful than the bomb that flattened Hiroshima. On November 27, 2017, the North conducted its third ICBM test, which demonstrated its ability to reach the entire U.S. mainland. Today, the North is likely one major technical step away—building a successful reentry vehicle—from having a capacity to strike the U.S. mainland. In January 2018, CIA Director Mike Pompeo has stated that North Korea is “ever closer to being able to hold America at risk” within a “handful of months.”<sup>23</sup>

In sum, nuclear weapons have become a core ingredient in North Korea’s recipe for regime preservation. Nuclear weapons are seen by the regime as the best guarantor of the regime’s survival, and President Trump’s threats to rain “fire and fury” on the North have only strengthened that determination.

If he needed any more justification, Kim Jong-un’s determination to maintain nuclear weapons has only been enhanced by the example of Libya, where the West first convinced Muammar Qaddafi to abandon his WMD program and then backed a revolt that overthrew and killed him. In many private conversations, North Korean officials often state that they do not intend to become “another Iraq,” or “another Libya,” two countries that did not have a nuclear deterrent.<sup>24</sup> And of course, nuclear weapons also dramatically raise the North’s clout in world affairs, allowing an impoverished and otherwise insignificant state to be treated as a regional and even global power.

<sup>23</sup> Leandra Bernstein, “CIA director: North Korea is only 'months away' from holding America at risk,” *WJLA*, January 23, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Bruce Klingner and Sue Mi Terry, “We participated in talks with North Korean representatives. This is what we learned,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2017.

## “Juche” and “military first”

*“The DPRK is firmly advancing along the road of independence, songun, and socialism under the guidance of respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, who is accomplishing the cause of independence pioneered and developed by President Kim Il-sung and leader Kim Jong-il and their desire for the building of a power.”<sup>25</sup>*

Aside from the strategic benefits of deterring the U.S. for regime preservation, the possession of nuclear weapon provides the Kim regime with an ideological rallying point of national pride which justifies the deprivations ordinary citizens suffer to support the military and the state. Nuclear weapons give the Kim regime internal legitimacy.

The North has operated according to certain ideological assumptions that have not changed much since 1948: The regime claims that the North is the true representative of the Korean people, that the government in the South is a “puppet regime” backed by an antagonistic United States, and that the continued U.S. presence on the Peninsula constitutes a threat to the very existence of North Korea. It believes that the South Korean people (as opposed to their government) would welcome unity with their northern brethren and would be more sympathetic towards the North were it not for the indoctrination by their government and the U.S., and that, ultimately, the North’s position will prevail because it is morally virtuous. These principles have led the North to assume that it must have a strong defense at all costs against American and South Korean hostility. This defense is not just military but also ideological—that is, the people of North Korea must be protected from any ideological infection of the U.S. or South Korean capitalism.

The official *Juche* ideology of the North, crafted under Kim Il-sung, emphasizes self-reliance: reconstructing one’s own country, being

<sup>25</sup> “DPRK Advancing along Road of Independence, Songun, and Socialism,” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, September 9, 2017.

independent of others, displaying one's strengths, defending oneself, and taking responsibility for solving one's own problems. *Juche* ideology—and the cult of personality associated with it—helped the Kim regime consolidate power at home through an emotional appeal to nationalism. This ideology stresses the superiority of all things Korean over all things foreign, including foreign ideologies, and inculcates hatred for the enemies of the state, the “hostile” class, including the U.S., South Korea and Japan.

The more recent “military first,” or *Songun* policy, is a newer pillar of the Kim regime, developed by Kim Jong-il in the 1990s. The “military first” ideology declares: “The gun barrel should be placed over the hammer and sickle,” which means the Korean People's Army (KPA) is the basis of North Korea's revolutionary strategy.<sup>26</sup> Kim Jong-il, in essence, co-opted the military by bestowing on it a large share of the national budget—between 25 percent and 30 percent of GDP.<sup>27</sup> In 1997, an editorial published in *Rodong Sinmun*, the North Korean Workers' Party official newspaper, stated that Kim Jong Il's “idea of attaching importance to the military affairs is the philosophy of the harmonious whole of the Workers' Party of Korea, the army and the people. The existence of a nation, a socialist state and a party is unthinkable without a strong army and vice versa.”<sup>28</sup> This military-first approach was codified in 1998 in a revised constitution, which granted the military the primary position in the Korean government and society.<sup>29</sup> As part of the military-first politics,

nuclear weapons are considered critical in bolstering the North's deterrence against adversaries with superior conventional forces.<sup>30</sup>

Today, Kim Jong-un, who, like his father, has no real military experience, is keen on continuing with a “military first” line, albeit in modified form. He has said, reviving a term coined by his grandfather, that now he is pursuing a *byungjin* policy—a parallel development policy of “economic prosperity and nuclear weapons.” Despite the name change, the military still remains Kim's most important priority even as he has been busy building ski resorts, a horse riding club, an amusement park, a water park, and a new airport—all the features of what Kim considers a modern state. In his first public speech in April 2012, Kim stressed the need to successfully accomplish the revolutionary cause of *Juche*, and declared that his “first, second, and third priorities are to reinforce the People's Army.”<sup>31</sup> The North's scarce resources continue to be spent on the military, on arms production and procurement, nuclear weapons and missiles, when, according to the South Korean government, a reduction of just five percent in the North's defense budget could resolve its food crisis. In the aftermath of the sixth “hydrogen” nuclear test in September 2017, the regime boasted that “the unique Songun politics embodying the *Juche* idea and the spirit of self-reliance have boosted the DPRK into a satellite manufacturer and launcher, one of the world's five powers with submarine-launched ballistic missile, one of the world's three powers possessed of the

<sup>26</sup> Paul French, *North Korea: State of Paranoia* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 319-344.

<sup>27</sup> Marcus Nolan et al., “Rigorous Speculation: The Collapse and Revival of the North Korean Economy,” *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, January 1999; Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, “Keeping Kim: How North Korea's Regime Stays in Power,” *Quarterly Journal of International Security* (July 2010).

<sup>28</sup> “Victory of socialism is guaranteed by strengthened people's army,” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, April 7, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig, *North Korea: Through the Looking Glass* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 2000), 118. Under the revised

Constitution, which dramatically diminished the role of the Party within the state and increased the functionality of the military organization, the National Defense Commission (NDC) has direct control of People's Security, the Armed Forces Ministry, and State Security, bypassing both the Party and the Cabinet.

<sup>30</sup> Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, “North Korea's Nuclear Politics,” *Current History*, September 2004, 273-279.

<sup>31</sup> “Kim Jong Un Calls for Holding Kim Jong Il in High Esteem as General Secretary of WPK Forever,” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, April 19, 2012, The National Committee on North Korea.

technology of mobile ICBM and a power which succeeded in the test of H-bomb to be loaded onto ICBM.”<sup>32</sup>

The *byungjin* policy is an attempt by Kim Jong-un to leave his own ideological mark. His focus on building modern amenities such as skating parks, pizzerias, and a dolphinarium—as well as nuclear weapons—is likely Kim’s attempt to change the narrative of the North as a poor, pitiable state to one that at least on the surface appears more normal, even affluent. But in essence, the regime’s worldview and ideology—more akin to far-right Japanese militarism than Marxism/Leninism—have remained largely the same over the three generations of the Kim family. Given the regime’s ideology, the North will almost certainly refuse denuclearization regardless of any inducements and threats Washington puts forth.

### Unification?

One of the most heatedly debated questions among Korea watchers today is about North Korea’s long-term commitment to unification, a vitally important goal since the regime’s inception. As Nicholas Eberstadt noted almost two decades ago in *The End of North Korea*, the continued existence of a rival Korean state on a shared peninsula ultimately poses a threat to the North’s legitimacy, authority, and security.<sup>33</sup> Without unification on its own terms, the North must go on living with a constant fear of either regime collapse or an eventual absorption by the freer, richer South Korea. The inescapable reality for the North is that the South will always pose the “clear and continuing danger of German-style hegemonic unification by absorption.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “DPRK Advancing along Road of Independence, Songun and Socialism,” *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, September 9, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt, *The End of North Korea* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Sung-Yoon Lee, Conclusion: South Korea is the Greatest Challenge to Kim Jong Il, “The Mythological Kingdom of North Korea,” *The*

Accordingly, the urgent priority accorded to the goal of unification has been made clear in the fundamental documents of both party and state. The preamble to the charter of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) declares that its task is to “(en)sure the complete victory of socialism in the northern half of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the accomplishment of the revolutionary goals of national liberation and the people's democracy in the entire area of the country.”<sup>35</sup> That means kicking U.S. troops out, dissolving the South Korean government, and communizing the entire Korean Peninsula by force.

But some Korea watchers now believe this unification argument is outdated and question whether unification is still Kim Jong-un’s ultimate goal. Their contention is that Kim is not aiming for unification because he must know that that unification on his terms is not a realistic possibility, given how much more prosperous and populous the South has become. Robert Kelly, for example, has argued that North Korea is not prepared to pay the costs of unification and that nuclear weapons are intended for defensive purposes.<sup>36</sup> Countering such arguments, scholars such as B. R. Myers have argued that “the regime has itself long identified unification as the end goal of its military-first policy,” and “for Westerners not being able to imagine something happening is not an evidence that the North has now given up its goal of unification on its own terms.”<sup>37</sup>

It is hardly far-fetched to imagine that the North might calculate that its ability to strike the U.S. with a nuclear missile might induce the U.S. to sign a peace treaty, and this could be a

*Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 140-141.

<sup>35</sup> “Chosŏn Rodongdang Kyuyak 조선로동당규약 [The Charter of the Workers' Party of Korea],” Chosŏn Rodongdang 조선로동당 [Workers' Party of Korea]. Voice of America, September 28, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Robert E. Kelly, “North Korea Does Not Seriously Seek Unification,” *The Interpreter*, January 9, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, B. R. Myers, “A Response to Twitterati,” updated January 9, 2018.

first step toward unifications on Pyongyang's terms. For the North, a peace treaty with Washington is the ultimate grand bargain that it has sought for decades. North Korea has steadfastly insisted on the dissolution of the United Nations Command and complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from the South so that the two Koreas may achieve unification without the interference of external powers.<sup>38</sup> This desire was symbolized by a North Korean orchestra playing "Our Wish Is Unification" in South Korea prior to the start of the Winter Olympics—a song that elicited an emotional reaction from South Korean concertgoers.<sup>39</sup>

The U.S. intelligence community shares that view that the North's ultimate goal is still to unify the Korean peninsula. In May 2017 testimony, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coates repeated the U.S. Intelligence Community's long-standing analysis that "Pyongyang's nuclear capabilities are intended for deterrence, international prestige, and coercive diplomacy," which means Pyongyang sees the acquisition of a nuclear-tipped ICBM as a way to increase its freedom of action on the Korean Peninsula free from an American threat.<sup>40</sup> As the National Intelligence Manager for East Asia, Scott Bray, stated in June 2017, "Kim probably judges that once he can strike the

<sup>38</sup> "N. Korea Calls for Replacing Korean War Armistice with Peace Treaty," *Yonhap News Agency*, May 29, 2013. On May 29, 2013, for example, the North has called for the replacement of the armistice with a formal peace treaty in its official paper, *Rodong Sinmun*, which cited "a pressing need to replace the Armistice Agreement, which is a relic of the war, with a permanent peace regime."

<sup>39</sup> Amy Qin, "Northern Korean Orchestra Gives Emotional Concert in the South," *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Dan Coates, "Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, May 11, 2017; Also cited in "The North Korean Nuclear Challenge: Military Options and Issue for Congress," Congressional Research Service, November 7, 2017, 10; Scott W. Bray, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons and Missile Capability," cited in Congressional Research Service "The North Korean Nuclear Challenge: Military Options and Issue for Congress," November 7, 2017.

U.S. mainland, he can deter attacks on his regime and perhaps coerce Washington into policy decisions that benefit Pyongyang and upset regional alliances—possibly even to attempt to press for the removal of U.S. forces from the peninsula."<sup>41</sup> CIA Director Mike Pompeo reiterated this view in a recent interview at the American Enterprise Institute, saying that Kim's ultimate goal remains "reunification of the peninsula under his authority."<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the actual prospects of unification on North Korea's terms, Pyongyang cannot give up the dream which underlies the state's very existence. Neither the North nor South envisages that the partition of the Peninsula will last forever. It is only a question of who will be in charge when the two Koreas eventually unify. If Pyongyang accepts that it will not run a unified Korea, it is implicitly conceding that Seoul will do so one day. This resignation could prove detrimental, even deadly, to the continued survivability of the state—so it will never be allowed as long as North Korea continues to exist in its present form.

### **Objectives behind provocations**

For decades, North Korea has been pursuing its essential objectives—recognition as a nuclear-weapons state, a peace treaty with Washington, and eventual reunification on its own terms—through a policy of brinkmanship. Its pattern under Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il was a familiar one: Provoke when Washington or Seoul seem distracted, up the ante in the face of international condemnation, and pivot back to some sort of peace offensive, which usually ends with dialogue and negotiation, culminating, finally, in concessions for the North. Such brinkmanship tactics made sense from the North's perspective. The U.S. and South Korea both have a long history of making concessions to the North in response to its bad behavior.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Mike Pompeo. "Intelligence beyond 2018: A conversation with CIA Director Mike Pompeo," AEI, January 23, 2018.

Under Kim Jong-un, however, the North seems to be bent on completing its nuclear program at all costs and, until now, has shunned dialogue and negotiation. In both public statements and private meetings, the current leadership has made it clear that denuclearization is off the table for discussion and there is nothing that Washington or Seoul could offer that would induce the North to abandon its nuclear arsenal. In one Track 1.5 meeting last summer that this author was part of, North Korean officials showed no signals of flexibility or willingness to negotiate. Instead, North Korean interlocutors presented a stark choice to the American delegation: “First accept us as a nuclear state, then we are prepared to talk about a peace treaty or to fight. We are ready for either.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite its unwillingness to negotiate away its nuclear weapons, North Korea embarked on another charm offensive at the Winter Olympics, sending a member of the Kim family—Kim Jong-un’s sister Kim Yo-jong—to the South for the first time and offering to host President Moon Jae-in for a summit in Pyongyang. The North’s goal is to separate Seoul from Washington without fundamentally altering its missile-and-nuclear programs or the repressive nature of the regime. Indeed such talks are seen in Pyongyang as a way to achieve its goal of unification on its own terms rather than a sign of softening.

The North’s strategy has largely worked even though it has not gotten a peace treaty from the U.S. or unified the peninsula. The North is a nuclear-weapons state and it remains standing, while other totalitarian regimes, from Eastern Europe to the Middle East, have been consigned to the ash heap of history. The Kim dynasty has shown itself to be shrewd, calculating and resilient. All indications are that it is acting rationally and that does not want to risk a major conflagration that could result in the regime’s demise. If foreign policy is designed to aid a

regime’s security, then North Korean foreign policy may be judged a success, at least for now.

## Conclusion

Some Korea watchers have insisted on taking a benign view of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program—insisting that is for defensive purposes only and that the North has given up hopes of conquering the South—for fear that if the nuclear weapons program is seen in a more alarming light, the Trump administration will respond with a first strike. But one can acknowledge that the North is acquiring nuclear weapons not only to guarantee regime survival but also to enhance its ability to coerce the United States and South Korea—and *still* conclude that a preventative strike is a bad idea.

All the evidence indicates that the Kim Jong-un regime is on its way to perfecting a nuclear arsenal meant to threaten the U.S. homeland, blackmail the U.S. to decouple it from South Korea, and force Seoul to make concessions and one day capitulate to Pyongyang. Moreover, the Trump administration’s concern that the North Korean regime could sell these weapons to state and non-state actors is real and legitimate. North Korea is a proven serial proliferator that has sold almost everything it has for hard currency. Although there is no evidence yet that the North has sold nuclear weapons or nuclear fissile material to countries like Iran or Syria, we know there has been extensive clandestine ballistic-missile cooperation between North Korea, Iran, and Syria. The North even assisted in constructing a covert nuclear reactor in Syria that was bombed by the Israeli Air Force in 2007. Therefore, it’s entirely possible that the Kim regime, increasingly desperate as economic sanctions bite, could one day try to sell nuclear weapons, materials, or expertise to state or non-state actors. There is also a risk of the regime proliferating chemical and biological weapons.

Moreover, once the North completes its nuclear program without paying a substantial price and “gets away with it,” surely it is reasonable to assume that this could inspire

<sup>43</sup> Bruce Klingner and Sue Mi Terry, “We participated in talks with North Korean representatives. This is what we learned,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2017.



other rogue actors, such as Iran, to pursue nuclear capabilities too. And as North Korea strengthens its nuclear arsenal, South Korea and Japan may lose confidence in the U.S. nuclear umbrella and feel compelled to field their own nuclear weapons.

But while these concerns are real, the fact remains that a kinetic strike could have potentially catastrophic consequences and is unlikely to eliminate the North's nuclear and missile capabilities, many of them hidden in covert facilities and buried in impenetrable bunkers. The U.S. should not commit suicide today because it is worried about being murdered at some point in the future. Rather than attack North Korea preemptively, the U.S. should pursue a coercive strategy that involves enhanced and sustained U.S. and global economic and political pressure on the North. This means, first and foremost, enhancing and expanding the financial sanctions campaign, to include the application of secondary sanctions against Chinese or other third-party entities assisting North Korea. As part of this approach, the U.S. should significantly enhance its alliances with Seoul and Tokyo with integrated missile defense, intelligence sharing, and anti-submarine warfare and strike capabilities to convey to North Korea that an attack on one is an attack on all.

The U.S. should also build a maritime coalition around North Korea involving rings of South Korean, Japanese, and broader U.S. assets to intercept any nuclear missiles or proscribed technologies leaving North Korea. China and Russia should be prepared to face the consequences if they allow North Korean proliferation across their borders. Washington should issue an unambiguous message that there will be meaningful consequences to the North, its facilitators, and recipient entities and countries that proliferate WMD materials, equipment or expertise. To make such threats credible, the U.S. should step up its military preparedness so that military options are credible should they become necessary down the road.

Beyond tightening sanctions and strengthening deterrence, the U.S. should take concerted action to bring North Korea's crimes against humanity to the attention of the world. A robust international human-rights campaign in support of the world's most hideously abused population would further isolate the regime, just as the anti-apartheid campaign did against South Africa in the 1980s. This human-rights campaign should also be directed to help the people of North Korea break the information blockade imposed by the state. The U.S. can do more to step up radio broadcasts and other means, some of them covert, to transmit information to North Korea. An American information operation should include targeting the elites as well as average North Koreans. We need to make it clear to the elites that economic opportunity and long-term prospects for survival will be denied to them as long as Kim holds onto the nuclear arsenal. But our communication could also provide credible assurance of amnesty and a better quality of life in South Korea to those who defect. The point is to get a message across to elites that there is an alternative path that can safeguard their survival.

This strategy would continue to squeeze Pyongyang while deterring it from aggressive acts. At some point, the North may want to enter into a negotiation with the U.S. Dialogue with North Korea will probably become necessary to clarify positions and manage crises, but we should be careful that negotiations with the North are not held prematurely and they be undertaken only when the North is finally willing to abandon its nuclear program. In the past 25 years, there have been numerous negotiations, including two-party talks, three-party talks, four-party talks and six-party talks. The U.S. and its allies offered extensive economic and diplomatic inducements in return for Pyongyang simply beginning to comply with its denuclearization pledges—without success. The best way to engage in negotiations is after a comprehensive, rigorous, and sustained international pressure strategy.

This strategy of deterrence and gradual rollback of the North Korean threat is a sustained, long-term approach that plays to U.S.

strengths, exploits our opponent's vulnerabilities, and sends a message to rogue regimes around the world that there is a meaningful cost to nuclear proliferation—while avoiding the pitfalls of more failed diplomacy or of a potentially calamitous conflict. And it is grounded in a realistic reading of North Korean intentions rather than wishing that the North

Korean leadership would think as we want them to.

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# Former Defense Secretary William Perry on why we didn't go to war with North Korea

By Barbara Demick

Originally published in the *Los Angeles Times* on April 14, 2017.

In 1994, the United States was on the brink of war with North Korea. The Clinton administration had intelligence that North Korea was about to move fuel rods from its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, to a reprocessing center — the first step in making a nuclear weapon.

The Pentagon drew up plans to destroy the facility with cruise missiles and F-117 Stealth fighters. William J. Perry, who as Defense secretary had drawn up the plan, ultimately decided not to proceed. Although he believed the Pentagon could safely destroy the plant without spreading radiation, he also thought that North Korea would retaliate against South Korea, and that the hostilities could engulf the region in a cataclysmic war.

The Clinton administration instead struck a deal to provide North Korea with energy assistance in exchange for a nuclear freeze. That deal fell apart in 2002 amid evidence that North Korea was cheating. Perry, now an 88-year-old professor emeritus at Stanford University, remains convinced that the Clinton administration did the right thing in averting military action, although North Korea's nuclear program has continued to expand.

In an interview from Palo Alto, he explained his reasoning back then and his fears for the future.

**With the Trump administration reportedly considering military action to stop North Korea's nuclear program, we are in a similar situation. Do you feel like this is 'Groundhog Day,' the same dilemmas repeating themselves?**

The situation is different in many respects today than it was then, but I think the answer is still the same. Which is it's not yet time to conduct strikes against North Korea. That time might come, but I think there is still room for creative and constructive diplomacy. The reason I feel so strongly about that is the consequences of a strike. This is not like the Syrian operation where we conducted a strike which we think was relatively cost-free to us militarily. In the case of North Korea, for whatever benefits we might accrue from the strike, and they might be substantial benefits, there is a very significant downside. Chapter one in this book could be a happy story: chapter two is what we have to worry about.

**So what would happen after the U.S. conducts an airstrike against North Korea?**

I think with high confidence, there is going to be a military reaction from North Korea. Not a nuclear attack as they've threatened, rather a conventional but still quite destructive attack against South Korea. We have to care about South Koreans as much as we worry about U.S. citizens; they are our allies and they count. There will be significant military consequence for South Korea. That's chapter two and it's not a very happy story, but chapter three could be catastrophic.

**How could it get worse? Aren't U.S. and South Korean forces combined much stronger than North Korea?**

Our troops are in South Korea. If North Korea attacks, we do respond to it. It could start as a relatively minor conflict, but it is all too likely to escalate into a bigger war and

ultimately into a nuclear war. I have no doubt that in a war with North Korea, the U.S. and South Korea have quite superior forces and we would win. But let's raise the question what North Korea's objectives are. Because I believe this is not a crazy regime; it is an evil regime, it is a reckless regime, but it's not crazy. They are oriented almost entirely around regime survival and therefore they are not going to undertake an unprovoked nuclear attack against South Korea anyway. That's bluster. They are not suicidal. They recognize if they do that their leaders will be killed and their country devastated. They know there will be a nuclear response against them. But if we get into a conventional war and they start losing it, and they see the regime falling anyway, then they might take some last, desperate Armageddon approach. From all of my experience with them, and I worked with the North Korean problem now for several decades and I've met with North Korean leaders many

times, I think this is a sobering and a worrisome forecast of what could happen.

**Are you opposed to military action in North Korea under any circumstance?**

I am not opposed to military action forever. I think it is something we always ought to hold as an option. But I think it premature. I think we still have significant diplomatic steps, but it must be in conjunction with China. If you put the incentive and disincentive package together, and we add China to the mix, we have enough. We've never been able to get them to cooperate in the past, but now might be the time. First of all, I think North Korea is taking us seriously, fearing that we might conduct military action. Secondly, and more importantly even, China is now concerned. If we make the right proposal and they join forces with us, it will be a very powerful diplomatic approach. The opportunity is there; I hope we don't muff it.



# Sanctions on North Korea

Marcus Noland

Executive Vice President  
Peterson Institute for International Affairs

The following is a transcription of a weekly podcast conducted Nov. 29, 2017 as part of the *Trade Talks* series of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, with Marcus Noland, Executive Vice President of the Peterson Institute and author of *Hard Target: Sanctions, Inducements, and the Case of North Korea*.

Conducting the interview are Soumaya Keynes, Economics and Trade Correspondent, *The Economist*, and Co-host, *Trade Talks*, and Chad Bown, Senior Fellow at the Peterson Institute and Co-host, *Trade Talks*.

## SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA

**MS. KEYNES:** Hello. You are listening to an episode of Trade Talks, a podcast by the economics of trade policy. I am Soumaya Keynes, economics and trade correspondent for The Economist in London.

**MR. BOWN:** And I'm Chad Bown, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington.

**MS. KEYNES:** This week we are going to talk to Marcus Noland, a colleague of Chad's at the Peterson Institute and author of *Hard Target*, a book about North Korea, trade and sanctions.

**MR. BOWN:** We'll discuss North Korea's economic relationship with the outside world, how some have tried to use trade to make them stop their nuclear program and why that hasn't exactly worked.

**MS. KEYNES:** Marcus, welcome.

**MR. NOLAND:** Thank you. My pleasure.

**MS. KEYNES:** Okay. So first of all, could you just summarize very briefly what is the current situation with North Korea?

**MR. NOLAND:** Current situation is a mess. North Korea is systematically developing nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems. We were most recently reminded of this with an ICBM launch that in principle is capable of striking the radio studio here in Washington, D.C. where I'm sitting. The United States has recently put North Korea back on its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

And one gets the sense that in the midst of all this the players are not all on the same page. The United States President Donald Trump has engaged in a name-calling battle with the North Korean leader and in a high-profile speech at the UN General Assembly, mentioned the possibility of totally wiping out the country. In South Korea, a new progressive government would like to pursue a more pro-engagement policy towards the North, and China and Japan seem to be pursuing policies that are excessively narrow in terms of their definition of national interest. In short, we have a looming crisis in the context of real disarray among the major players.

**MR. BOWN:** So before we get to the story of how we actually got here today and maybe to give us a flavor of this regime, could you talk a little bit about what it's like to be an economist working on North Korea?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, working on North Korea is akin to writing fiction because little of what you say can actually be falsified. To give you an example, in North Korea basic national accounts, even international trade statistics are considered national secrets, are not published. The economy has some peculiar characteristics including reliance on unconventional and even illicit and illegal ways of earning revenue such as engaging in smuggling, counterfeiting and nowadays cybercrime.

When people ask me where I get the data I use, I tell them I just make it up. I mean I do a little better than that. For example, in the case of trade statistics, we can use something called Mirror statistics to compile what we think North Korea is trading, but even that's hazardous. Every year somebody in some statistical agency around the world gets North and South Korea confused. And the volume of North Korean trade is so small relative to South Korea that those recording errors absolutely swamp the actual data.

Another approach that I've been involved in is to use survey data. I've been involved in two large-scale surveys of North Korean refugees. People tend to look askance of refugee surveys, but for the purposes I'm looking at which is essentially asking the refugees how did you earn your money and how did you spend it, I think these refugee surveys can actually be quite revealing about the actual workings of the North Korean economy.

I've also been involved in formal surveys of Chinese enterprises operating in North Korea as well as South Korean firms operating in North Korea. And again, we glean a lot about the actual workings of the North Korean economy by talking to these participants. In short, doing economics on North Korea in many ways is as much art as it is science.

**MS. KEYNES:** Okay. So let's step back. How did we get here? How did North Korea come to be so close, so secretive, so shutoff?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, North Korea or formally the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established in 1948 in the wake of the Second World War. It was the zone of Soviet military occupation when Korea, which had been colonized by the Japanese, was liberated. And it inherited its institutions from the Stalin-era Soviet Union. Internally it was notable only to the degree that markets were repressed. Externally it was concerned about domination by foreign powers. So, for example, it never joined the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, the kind of club of socialist countries, and indeed it deliberately timed its central plans to frustrate linkage with those other socialist states. And what developed was the closest thing we've ever seen to real autarky.

The North Koreans, for example, used to produce radios and televisions that had no tuners. They were pre-tuned to a specific frequency, you just flipped on the power switch and you got state propaganda. Needless to say there's not a lot of demand for those devices in the world market. This strategy of emphasizing self-determination was called Juche or which is normally translated as self-reliance. But for all the protestations of self-reliance, North Korea has always been dependent on external patrons. First it was the Soviet Union, later China, more recently South Korea and a more diversified set of sources.

**MR. BOWN:** What happened in the 1980s with changes that occurred when the Soviet Union fell? How did that impact North Korea?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, the Soviets had been supplying the North Koreans with a lot of aid, most importantly oil which was used not only for transportation but importantly as a feedstock for chemical fertilizers and this turns out to be of critical importance in the 1990s. But by the mid-1980s, the Soviets were getting fed up and they started to demand that the North Koreans begin repaying those debts and they started cutting them off. And sometime in the mid to late '80s, it appears that net resource transfers turned negative. Then in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, that amounted to a tremendous macroeconomic shock to the North Korean economy.

**MS. KEYNES:** How did the government in North Korea respond?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, the short answer is it didn't. And in this context the comparison with the Vietnamese could be instructive. The Vietnamese were facing the same set of incentives, the Soviets were also cutting them off in terms of aid. But instead of just standing pat, the Vietnamese initiated reform process of Doi Moi, they expanded their exports, and so on.

For reasons that we may never know until the regime falls and somebody gets access to the archives, the North Korean leadership just didn't seem to grasp what was going on around them and stood still.

**MR. BOWN:** So it sounds like they're in autarky essentially at that period on now cut off from the Soviet Union, so how does that work out for them?

**MR. NOLAND:** It was an absolute disaster. They had this national ideology of Juche or self-reliance and, for example, they pursued an understandable goal of national food security through what we as economists would consider an irrational policy of self-sufficiency. It was irrational because North Korea is largely mountainous and because of its latitude and because it gets these cold winds coming off Siberia, it has a generally cold climate, very limited opportunities for double cropping.

So in order to achieve self-sufficiency given those inauspicious conditions, the North Koreans really had to push yields to the absolute maximum and they developed an agricultural system that was highly dependent on industrial inputs, tremendous applications of fertilizer and other agricultural chemicals, reliance on electrically powered irrigation that had been installed by Soviet engineers and so on, so when they got hit with that macroeconomic shock and when the oil supply started to dwindle, the industrial economy pulled the agricultural economy down with it.

And as agricultural yields began to fall, the North Koreans responded by putting more and more marginal land into production, they literally started cutting trees off the hillsides. That then contributed to river silting, silting of canals and reservoirs, and exacerbated the normal seasonal pattern of flooding that occurs on the Korean Peninsula. The regime initiated something called a Let's eat two meals a day campaign and finally in 1994 approached first Japan then South Korea and eventually the United Nations seeking food aid.

The reason I mention the floods is the floods played an important political role. So the country was hit by big floods in '95 and '96 and it allowed North Koreans as well as some of their people sympathetic to them in outside countries to portray what was going on as a natural disaster but in fact it was the culmination of 50 years of economic mismanagement. The famine actually began before the floods. And the famine ultimately took, we estimate, 600,000 to a million people's lives or roughly 3 to 5 percent of the population. It was the worst peacetime famine in an industrial or semi-industrial country in the 20th century.

**MS. KEYNES:** How did the famine affect North Korea's relationship with the outside world?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, the famine had profound effects both internally and externally and actually the internal effects may even be greater. So what happened was, to be blunt, if you played by the rules you died. To access food, small scale social units, families, small military units, party offices, municipal government offices all began operating in entrepreneurial fashion oftentimes engaged in what was technically illegal behavior to access food. So the marketization in the North Korean economy that we've observed over the last 25 years is fundamentally a product of state failure, it's not the product of any top-down reform process. And as a consequence, the state has always been ambivalent about it.

Now in terms of the external relations, one of the aspects of this expansion of entrepreneurial activity was the expansion of nonregulated trade with China. Initially it was barter trade to obtain grain. Later it monetized and it spread from grain to a broader array of consumer goods.

Aid was also very important. At its peak, aid in principle fed one-third of the population. But the reason that aid was really important was, remember, markets were illegal, now you have aid coming in which in the context of a famine has astronomical value. But you can only appropriate those rents if there are markets in which to sell the aid. So now you have parts of the elite who have an interest in seeing markets develop because that's how they can get rich. So the famine had absolutely profound effects, both on North Korea's internal organization and institutions as well as its external relations with the rest of the world.

**MS. KEYNES:** Okay. And alongside all of this at some point North Korea starts trying really hard to develop its nuclear capacity.

**MR. NOLAND:** The founder of North Korea, the founding leader of North Korea and the grandfather of the current leader, Kim Jong-un was a man named Kim Il-sung. Kim Il-sung had been a low-level anti-Japanese guerrilla fighter sort of employed by the Red Army during the Second World War and as someone fighting against the Japanese he was tremendously impressed by the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He'd spent his whole life fighting against Japanese colonialism and along come these Americans with these atomic weapons and they bring Imperial Japan to its knees. So he was very impressed. And there was a long interest in developing nuclear weaponry.

They had a certain amount of nonmilitary support for developing experimental research reactors and so on from both the Soviets and a bit from the Chinese, and they started to develop nuclear weapons and a crisis was averted in 1994 through a bilateral deal between the United States and North Korea called the Agreed Framework. That deal held for about a decade until a crisis broke in 2002 with the revelation of a second secret nuclear program.

**MS. KEYNES:** And just to be clear, the crisis is because the Americans do not want the North Koreans to have nuclear capability.

**MR. NOLAND:** The Americans don't want it, the South Koreans don't want it, the Japanese don't want it, the Russians actually don't want it, even the Chinese probably don't really want it either. There's nobody except the North Koreans who think that North Korea having nuclear weapons is a really good idea.

**MS. KEYNES:** Sorry, I interrupted you. Back to 2002.

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, it's simply in 2002 there was a crisis, there was an agreement in principle to basically freeze the North Korean nuclear program in 2005. The North Koreans defected from that agreement and essentially we spent the last 12 years trying to get back to the 2005 ante.

**MR. BOWN:** So in theory the fact that North Korea wasn't completely closed off in terms of its trade with the rest of the world, it was trading during this period with China, with South Korea meant it gave some other country some leverage that it could potentially use. So how did that work out?

**MR. NOLAND:** Sanctions to the North Korea face a variety of problems in practice. One set of problems has to do with multilateral coordination. North Korea has been very skilled at playing various countries off against each other and it's hard to sort of heard all the cats in the same direction. Second problem is particularly acute in democratic societies, it's a problem of the credibility of commitments that you can have a change in government and while one government committed to a certain policy or course of action, a successive government may want to undo this. And it's made worse in the case of North Korea. The same sort of incentive problems bedevil engagement.

You have problems of coordination across countries as well as problems of the credibility of commitments, especially when it has to do with kind of lumpy things like shutting down a nuclear program. So who goes first, do you pay them upfront and then have them refuse, which is the accusation that has been made in the past about North Korean behavior or do some how you try to persuade them that they really need to dismantle their nuclear program and we will pay you, we really mean it. So both sanctions and inducements have these basic problems of coordination and credibility.

**MR. BOWN:** So you mentioned herding cats, so tell us about the various players on the external side that were trying to sanction North Korea and the difficulties that came in there.

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, the problem for the United States is that North Korea has been under pretty heavy bilateral sanctions since the outbreak of the Korean War in the early 1950s. So the U.S. didn't have much to sanction itself and so it was really trying to get North Korea's major trade partners, which at the time were China, South Korea and Japan to sanction. It wasn't that much of a problem in the case of Japanese, they had a narrow agenda having to do with Japanese citizens that had been abducted by North Korea, but in general the Japanese were not averse to sanctioning North Korea.

China and South Korea were a different matter however. China for all sorts of reasons sees the continuation of the North Korean regime as in its geopolitical interests and has been reluctant to impose sanctions. South Korea, the issue of sanctions is controversial domestically. And depending on whether you had a conservative or so-called progressive government, you would either get a government that was pretty oriented toward sanctioning North Korea or a government that almost wanted to engage unconditionally.

And the problem for the United States was, to use another metaphor, every time we tried to push North Korea up against the wall and give them a simple choice, either give up your nuclear weapons and integrate yourself into the global community in a prosperous and respectable manner or retain your nuclear weapons and be cold, hungry and in the dark, China, and at times South Korea, would move the wall backwards so we could never really put them up against the wall and force that choice.

**MR. BOWN:** So, Marc, if these trade sanctions were so difficult for the Americans to apply, did they experiment with other types of sanctions instead?

**MR. NOLAND:** Because we had already sanctioned most of North Korea's goods trade starting in 2005 we really shifted towards financial sanctions. The basic idea is that if a bank or financial institution in some other country was dealing with North Koreans involved in the nuclear missile programs, we would go after them labeling them a money laundering concern. At that point the bank has a simple choice. Maybe it's doing \$1 billion worth of business in the United States and \$10 million worth of business in

North Korea, so commercial logic just dictates that you drop the North Koreans and preserve the more important commercial interest in the United States.

The financial sanctions act differently because what you're doing is you are—it's sort of the same logic that the bank has a greater stake in its relationship with the United States than North Korea. The finance ministry or the central bank has a greater stake in its relationship with the U.S. Treasury or the Fed than it does with the North Korean counterparts. So again they're liable to go along with the sanctions because they have a more important agenda with the United States and it's not worth disrupting relations with the United States on more important financial issues over the North Koreans. So increasingly our sanctions are targeted towards the financial sector which essentially leverage the size and depth of U.S. financial markets to get other players around the world to do what we want them to do.

**MS. KEYNES:** Okay. So we've got trade sanctions, financial sanctions. Who are these aimed at? Was it powerful North Koreans, was it more general? Who are they trying to squeeze?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, in the case of the UN sanctions, until recently, the bulk of the UN sanctions were what I would describe defensive in nature. They were sanctions explicitly aimed at disrupting North Korean nuclear programs and I think they're completely justified. Beyond that, there was concern that the imposition of sanctions might hurt the average North Korean and they may be poor people, they have no real voice or ability to hold their regime accountable. So there was a movement toward so-called targeted sanctions that would be aimed at the elite.

And so for example, we had sanctions that prevented the exportation of luxury goods to North Korea, but the fact of the matter is those sanctions seem to have very little effect. And in the face of North Korean intransigence in the nuclear and missile fields, more recent UN sanctions have become much broader. So now we're sanctioning North Korean exports of minerals, we're sanctioning North Korean exports of textiles and apparel, which will clearly hurt average North Koreans who work in those industries. The basic problem is again as in the famine period is the North Korean government is fundamentally unaccountable to its citizenry.

**MR. BOWN:** So sanctions during that period don't seem to be working for a number of different reasons that you've explained to us, but it's also partly North Korea's trade relationship is changing fundamentally during that period. So now we're talking about the 2000s and to the more recent period. So can you explain to us what's going on there?

**MR. NOLAND:** North Korea is natural trade partner of South Korea followed by Japan and China and then the United States, you know, trailing distantly. But what happened was China emerged as the predominant trade partner basically because of concerns in South Korea about trade with North Korea and the sort of politics of that. Then in 2010, in response to some military provocations, the South Koreans imposed sanctions. So South Korean trade with North Korea basically dropped to zero. And in that situation, trade with China began to take up an ever larger share. That was reinforced by the fact that North Korea largely exports to China natural resource products.

So in the context of the global commodity boom with the prices of those commodities rising, North Korea's trade with China grew until the point today where China accounts for 90 percent or more of recorded trade. Now that trade has actually been going down in the last couple of years, a product of slowing Chinese growth, a decline in commodity prices and possibly even the impact of sanctions. But China still remains really the only game in town accounting for 90 percent of North Korea's trade.

**MS. KEYNES:** Can I just probe a bit more about what exactly is crossing between these two countries? Is it you know things like coal?

**MR. NOLAND:** North Korea exports to China, primarily mineral products, that's mainly coal, but also a wide range of other types of mineral, iron ore, zinc, magnesite, lead, copper, gold, rare earths, all kinds of things.

**MS. KEYNES:** They're really basic products, essentially?

**MR. NOLAND:** Yes. North Korea is essentially a 21st century hunter-gatherer society. It digs things out of the ground and it gathers a few other natural resource products like ginseng or some marine products, and it sells to China. In return, it gets oil, grain and consumer goods. More recently, there has been growth of some manufactured exports that are basically through Chinese invested factories mainly very, very, very bottom end garments, mostly T-shirts. Those things are now under sanctions. So it's not clear how much longer you're going to see this kind of trade in minerals as well as the trade in textiles and apparel.

**MR. BOWN:** So tell us about the Trump administration strategy. So the US doesn't really trade with North Korea at all, so what's he doing by putting pressure on the Chinese here?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, quite honestly, the Trump administration doesn't seem to have much of a strategy beyond cajoling the Chinese and possibly increasing secondary sanctions on Chinese firms and enterprises engaged in trade especially in these military fields with the North Koreans.

**MS. KEYNES:** Okay. So you don't sound that positive, but what are the reasons to think that this kind of indirect pressure could work?

**MR. NOLAND:** Honestly, I'm skeptical that a strategy of bluster, cajoling and increased secondary sanctions is going to change Chinese behavior towards North Korea in any fundamental way. I think that if China changes its policy towards North Korea, it's going to come through the realization in China that North Korean behavior is really putting Chinese interests at risk by encouraging an even greater US military presence in Northeast Asia and even tighter cooperation between the United States, South Korea and Japan.

Now having said that, the United States does have some kind of leverage over China. Again, I'm skeptical I doubt that this would come through the sort of standard trade relationship that we're going to put, you know, some sort of trade protections on China if it doesn't change its North Korea policy. But I do see that the United States could quite aggressively ramp up its policy; secondary sanctions against third parties.

The United States recently had an executive order that greatly increases the Treasury scope for pursuing this kind of action and with 90% of North Korea's trade being with China one would expect that many of the firms getting caught up in these secondary sanctions will be Chinese firms. I think that's more likely to be the mechanism through which the United States signals increasing displeasure with China rather than applying direct trade protections on Chinese exports to the United States.

**MS. KEYNES:** What might work?

**MR. NOLAND:** Well, North Korea regards possessions of nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems as absolutely essential to the political survival of the regime and it's not clear that really there's any price that they would accept for the elimination of those programs. If there was to be a deal, it would probably be in the context of a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War. So there's never been a

Korean peace treaty, it's still just an armistice. You could kind of imagine a package which would essentially amount to a kind of rigorous freeze.

What the parties would do would be to recognize the statements that the North and South Korean governments have made on multiple occasions of their commitment to a nuclear free Korean peninsula, and that commitment to a nuclear free Korean peninsula would establish the end state. And in the medium run, North Korea will continue to possess some kind of nuclear capability.

But North Korea will agree to no new development, no new production, no new testing, and most critically from the standpoint of the United States and other countries, no proliferation beyond the Korean peninsula. And then during this medium run period, the North and South Koreans work together to establish more cordial relations, a kind of reasonable basis for national reconciliation and potentially a national unification.

Others such as United States, China, perhaps Russia, perhaps the European Union provide North Korea with various sorts of security guarantees and financial assistance; getting them into the World Bank and so on. It's a second best solution. It's not optimal, but it's something that we could probably live with.

And here in the United States, it's conceivable that the domestic political forces are aligned that we could have an eventual Nixon-goes-to-China moment. After all, our president regards himself as the ultimate deal maker and this would be a way for him to get the Nobel Peace Prize and actually have done something to accomplish it unlike his predecessor with whom he appears to be obsessed.

**MS. KEYNES:** What do you think that North Korea is losing by continuing along this path of near autarky?

**MR. NOLAND:** The tragedy of North Korea is that North Korea is a chronically food insecure country in the middle of the world's most dynamic economic neighborhood. If North Korea could open up, if it could have foreign investment—see North Koreans there's a certain latent potential in the economy, but they lack the neural connections to the outside world to turn that latent potential into a product the world actually wants to buy.

So if you could get foreign direct investment into North Korea, if you could establish North Korea as part of global supply chain networks, the economy could potentially just take off and one would observe an enormous improvement in standards of living and reduction in poverty. That's the real tragedy of the country that it has a political system that allows it to continue decade after decade to pursue grotesquely suboptimal policies, and every single day that goes by North Korea falls further and further behind its neighbors, and that's really the tragedy of North Korea.

**MS. KEYNES:** Pretty depressing stuff and I think that is all from *Trade Talks*.



# The Price of War With North Korea

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During his first official trip to Asia last month, President Trump issued a stern warning to North Korea: “Do not underestimate us. And do not try us.” But for his part, Mr. Trump should not underestimate the steep human cost of initiating a war against Pyongyang.

The key problem for the United States is the likely possibility that North Korea has the missiles to deliver nuclear bombs to South Korea and Japan. If one of these weapons were to reach its target, an entire city would be annihilated.

And even if an American first strike knocked out North Korea’s nuclear capacity, millions of South Korean civilians, and American and South Korean soldiers, would be vulnerable to retaliation with conventional or chemical weapons. Pyongyang could devastate Seoul and kill tens of thousands of people. North Korea may have as many as 250 mobile missile launchers, some of which could fire nuclear-tipped missiles. If some of these mobile units were dispersed at the time of an American attack, it’s unlikely that the United States could destroy all of them before one fires a missile. America has not had much success in finding and destroying mobile missile launchers in recent wars.

An American attack that truly caught North Korea by surprise could minimize the effectiveness of a North Korean counterattack — but not eliminate the possibility. And surprise would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. North Korea probably has reliable intelligence sources reporting on activity in South Korea and Japan that could warn of an attack. And news

reports from the United States and elsewhere, or the intelligence agencies of other countries like China and Russia, could also warn Pyongyang.

To plan a surprise, the United States would have to make as few visible preparations as possible. Washington could not significantly increase its forces in the region without raising alarms in the North. The South Koreans would have to be kept in the dark, and they could make no preparations for war. Nor could American civilians be alerted and evacuated from South Korea. Any preparations would have to be masked behind other more normal activities such as training exercises.

But the surprise attack would still require large numbers of powerful, precise, concrete-piercing munitions to destroy the hardened bases that store North Korean missiles and nuclear warheads. Only American strategic bombers — B-2s and B-1Bs, which take hours to reach North Korea from Guam, or longer from bases in the United States — could do this job. And the bombers would require considerable support from aerial tankers.

It is difficult to estimate how many bombers it would take because there is little public information about North Korean military bases.

My own estimate, based on marrying published estimates of the number of North Korean missile launchers to past American practice in deploying such systems, is that an initial attack could require at least two dozen bombers, capable of carrying nearly 500 one-ton precision guided bombs, or smaller numbers of larger weapons.

American submarines could move close enough to the North Korean coastline to launch cruise missiles while the bombers are en route. This would minimize the chance that North Korea's mobile weapons are moved before the bombers arrive and would suppress some of the North Korean air-defense weapons.

But the overall effort would be so large that trying to catch the North Koreans by surprise would be a high-risk gamble. And the first wave of American assaults would have to be focused on attacking nuclear infrastructure, at the expense of dismantling conventional weapons.

Thus, even if an American attack on the North's nuclear weapons were entirely successful, North Korea would have the opportunity to retaliate with conventional forces against unprepared soldiers and civilians in South Korea. In most scenarios, it is all but inevitable that many thousands of civilians, and American and South Korean soldiers, would die.

A surprise American nuclear attack would offer the greatest chance of eliminating the North Korean nuclear arsenal and of preventing a conventional counterattack. America's nuclear weapons are quite accurate and always ready for action.

But the detonation of even a small number of nuclear weapons in North Korea would produce hellish results. The United States would make itself an international pariah for decades, if not centuries. It is entirely possible that the American military personnel would even resist the order to execute such an attack. For strategic, humanitarian and constitutional reasons, a first-strike nuclear option should not even be on the table (other than to forestall an imminent nuclear attack from North Korea).

The complexity, risks and costs of a military strike against North Korea are too high. A combination of diplomacy and deterrence, based on the already impressive strength of South Korean and United States conventional and nuclear forces, is a wise alternative.

# The Korean Missile Crisis: Why Deterrence Is Still the Best Option

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It is time for the U.S. government to admit that it has failed to prevent North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach the United States. North Korea no longer poses a nonproliferation problem; it poses a nuclear deterrence problem. The gravest danger now is that North Korea, South Korea, and the United States will stumble into a catastrophic war that none of them wants.

The world has traveled down this perilous path before. In 1950, the Truman administration contemplated a preventive strike to keep the Soviet Union from acquiring nuclear weapons but decided that the resulting conflict would resemble World War II in scope and that containment and deterrence were better options. In the 1960s, the Kennedy administration feared that Chinese leader Mao Zedong was mentally unstable and proposed a joint strike against the nascent Chinese nuclear program to the Soviets. (Moscow rejected the idea.) Ultimately, the United States learned to live with a nuclear Russia and a nuclear China. It can now learn to live with a nuclear North Korea.

Doing so will not be risk free, however. Accidents, misperceptions, and volatile leaders could all too easily cause disaster. The Cold War offers important lessons in how to reduce these risks by practicing containment and deterrence wisely. But officials in the Pentagon and the White House face a new and unprecedented challenge: they must deter North Korean leader Kim Jong Un while also preventing U.S. President Donald Trump from stumbling into

war. U.S. military leaders should make plain to their political superiors and the American public that any U.S. first strike on North Korea would result in a devastating loss of American and South Korean lives. And civilian leaders must convince Kim that the United States will not attempt to overthrow his regime unless he begins a war. If the U.S. civilian and military leaderships perform these tasks well, the same approach that prevented nuclear catastrophe during the Cold War can deter Pyongyang until the day that communist North Korea, like the Soviet Union before it, collapses under its own weight.

## **Danger of Death**

The international relations scholar Robert Litwak has described the current standoff with North Korea as “the Cuban missile crisis in slow motion,” and several pundits, politicians, and academics have repeated that analogy. But the current Korean missile crisis is even more dangerous than the Cuban one. For one thing, the Cuban missile crisis did not involve a new country becoming a nuclear power. In 1962, the Soviet Union was covertly stationing missiles and nuclear warheads in Cuba when U.S. intelligence discovered the operation. During the resulting crisis, Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro feared an imminent U.S. air strike and invasion and wrote to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev advocating a nuclear strike on the United States “to eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear legitimate defense, however harsh and terrible the solution would be.” When Khrushchev received the message, he

told a meeting of his senior leadership, “This is insane; Fidel wants to drag us into the grave with him!” Luckily, the Soviet Union maintained control of its nuclear weapons, and Castro did not possess any of his own; his itchy fingers were not on the nuclear trigger.

Kim, in contrast, already presides over an arsenal that U.S. intelligence agencies believe contains as many as 60 nuclear warheads. Some uncertainty still exists about whether North Korea can successfully mount those weapons on a missile capable of hitting the continental United States, but history cautions against wishful thinking. The window of opportunity for a successful U.S. attack to stop the North Korean nuclear program has closed.

At the time of the Cuban missile crisis, both the American and the Soviet nuclear war plans were heavily geared toward preemption. Each country’s system featured a built-in option to launch nuclear weapons if officials believed that an enemy attack was imminent and unavoidable. This produced a danger that the strategist Thomas Schelling called “the reciprocal fear of surprise attack.” That fear was why Khrushchev was so alarmed when a U.S. U-2 spy plane accidentally flew into Soviet airspace during the crisis. As he wrote to U.S. President John F. Kennedy on the final day of the crisis: “Is it not a fact that an intruding American plane could be easily taken for a nuclear bomber, which might push us to a fateful step?”

Today, the world faces an even more complex and dangerous problem: a three-way fear of surprise attack. North Korea, South Korea, and the United States are all poised to launch preemptive strikes. In such an unstable situation, the risk that an accident, a false warning, or a misperceived military exercise could lead to a war is alarmingly high. The same approach that prevented nuclear catastrophe during the Cold War can deter Pyongyang.

Another factor that makes today’s situation more dangerous than the Cuban missile crisis is the leaders involved. In 1962, the standoff included one volatile leader, Castro, who held radical misperceptions of the consequences of a

nuclear war and surrounded himself with yes men. Today, there are two such unpredictable and ill-informed leaders: Kim and Trump. Both men are rational and ruthless. Yet both are also prone to lash out impulsively at perceived enemies, a tendency that can lead to reckless rhetoric and behavior.

This danger is compounded because their senior advisers are in a poor position to speak truth to power. Kim clearly tolerates no dissent; he has reportedly executed family members and rivals for offering insufficiently enthusiastic praise. For his part, Trump often ignores, ridicules, or fires those who disagree with him. In May, The New York Times reported that Trump had described his national security adviser, Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, as “a pain” for subtly correcting him when he made inaccurate points in meetings. And in June, the spectacle of U.S. department secretaries falling over themselves to declare their deep devotion to Trump and flatter him on live television during the administration’s first full cabinet meeting brought to mind the dysfunctional decision-making in dictatorships. Any leader who disdains expertise and demands submission and total loyalty from his advisers, whether in a democracy or in a dictatorship, will not receive candid assessments of alternative courses of action during a crisis.

### **Tone DEFCON**

Trump’s poor decision-making process highlights another disturbing contrast with the Cuban missile crisis. In 1962, strong civilian leaders countered the U.S. military’s dangerously hawkish instincts. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended an immediate air strike and an invasion of Cuba, Kennedy insisted on the more prudent option of a naval blockade. Together with his subsequent refusal to retaliate with an air strike after an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over Cuba, Kennedy’s approach reflected the best kind of cautious crisis management.

Now, however, it is the senior political leadership in the United States that has made reckless threats, and it has fallen to Secretary of

Defense James Mattis (a former general) and senior military officers to serve as the voices of prudence. In early August, Trump warned: “North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.” By appearing to commit to using nuclear force in response to North Korean threats, he broke sharply with U.S. deterrence policy, which had previously warned of military responses only to acts of aggression. Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and UN Ambassador Nikki Haley have not echoed Trump’s “fire and fury” rhetoric, but they have repeated the worrying mantra that “all options are on the table.”

That phrase may sound less threatening than Trump’s comments, but it still leaves itself open to misinterpretation. To some listeners, it just suggests that Washington is considering limited military options. But from a North Korean perspective, the statement implies that the United States is contemplating launching a nuclear first strike. This would not be an altogether unreasonable conclusion for Pyongyang to draw. In 2008, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that all options were on the table when it came to U.S. tensions with Iran, and when a reporter explicitly asked Bush whether that included “nuclear options,” Bush simply repeated himself: “All options are on the table.” The Obama administration made a commitment, in its 2009 Nuclear Posture Review, not to use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear weapons state that was in compliance with its nonproliferation commitments. But then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates quickly added that “because North Korea and Iran are not in compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, for them, all bets are off. All options are on the table.”

Such rhetoric is dangerous. The U.S. government must convince Kim that an attack on the United States or its allies would spell the end of his regime. But it is equally important that U.S. leaders acknowledge loudly and often that it would be a disaster for the United States to start a war. If those in the White House do not do so, the civilian and military leadership in the

Pentagon should more forcefully and publicly make this point.

To back this rhetoric up, the United States should take some military options off the table, starting with a preventive nuclear war. A preemptive strike, the use of force when a country considers an adversary’s first strike imminent and unavoidable, can sometimes be justified strategically and legally as “anticipatory self-defense.” But preventive war—starting a war to prevent another country from taking future action or acquiring a dangerous capability—is rarely justified and arguably contrary to the UN Charter.

U.S. military officers are trained to follow orders from political authorities, unless they are clearly unconstitutional. The Constitution, however, says nothing about what to do if a president’s orders are legal but also crazy. This leads to bizarre situations, such as the response that Admiral Scott Swift, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, gave when he was asked at a seminar at the Australian National University in July if he would launch a nuclear strike against China “next week” if Trump ordered him to do so. The admiral should have said that the hypothetical scenario was ridiculous and left it at that. Instead, he answered, “Yes.”

Trump’s volatility has produced a hidden crisis in U.S. civil-military relations. In 1974, during the final days of Richard Nixon’s presidency, when Nixon had become morose and possibly unstable, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger told the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George Brown, that if Nixon gave military orders, Brown should contact Schlesinger before carrying them out. Schlesinger’s action was extraconstitutional but nonetheless wise, given the extraordinary circumstances. The U.S. government faces similar dangers every day under Trump. Mattis and senior military leaders should be prepared to ignore belligerent tweets, push back against imprudent policies, and resist any orders that they believe reflect impetuous or irrational decision-making by the president. Their oath, after all, is not to an individual president; it is to “support and defend the Constitution of the

United States.” The Constitution’s 25th Amendment lays out procedures on how to relieve an impaired president of his responsibilities. If senior military leaders believe at any time that Trump is impaired, they have a duty to contact Mattis, who should then call for an emergency cabinet meeting to determine whether Trump is “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office” and thus whether to invoke the 25th Amendment.

### **What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You**

One similarity with the Cuban missile crisis is that those Americans who think the United States should attack North Korea exaggerate the prospects that U.S. military action would succeed and underestimate the costs of a war. In 1962, the CIA and the military assumed that there were no nuclear weapons in Cuba and, on that basis, recommended air strikes and an invasion. But the intelligence assessment was wrong. Well over 60 nuclear warheads, gravity bombs, and tactical nuclear weapons had already arrived in Cuba, and one missile regiment was already operational by the time the Joint Chiefs were advising military action. Any attack on Cuba would almost certainly have led to nuclear strikes on the United States and against invading U.S. forces.

Today, U.S. intelligence finds itself once again in the dark. It does not know the status of North Korea’s warheads or the locations of its missiles. For example, when the North Koreans successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile in late July, it came as a complete surprise to the United States and demonstrated that North Korea can now build such missiles, store them, take them out of storage, and launch them, all before the United States could react. Yet U.S. military leaders have failed to pour cold water on the idea of a U.S. first strike. Instead, they have added fuel to the fire.

Consider the complaint expressed by General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the Aspen Security Forum in July that “many people have talked about the military options with words such as ‘unimaginable.’” Dunford insisted that, to the

contrary, “it is not unimaginable to have military options to respond to North Korean nuclear capability. What’s unimaginable to me is allowing a capability that would allow a nuclear weapon to land in Denver, Colorado.... And so my job will be to develop military options to make sure that doesn’t happen.” Dunford should have reinforced deterrence. Instead, he created a redline that Kim may have already crossed.

The military’s job is to come up with options. That involves thinking the unthinkable. But it is also military leaders’ responsibility to offer brutal honesty to political leaders and the public. When it comes to the current conflict with North Korea, that means admitting that there are no military options that do not risk starting the most destructive war since 1945.

### **Why There’s No Military Solution**

Some Trump supporters, including former UN Ambassador John Bolton and Trump’s evangelical adviser Robert Jeffress, have argued that a U.S. strike to assassinate Kim is the best solution. Any attempt to “decapitate” the regime, however, would be a gamble of epic proportions. The history of unsuccessful U.S. decapitation attempts, including those launched against the Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi in 1986 and the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in 1991 and again in 2003, warns against such thinking. Moreover, Kim may well have ordered his generals to launch all available weapons of mass destruction at the enemy if he is killed in a first strike—as did Saddam before the 1990–91 Gulf War. There is no reason to think that the North Korean military would fail to carry out such an order.

U.S. leaders should also resist the temptation to hope that limited, or “surgical,” conventional attacks on North Korean missile test sites or storage facilities would end the nuclear threat. Proponents of this course believe that the threat of further escalation by the United States would deter North Korea from responding militarily to a limited first strike. But as the political scientist Barry Posen has explained, this argument is logically inconsistent: Kim cannot be both so irrational that he cannot be deterred in general

and so rational that he could be deterred after having been attacked by the United States. Moreover, even a limited attack by the United States would appear to North Korea as the beginning of an invasion. And because no first strike could destroy every North Korean missile and nuclear weapon, the United States and its allies would always face the prospect of nuclear retaliation.

Nor can missile defense systems solve the problem. The United States should continue to develop and deploy missile defenses because they complicate North Korean military planning, and any missiles that Pyongyang aims at U.S. or allied military targets are missiles not aimed at American, Japanese, or South Korean cities. But military leaders should be candid about the limits of U.S. ballistic missile defenses. Most such systems have failed numerous tests, and even the most effective ones, such as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, system, could be overwhelmed if North Korea fired multiple missiles—even dummy missiles—in a salvo at one target. That is why North Korea has been practicing launching several missiles simultaneously. Any prudent U.S. planner should therefore assume that in the event of an attack, some North Korean nuclear-armed missiles would reach their targets. Even in the best-case scenario, in which only a few North Korean nuclear weapons penetrated U.S. defenses, the consequences would prove catastrophic.

Estimating the potential fatalities in a limited nuclear strike is difficult, but the nuclear weapons scholar Alex Wellerstein has designed a useful modeling tool called NUKEMAP, which uses data from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings to provide rough estimates of how many people would die in a nuclear strike. After North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test, in early September, Japanese, South Korean, and U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly provided a range of estimates of the weapon's explosive yield, with an average estimate of around 100 kilotons. According to NUKEMAP, a single 100-kiloton nuclear weapon detonated above the port city of Busan, in South Korea (which was shown as a target in

a recent North Korean press release), would kill 440,000 people in seconds. A weapon of that size detonated over Seoul would kill 362,000; over San Francisco, the number would be 323,000. These estimates, moreover, include only immediate blast fatalities, not the deaths from fires after a nuclear detonation or the longer-term deaths that would result from radioactive fallout. Those secondary effects could easily cause the number of dead to double.

Even if a war were limited to the Korean Peninsula, the costs would still be unacceptable. According to a detailed study published in 2012 by the Nautilus Institute, a think tank based in California, North Korea has thousands of conventional artillery pieces along the demilitarized zone that by themselves could inflict some 64,000 fatalities in Seoul on the first day of a war. A major attack on South Korea could also kill many of the roughly 154,000 American civilians and 28,000 U.S. service members living there. If the North Korean regime used its large arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, the fatalities would be even higher. Finally, there are a number of nuclear power plants near Busan that could be damaged, spreading radioactive materials, in an attack. All told, one million people could die on the first day of a second Korean war.

### **Accidental War**

Even if the United States forswore preventive conventional or nuclear strikes, the danger of an accidental war caused by the mutual fear of a surprise attack would remain. South Korea increasingly (and quite openly) relies on a strategy of preemption and decapitation. In 2013, General Jeong Seung-jo, the chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced that “if there is a clear intent that North Korea is about to use a nuclear weapon, we will eliminate it first even at the risk of a war,” adding that “a preemptive attack against the North trying to use nuclear weapons does not require consultation with the United States and it is the right of self-defense.” A white paper published by the South Korean Ministry of National Defense in 2016 featured an illustration of several missiles being fired at

and a group of South Korean commandos attacking the “war command” building in Pyongyang. (Unsurprisingly, the North Koreans have similar ideas about preemption: in April 2016, in response to U.S. and South Korean military exercises, North Korean state media reported that “the revolutionary armed forces of [North Korea] decided to take preemptive attack as the mode of its military counteraction.... The right to nuclear preemptive attack is by no means the U.S. monopoly.”)

In such a tense environment, one government’s preemptive-war plan can look a lot like a first-strike plan to its enemies. Would Seoul see the movement of Pyongyang’s nuclear missiles out of the caves in which they are stored as a drill, a defensive precaution, or the start of an attack? Would Pyongyang mistake a joint U.S.–South Korean exercise simulating a decapitation attack for the real thing? Could an ill-timed inflammatory tweet by Trump provoke a military response from Kim? What if a radar technician accidentally put a training tape of a missile launch into a radar warning system—which actually happened, creating a brief moment of panic, during the Cuban missile crisis? Add in the possibility of an American or a South Korean military aircraft accidentally entering North Korean airspace, or a North Korean nuclear weapon accidentally detonating during transport, and the situation resembles less a Cuban missile crisis in slow motion than an August 1914 crisis at the speed of Twitter.

The fear of a U.S. attack explains why Kim believes he needs a nuclear arsenal. Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons development undoubtedly appeals to Kim’s domestic audience’s desire for self-sufficiency. But that is not its primary purpose. Kim’s spokespeople have stressed that he will not suffer the fate of Saddam or Qaddafi, both of whom gave up their nuclear programs only to be attacked later by the United States. The North Korean nuclear arsenal is not a bargaining chip. It is a potent deterrent designed to prevent a U.S. attack or disrupt one that does occur by destroying U.S. air bases and ports through preemption, if possible, but in retaliation if necessary. And if all else fails, it is a means for exacting revenge by destroying

Kim’s enemies’ cities. That may sound implausible, but keep in mind that Castro recommended just such an attack in 1962.

### **Keep Calm and Deter On**

Living with a nuclear North Korea does not, in Dr. Strangelove’s terms, mean learning “to stop worrying and love the bomb.” On the contrary, it means constantly worrying and addressing every risk. U.S. policy should aim to convince Kim that starting a war would lead to an unmitigated disaster for North Korea, especially as his own ministers and military advisers may be too frightened of his wrath to make that argument themselves. The United States should state clearly and calmly that any attack by North Korea would lead to the swift and violent end of the Kim regime.

Kim may be under the illusion that if North Korea were to destroy U.S. air bases and kill hundreds of thousands of Americans, Japanese, and South Koreans, the American public would seek peace. In fact, it would likely demand vengeance and an end to Kim’s regime, regardless of the costs. Such a war would be bloody, but there is no doubt which side would prevail. There are few, if any, military targets in North Korea that the United States could not destroy with advanced conventional weapons in a long war. And the Kim regime cannot ignore the possibility of U.S. nuclear retaliation.

The more difficult challenge will be convincing Kim that the United States will not attack him first. Reducing the risk of war will therefore require an end to U.S. threats of first-strike regime change. In August, Tillerson told reporters that the United States did not seek to overthrow Kim unless he were to begin a war. Other American leaders should consistently echo Tillerson’s comments. Unfortunately, the Trump administration’s rhetoric has been anything but consistent.

Should the United States succeed in bringing North Korea back to the negotiating table, it should be prepared to offer changes to U.S. and South Korean military exercises in exchange for limits on—and notifications of—North Korean



missile tests and the restoration of the hotline between North and South Korea. The United States should also continue to extend its nuclear umbrella to South Korea to reduce the incentive for Seoul to acquire its own nuclear arsenal. Some have argued for a return of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to air bases in South Korea, but such weapons would be vulnerable to a North Korean first strike. A better option would be to keep nuclear capable bombers at Guam on ground alert. Or the United States could borrow a tactic it used in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis. To assuage Moscow, Washington promised to remove its Jupiter ballistic missiles from Turkey after the crisis. But to reassure Ankara, it also assigned some submarine-based missiles to cover the same retaliatory targets in the Soviet Union that the Jupiter missiles had and arranged for a U.S. submarine to visit a Turkish port. Today, occasional U.S. submarine

calls at South Korean harbors could enhance deterrence without provoking North Korea.

In 1947, the American diplomat George Kennan outlined a strategy for the “patient but firm and vigilant containment” of the Soviet Union. Writing in this magazine, he predicted that such a policy would eventually lead to “either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.” He was right. In the same way, the United States has deterred North Korea from invading South Korea or attacking Japan for over 60 years. Despite all the bluster and tension today, there is no reason why Kennan’s strategy of containment and deterrence cannot continue to work on North Korea, as it did on the Soviet Union. The United States must wait with patience and vigilance until the Kim regime collapses under the weight of its own economic and political weakness.



# New Thinking to Solve the North Korean Nuclear Conundrum

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North Korea fired a medium-range Musudan ballistic missile shortly before 8 a.m. on the morning of Feb 12. The launch reminds people of the 13 missile tests and two nuclear tests by Pyongyang in 2016 and constitutes a real security challenge for the Trump administration. At a press conference the next day, President Trump noted, "North Korea is a big, big problem and we will deal with that very strongly." Then what can the United States, the United Nations and the other countries concerned do to solve the North Korean nuclear conundrum?

Looking back, people can see that since Pyongyang's first nuclear test in 2006 the UN and the international community have done a great deal to force North Korea to give up its nuclear pursuit: UN Security Council passed resolutions 1718, 1874, 2087, 2094, 2270 and 2321 to condemn and impose sanctions upon North Korea; China, the U.S., Russia, South Korea, Japan and North Korea held six rounds of Six Party Talk (suspended in 2009) to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula; think tanks held various conferences to find better solutions to the nuclear crisis. However, all these efforts came to nothing. Causes for failure are many and complicated but several of them are fundamental. First, the pursuit of nuclear weapons has been written into North Korea's constitution and the leadership will not give up its effort to pursue nuclear weapons easily. Second, the six parties of the talks have different priorities, though they have a consensus to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. Third, the UN and the parties concerned have relied too much on dialogue and sanctions.

Facing a new nuclear test and more missile tests by North Korea, the UN and the parties concerned should give up their old ways of thinking and acting and seek new ways to persuade and force Pyongyang to give up or at least suspend its nuclear development.

**Way One:** Coordinate six parties' priorities to make denuclearization their first priority. In dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue each party follows a different priority: Pyongyang takes its national security as first priority and will agree to denuclearize only under the condition that its national security is ensured by the U.S. The U.S., South Korea and Japan take overthrow of the North Korean regime as their first priority, aiming at denuclearization through regime change; China and Russia take peace and stability as their first priority advocating denuclearization through peaceful consultations and negotiations. Different top priorities have diverted efforts to denuclearize and the Six Party Talks have achieved little. Each party, including North Korea, should understand that while there are a variety of contradictions in how countries deal with this nuclear issue, denuclearization is the primary objective and all the others are secondary; once the primary issue is solved, the secondary contradictions are easy to solve. Therefore denuclearization best serves each party's concerns and interests and the six parties should coordinate their priorities to make denuclearization the first focus of their efforts.

**Way Two:** Make a military strike an option while holding talks and imposing sanctions. In the past, the international community mainly relied on talks, conferences and sanctions to persuade and press Pyongyang to give up its nuclear development. However, facts show that talks, conferences and sanctions are far from enough. Without a military option, North Korea could not face a life or death choice, that is, no overwhelming pressure could force the country to give up its nuclear pursuit. With a military option, the leadership will have to seriously consider the high cost and low benefit in continuing nuclear development and make a better choice. Of course the military strike should be limited to “surgical operations” other than a large-scale war, only to destroy nuclear facilities and not to attack the country’s political, economic and civilian targets, that is, not aiming at overthrowing the North Korean regime.

**Way Three:** Initiate peace treaty negotiations and denuclearization talks concurrently. What Pyongyang worries about most is its survival; what it wants most is to sign a peace treaty with the U.S. The worry and the wish are reasonable and understandable. With proper coordination of all parties concerned, negotiations of a peace treaty between North Korea and the U.S. and denuclearization talks among the six parties can be undertaken concurrently. The negotiations and talks interact and promote each other and ultimately result in the signing of such a peace treaty and an agreement upon denuclearization.

**Way Four:** Remove obstacles to build confidence and mutual trust. To show sincerity and goodwill, each of the six parties should remove obstacles to build confidence and mutual trust. North Korea should fulfill its international obligations under Security Council resolutions, suspend its nuclear development and missile tests and return to Six Party Talks. The U.S. should reduce the number and frequency of its military exercises, cancel the deployment of THAAD in South Korea, promise not to overthrow the North Korean regime and agree to have direct contact with it. South Korea and Japan should urge the U.S. to sign a peace treaty with the North and return to Six Party Talks without conditions. China and Russia should forsake their opposition to any military strike and play a bigger role in Six Party Talks.

The four ways are by no means panacea but are worth trying. If all parties’ concerns and interests are taken care of, it is possible to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

# Setting a Timetable for Denuclearization of North Korea

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It has been fifteen years since North Korea declared it was going to develop nuclear weapons. A variety of international efforts to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile program, including the Six Party Talks, have failed, and all Security Council resolutions concerning North Korea's nuclear and missile tests have been adopted but achieved little. With the sixth nuclear test on September 3, 2017 and the latest intercontinental ballistic missile test on November 29, 2017, the security situation on the Korean Peninsula is getting tenser and tenser and the need to denuclearize North Korea is becoming increasingly urgent. To safeguard the international nonproliferation system, it is high time for the international community to set a timetable for the denuclearization of North Korea.

## **North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Tests Pose Ever-Increasing Threats**

North Korea began its nuclear tests in 2006 and has conducted six nuclear tests since. Each test saw an increase in yield and capabilities. The yield of the first nuclear test was 0.7-2 kt. The yield of the sixth nuclear test was 70-280kt—100-400 times higher.

North Korea began to conduct ballistic missile tests in 1998 and dozens of tests have been conducted since, with 18 and 20 tests in 2016 and 2017 respectively. On August 31, 1998, North Korea fired its first ballistic missile, the Taepodong-1, which was a three-stage technology demonstrator, derived from the Scud rocket, with a range of 2,000 km. On November 29, 2017, North Korea launched a Hwasong-15 missile without any airspace or maritime safety notifications, which reached an altitude of 4,475 km and flew a linear distance of 950 km before coming down, with a potential range of 13,000 km, 6.5 times farther than that of the Taepodong-1. North Korean Hwasong-15 missiles are now capable of striking anywhere in the United States. If North Korea puts nuclear warheads on Hwasong-15s, they will pose a great threat to the U.S. and its allies.

It is clear that North Korea is moving very close to the threshold of nuclear miniaturization. Once it crosses the threshold, no country or organization can force North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. The Security Council has adopted 18 resolutions relating to North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. North Korea has defied all these resolutions and continued its missile and nuclear tests, showing complete disregard for the united stance of the international community, and should be sternly punished.

## **Consensus on Denuclearization of North Korea Has Been Reached**

China holds that the Korean nuclear issue should be solved through dialogue and negotiation and no country would accept a nuclear-armed North Korea. To stop things from getting worse, China has proposed "double suspension," North Korea suspending nuclear-related activities in return for the U.S. pausing military drills with South Korea and the "dual track approach," advancing denuclearization and

peace building at the same time, leading ultimately to the replacement of the Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman have appealed for de-escalation and full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions and emphasized the need for a political solution during the Secretary-General's meeting with Ri Yong Ho, North Korea's Minister for Foreign Affairs.

President Donald Trump affirmed his commitment to a complete, verifiable, and permanent denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula while visiting China and remarked that "it makes sense for North Korea to come to the table and to make a deal that's good for the people of North Korea and the people of the world." Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said the U.S. did not seek regime change, a collapse of the Kim regime, an accelerated reunification of the Korean peninsula, or an excuse to send its military north of the 38th Parallel. These remarks show that the U.S. wants a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear issue.

President Moon Jae-in of South Korea said he had agreed with Trump to "resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in a peaceful manner and bring permanent peace to the Korean Peninsula" at a joint press conference with the U.S. president.

President Vladimir Putin of Russia and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan also made similar remarks at different occasions. All this shows that countries agree on the need to denuclearize North Korea, they just disagree about tactics.

### **It's Time to Set a Timetable for the Denuclearization of North Korea**

The UN and the international community should coordinate policy and efforts to denuclearize North Korea within three years. The process could be as follows:

From January to March 2018, the U.S. and South Korea should announce a freeze of joint military exercises in return for North Korea announcing a freeze of nuclear and missile tests. From April to June, the six parties—China, the U.S., Russia, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan—should resume dialogue to prepare peace treaty negotiations between North Korea, South Korea, China, and the U.S. From July to September, they should confirm the timetable for denuclearization and peace treaty negotiation and commence related negotiations. From October to December, they should sign a framework agreement on denuclearization and a peace treaty.

From January to June 2019, they should verify implementation of the framework agreement, North Korea should announce a freeze of operating nuclear facilities, the four parties should agree to concrete provisions on denuclearization, peace, and aid to North Korea. From July to December North Korea should close all nuclear facilities and accept international verification, and the international community should send aid to North Korea.

From January to June 2020, North Korea should begin to dismantle its nuclear facilities, and the denuclearization agreement and the peace treaty should be finalized. From July to December, North Korea should finish dismantling its nuclear facilities, and should accept international verification, and the four parties should sign the denuclearization agreement and peace treaty, and repeal the Armistice Agreement, thus realizing the denuclearization of North Korea and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

If North Korea refuses to participate in the negotiations on denuclearization, or if it obstructs them, the international community will have the right to employ military force to denuclearize North Korea.





# A View from China on Triangular Relations

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What will it take to jump start trilateral talks among Beijing, Seoul, and Washington over the situation on the Korean Peninsula, including the denuclearization of North Korea? If this subject has been on the minds of South Koreans in 2016-17 with some approaching their counterparts in Beijing and Washington, DC in the hope that such triangular talks can be launched—the more official, the better—not many Chinese have addressed what would be necessary to enlist their country in this endeavor. This chapter argues that, at present, China is unprepared to take this route. A major factor is the sense that there are imbalances that complicate the triangle. Beyond the substance of what would be on the agenda, Chinese are concerned by South Korea's alignment and how it would affect the course of the discussions.

South Korean advocates of trilateral talks have in mind a narrower agenda than the Chinese envision. They focus on combining carrots and sticks in pursuing denuclearization and on contingency planning in the event of unanticipated developments in the D.P.R.K. Their Chinese counterparts doubt that this is a sufficient set of themes to deal realistically with the challenges facing the region and prefer, if talks were to begin, a wide-ranging agenda of more appeal to the DPRK and more in keeping with the national interests of the parties involved. A balanced strategic environment on the Korean Peninsula figures into calculations for what talks they would seek, if doubts could be overcome about their efficacy and promise.

## Imbalances in Trilateral Relations

Serious security and economic imbalances cloud trilateral relations among China, the United States, and South Korea. As the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia is constantly changing, the China-U.S.-South Korea trilateral relationship has become troubled by inequalities, which have grown more complicated. Under these circumstances, trilateral relations, although embodying certain characteristics of a classic strategic triangle, as understood by international relations theory, do not fit the overall profile. According to Lowell Dittmer, this kind of relationship is formed only when every country enjoys full “legitimate autonomy” in trilateral interactions and in the competition for making the most of power balancing. The prerequisite for a strategic triangle is thus, that each country is free from the manipulation of the others. As China and the Soviet Union were allies from the early-Cold War period to the early 1960s, Dittmer does not consider China-U.S.-Russia relations during that period a typical strategic triangle.<sup>1</sup> The same reasoning applies to this situation. As North Korea makes substantial progress in its nuclear capabilities and the security situation on the Korean Peninsula worsens, the U.S.-South Korea alliance is stronger than ever in matters pertaining to defense and depth of cooperation, but the absence of strategic triangularity complicates China's role.

Each year, the U.S.-South Korea “two-plus-two” talks reevaluate the nuclear deterrence capability of North Korea and devise new responses. The persistent hesitation, leading to delay by the South Korean government in

transferring wartime operational control, also indicates that amidst the worsening regional security situation, South Korea is becoming more reliant on the United States for defense. The U.S.-South Korea military alliance can only grow closer as North Korea advances its nuclear technologies; South Korea will likely be more susceptible to greater pressure and influence from the United States when making security-related decisions, as evidenced by the recent decision in favor of the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD). Therefore China-U.S.-South Korea relations cannot be viewed as a strategic triangle due to the issue of military security.

Based on Dittmer's analysis of the gaming rule in triangular relations, the United States and South Korea are actually in a "stable marriage" because they hold negative views of China in common, and the three parties fall into two camps in terms of security, one being China alone and the other the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

The U.S.-South Korea military alliance and the security dependence of South Korea on the United States result in serious asymmetry in China-U.S.-South Korea relations, which often obstructs development in economic, educational, and other fields. According to the analysis of China-U.S.-South Korea economic and trade relations, more transactions are concluded between China and South Korea than between the United States and South Korea; however that does not suffice for balance. The statistics of China's Ministry of Commerce show that, in 2015, China-South Korea trade amounted to around \$270 billion, exceeding the sum of U.S.-South Korea and Japan-South Korea trade.<sup>2</sup> South Korea's exports to China accounted for 26 percent of its total, three times that of South Korea's exports to the United States. In 2016, South Korea surpassed Japan as the second largest trading partner of China, behind the United States. In terms of "cognitive proximity" in economic and trade relations within this triangle, the "stable marriage" is unquestionably shared by Beijing and Seoul.<sup>3</sup>

As the security situation on the Korean Peninsula worsens, however, the "stable marriage" between the United States and South Korea is becoming increasingly prominent. Both of them place more confidence in their negative cognition of China, which further divides the three sides in the fields of politics and military affairs. There is a lack of equilibrium, in which relations between China and South Korea and China and the United States lag far behind those between the two allies.

There are multiple reasons accounting for these imbalances. Since North Korea is determined to develop advanced nuclear strike technologies and nuclear power, which Chinese deem aimed at ensuring national safety, South Korea is feeling more and more insecure. In their pursuit of what Chinese refer to as "absolute safety," the United States and South Korea have agreed to deploy THAAD in South Korea, which in turn poses a severe threat to China's security, according to Chinese analysts. Because of this and other measures, the tendency for confrontation is becoming more pronounced in Northeast Asia. In their response to the security threats posed by North Korea, the United States, Japan, and South Korea are threatening China's security is the conclusion that drives China's response.

What Chinese consider to be ungrounded U.S. accusations against China for its "inaction" regarding North Korean issues and the determination of South Korea to mitigate the influence of North Korea's nuclear weapons finally led to the THAAD deployment in Korea. The anti-missile system may destroy the strategic balance between China and the United States, according to Chinese officials. It is also clear that Northeast Asian countries, under these circumstances, will adopt security policies guided by the strategic thinking of a "zero-sum game." As a result, the possibility of a security dilemma in the region is greatly increased. Thus, it is essential for the three countries to proactively seek a solution, so as to rebalance their relations concerning political security, economy, and trade, and shift the focus of their trilateral relations from "stable marriage" to healthy interactions.

This logic holds that not only does the THAAD deployment tilt the triangle sharply in the direction of imbalance versus China, but that South Korea must downgrade its alliance as the focus of security and give greater weight to political and security relations with China if it seeks to reduce the security dilemma in the region. Rather than North Korea's actions being the principal source of this dilemma, the argument holds that the U.S. priority for putting pressure on China and altering the strategic balance in Sino-U.S. relations, backed by South Korea, has resulted in this dilemma. If Washington is not prepared to rethink its approach, then South Korea should recognize the costs of the imbalance it is causing.

### **Ongoing Development of China-South Korea Relations**

To achieve balance in the strategic triangle, the key lies in shifting the U.S.-ROK relationship from “stable marriage” to a “ménage à trois” with China.<sup>4</sup> South Korea's increasing reliance on the United States in security can be directly attributed to North Korea's progress in developing a nuclear striking power, China's “willful blindness” to North Korea's actions, and South Korea's disappointment in the lack of resolution of the issue. If security relations between China and South Korea improve, China will not be as concerned as it is now when the United States and South Korea set their defense policies against North Korea; meanwhile, the structure of China-U.S.-South Korea trilateral relations would be rebalanced. Given that China-U.S. relations basically remain unchanged, according to this line of analysis, the improvement of China-South Korea relations becomes critical for the three sides to rebalance their relations.

Though the relationship between China and South Korea improved after President Xi Jinping visited South Korea in 2014, it worsened quickly after the Park Geun-hye administration agreed on THAAD deployment. Although China reiterated its stance on this issue several times, South Korea dismissed the warnings. As a result, many Chinese experts became pessimistic about

future bilateral relations. It is widely believed in the Chinese academic community that the North Korean nuclear issue is the most essential factor in the deterioration of China-South Korea relations.<sup>5</sup>

Ever since the Six-Party Talks ended in failure, sanctions by the international community against North Korea's nuclear tests have been unable to obstruct the country's nuclear technology advancement. In 2016, North Korea made another substantial breakthrough in its nuclear power development, further reducing the possibility of stopping it. As North Korea becomes more capable of deterring South Korea with its advanced nuclear power, South Korea attributes North Korea's nuclear progress to China's reluctance to adopt effective measures, such as cutting off energy and food supplies and trade contacts with North Korea, and views China as an indirect helper—or even the only helper—of North Korea's nuclear program.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, China's concerns are kept out of the scope of South Korea's considerations in military blowback against North Korea, which frustrates China-South Korea relations.

Chinese specialists also believe that the existence of the U.S.-South Korea alliance hampers the establishment of political and security trust between China and South Korea. South Korean policies towards North Korea and China are influenced by U.S. political preferences. However, the national interests of South Korea and the strategic planning of the United States in Northeast Asia do not correspond in all aspects. Faced with pressure from the United States, South Korea eventually agreed to the deployment of THAAD, which, as a result of China's response, adversely impacts its economic and trade relations with China.<sup>7</sup> It can, thus, be inferred that the United States is capable of damaging China-South Korea relations by exerting pressure. The spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs made clear at a press conference held on August 23, 2016 that, “At present, China-South Korea relations are faced with some problems.”<sup>8</sup>

The above-mentioned pessimistic views of the development of China-South Korea relations

have a basis in reality; however, there are also exaggerations of how the China-U.S.-South Korea security dilemma will influence China-South Korea relations. Such views have neglected the development and significance of China-South Korea relations, as well as their resilience to shocks. Hence, in the case of security issues, though the deployment of an anti-missile system on the Korean Peninsula and U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises harmed China-South Korea relations, the political, economic, cultural, and military exchange channels between the two sides have functioned over a long period. Bilateral relations enjoy a strong foundation.

China should, using various means, urge South Korea to take into account THAAD's adverse influence on China's security interests and act judiciously. Since Park Geun-hye's visit to China in 2013 and Xi Jinping's visit to South Korea in 2014, China and South Korea have become strategic cooperative partners, and bilateral cultural and personnel exchanges have climbed to a peak. By maintaining communications and cooperation on security issues, the two countries can prevent chaos in Northeast Asia from degrading into conflict. By strengthening collaboration on denuclearization and exploring peaceful settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue, the two sides can find solutions through negotiations rather than war. Therefore, due to the deep foundation and frequent exchanges in this relationship and the necessity of sustaining bilateral relations, China must stay on good terms with South Korea while handling numerous difficulties. In retrospect China-South Korea relations have always been laden with obstacles, contradictions, and conflicts. If it were not for mutual efforts, China-South Korea relations would never have made it this far.

### **Development and Achievements of China-South Korea Relations**

After the Korean War, the Cold War affected world politics. As a socialist country, China offered political support to North Korea, which supported communism, and confronted the Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee

administrations of South Korea. As China-U.S. relations improved after President Nixon visited China, China and Japan established diplomatic relations, and inter-Korean dialogues were held. China and South Korea started to trade indirectly via Hong Kong in 1979.<sup>9</sup> Since South Korea started economic modernization in the 1960s and China opened its economy to the world in 1978, the harmony between the two economies became even more prominent. Meanwhile, they shared a similar stance on Japan's militarism and wartime past. Propelled by trade, cultural, and sports exchanges, the two finally established diplomatic ties in 1992.

Within 20 years after establishing formal diplomatic ties, China and South Korea had made huge progress in politics, economics, and people-to-people exchanges; bilateral relations had caught up with and even surpassed the development level of China-U.S. relations on these dimensions. In politics, the general partnership reached its peak by transforming into a "strategic cooperative partnership" after Xi's visit to South Korea in 2014. China and South Korea were the first two countries that agreed to establish the dialogue mechanism of four-party and Six-Party Talks, which raised the possibility of settling the North Korean nuclear issue through negotiations rather than violence. In economy and trade, China surpassed the United States as South Korea's largest trading partner in 2004, and South Korea, replacing Japan, became China's second largest trading partner in 2016.<sup>10</sup>

China-South Korea economic relations have extended from developing investment, finance, and logistics to establishing high-level platforms such as free trade agreements. In people-to-people exchanges, as the Chinese and South Korean cultures are intimately tied to each other, the two sides always share a natural affinity. According to the consensus reached between Park and Xi during their visits to each other's countries, the two countries are expected to further take advantage of the China-ROK Joint Committee on People-to-People Exchanges to promote greater advancement in this regard.<sup>11</sup>

In October 2015 when Premier Li Keqiang paid a visit to South Korea, the two sides signed the “Development Plan of China-ROK Joint Committee on People-to-People Exchanges,” in which the principle of “designs by top level, guidance from governments and participation of all” was stated.<sup>12</sup> The next year saw the issuance of the “Project List of Exchanges and Cooperation of China-ROK Joint Committee on People-to-People Exchanges 2016.” Consisting of 69 communication and cooperation programs touching on education, localities, teenagers, and cultures, the list has presented a full-range of progress in this regard.<sup>13</sup> Thanks to geographical proximity, exchanges between the two countries are developing at an amazing speed. According to the Korea Tourism Organization, in 2016 visitors from China accounted for 40 percent of total international visitors to South Korea, registering a sharp increase of 40 percent over the previous year. Such exchanges play an irreplaceable role in enhancing mutual understanding and affinity between the two countries.

In military security, as early as 2008, China and South Korea signed an agreement on setting up a military hotline, put into use later, which could facilitate communication on issues regarding the Korean Peninsula and help to safeguard peace on the peninsula.<sup>14</sup> Three years later, the two established a senior national defense strategic dialogue mechanism, which showed that they had entered the stage of military cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

At present, although bilateral relations are impacted by the THAAD issue, the foundation of relations remains unimpaired; the condition is even better than that of China-U.S. relations in aspects of public favorability and trading ties. However, the long-term conflicts perplexing China-South Korea and China-U.S. relations remain to be resolved, and they may limit or even worsen the trilateral relationship.

### **Obstacles in Trilateral Relations**

According to Chinese observers, there are two main factors influencing the balance of the trilateral relationship: the North Korean nuclear

issue and U.S. strategies towards China. The North Korean nuclear issue is the main constraint for China-South Korea relations. Since North Korea is determined to expand its nuclear capability, the sanctions imposed by China and other UN Security Council members have failed to work effectively. At present, South Korea is becoming increasingly anxious about the constant growth of North Korea’s nuclear capability. Moreover, due to the great progress North Korea has made in developing nuclear explosive capabilities, nuclear explosion technology, and deliverable nuclear weapons in recent years, South Korea is deepening defense ties with the United States to confront the threats.

Although both China and South Korea agree to denuclearize North Korea, the two differ in their approach and priority options. China holds that the six parties should resort to an approach featuring “peace and stability, denuclearization, and dialogue,” and work to address the North Korean nuclear issue by simultaneously conducting Korean Peninsula peace talks and denuclearization negotiations. In this situation, the stability of the Korean Peninsula would be considered a prerequisite; no war or dispute could be allowed.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, China has always upheld that the sanctions initiated by the UN against North Korea should be implemented based on the principle of not disturbing the everyday life of the North Korean people. China still insists on the return of all sides to Six-Party Talks. However, South Korea and the United States interpret this as China’s unwillingness to cut off the energy and food aid for North Korea, and even claim that China is “intentionally” shielding North Korea from sanctions. Both believe that the international community should do its utmost to pressure North Korea by cutting off its financial resources, so as to bring about what China regards as the internal collapse of the country, although the two allies argue that the goal is a new calculus for denuclearization.

The three countries remain at a stalemate while North Korea gains more nuclear power; South Korea and the United States blame China

for the deterioration. South Korea appears tougher on the deployment of THAAD. In response, China will show firmer opposition against this behavior.

The second factor influencing China-South Korea relations is that the United States incorporates its strategy regarding China into its policies towards Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula. Undoubtedly, it has ulterior motives in its deployment targeting North Korea's nuclear weapons: the weapon systems can contain and counter China in addition to North Korea. This is Chinese reasoning about the U.S. behavior toward the peninsula. The signs are clear when one considers the THAAD deployment in South Korea requested by U.S. leaders. For instance, the radius of the radars in THAAD goes well beyond the requirement of the defense system for North Korean missiles and affects Northeast China, which will significantly impair the strategic balance between China and the United States. Tying U.S. policy towards Northeast Asia to South Korea's policies towards North Korea gives rise to problems in China-South Korea relations. The U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises against North Korea in the Yellow Sea were, in part, intended to counter China, insist Chinese observers. In other words, China-U.S. relations are also frustrated by the U.S. policies regarding North Korea.

### **How to Achieve a Breakthrough in Trilateral Relations and Deal with the Situation in Northeast Asia**

The United States plays a key role in resolving the security dilemma in Northeast Asia and the dilemma of the trilateral relationship. U.S. strategies towards Northeast Asia are designed to contain North Korea and also counter China; it urges South Korea to incorporate

U.S. policies towards North Korea and China into its own policies. Therefore, when dealing with relations with China, the United States, and North Korea, South Korea, in the view of Chinese, was forced to make some choices. In the recent deployment of THAAD,

for instance, South Korea had to choose between a U.S. view of national security and its own economic interests, and between relations with China and relations with the United States.<sup>17</sup> Under these circumstances, the conflicts in China-U.S. relations have given rise to problems in China-South Korea relations, as seen from China. If the three sides wish for balanced, healthy trilateral relations, the United States has to give up its attempt to check and even contain China. Both China and the U.S. stand to gain from cooperation and to lose from confrontation. South Korea, under less strategic pressure, would no longer need to choose sides when dealing with the United States and China, or choose between security and economic interests. Remove U.S. pressure, and it would seek a new relationship with China and balance in triangular relations.

The deployment of THAAD in South Korea may jeopardize South Korea's long-term plans. The United States, in insisting on this intends to make China suffer from security threats for "shielding" North Korea's nuclear programs. However, instead of prompting China to address the North Korean nuclear issue, the deployment of THAAD has amplified the voices of China's hardliners to support North Korea; it is an awkward miscalculation by the United States.

The deployment of THAAD, along with the U.S. strategy pressuring other parties, has worsened the security dilemma faced by China and the United States, contributed to instability in the strategic situation of Northeast Asia, and greatly impacted the security of China and South Korea. Therefore, both China and South Korea should recognize that, though serving U.S. strategic interests in Northeast Asia, the situation on the peninsula and China-South Korea relations do not benefit. Moreover, China will not be forced into submission. The United States must adjust its thinking regarding Northeast Asian and Korean Peninsula policies, consider China's security interests, and take into account the real interests of South Korea in negotiating the denuclearization of North Korea.

Although the United States forces South Korea to incorporate American policies into its

policies towards North Korea and China, and to take sides between China and the United States, South Korea should seek a more balanced stance. South Korea should work to promote the thawing of China-U.S. relations, rather than tie itself to the United States and serve its strategic interests. It must be more independent strategically. When faced with U.S. pressure, instead of solely focusing on security issues. In security, there is no need for China and South Korea to strategically confront each other, and China has never posed a threat to South Korea's security since the two countries established diplomatic relations; on the contrary, the two sides are sharing more and more in common when it comes to the Korean Peninsula issue, such as the consensus to denuclearize North Korea, and the common will to avoid war and control conflict on the peninsula. China and South Korea do not have fundamental security conflicts.

Additionally, China and South Korea share the same view on Japan's wartime past. Hence, South Korea needs to be aware of the significance of a truly independent diplomacy and its important role in moderating China-U.S. relations.

China should be more proactive, strengthening its efforts to promote denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, a peace agreement, and the construction of a peaceful development mechanism in Northeast Asia. China's proposal for a dual-track approach can comprehensively meet the security requirements of countries concerned about the North Korean nuclear issue;<sup>18</sup> however, as China-North Korea relations normalized and then grew frosty, and China split with the United States and South Korea on sanctions against North Korea and military exercises conducted in the Korean Peninsula region, China could not leverage any tools on all sides to return to the Six-Party Talks or prevent conflicts between North Korea and the United States from escalating. As a result, diplomatic pleas and multilateral mediation become the only option available to China. Nevertheless, if China wants to mitigate North Korea's progress in its nuclear tests, ease concerns about the security of North

and South Korea, and prevent the worsening of the security dilemma on the peninsula, it must more proactively implement its proposal to pursue, on parallel tracks, the denuclearization of the peninsula and the replacement of the armistice agreement with a peace treaty. Hence, China should attempt to persuade the United States to return to the talks so as to begin a dialogue on the issues with all concerned parties. Meanwhile, China should also give reassurances, and help South Korea and the United States to regain their confidence in peace talks and their efficacy.

All sides should take advantage of the proactive efforts of the academic community and think tanks to promote: trilateral Track-2 or 1.5 dialogue frankly and profoundly talking about their own strategic concerns, while allaying misperceptions and strategic miscalculations and seeking an innovative strategic path in place of the inadequacies of official communications.

Currently, the three countries are vexed by a number of misperceptions about the North Korean issue. The United States and South Korea believe that China refuses to cut off economic ties with North Korea or suspend energy and food supplies, so as to support North Korea in the development of its nuclear capability. Such misperceptions are prevalent in South Korean society.

The Obama administration began to adopt the strategy of "strategic patience" after the collapse of Six-Party Talks, hoping to pressure North Korea to fall apart gradually, according to Chinese observers. Both China and the United States agree on continuing the sanctions, but they differ a lot on the content and scope of sanctions.<sup>19</sup> How much pressure on North Korea is considered appropriate when imposing sanctions? On the one hand, the sanctions are expected to change the North Korean leader's cost calculations in developing nuclear weapons; on the other, they could undermine the domestic stability of the country, if not handled with caution. This is a question that affects the future of North Korea.

For China, the stability of the Korean Peninsula, as an indispensable part of the “three core goals” (denuclearization, stability, and peace talks) it proposed, affects the stability of China’s own neighborhood and its core national interests. This point has been emphasized by Xi Jinping and Wang Yi several times.

China, the United States, and South Korea can make their positions clear through dialogue organized by the academic community and think tanks. For instance, in October 2015, under the joint organization of the School of International Studies at Peking University, the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, and the Brookings Institution, a trilateral dialogue was held at Peking University. The participants had in-depth discussions on topics including how they understood the international order, what are the characteristics of the postwar order, and how they view the South China Sea issue, China-U.S. relations, and the North Korean nuclear issue. Academic conferences of this kind can enable the three sides to frankly express their views, clear up misperceptions, and eliminate strategic miscalculations.

Finally, China, the U.S. and South Korea shall seek consensus of a higher level to promote the peaceful development of Northeast Asia. The

integration of Northeast Asia has been repeatedly brought up by scholars. The countries in Northeast Asia, China and South Korea in particular, undoubtedly enjoy built-in advantages in cultural affinity, geographical position, and economic interdependence. Nevertheless, due to various high-level political issues in Northeast Korea, such as the great power games of power and politics, the North Korean issue, and the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, the region has always been a source of pressures frustrating China-U.S.-South Korea cooperation. This is largely because the three countries tend to stick to the short-sighted goals valuing realistic interests when wrestling with one another.

If the three countries want to achieve breakthroughs for trilateral relations, they must redefine the relations based on higher-level national interests and logistics, so as to seek consensus of a higher level. In this way, China, the U.S., and South Korea can be less disturbed by security dilemmas when dealing with the situation in Northeast Asia, and create a political environment in which the three sides understand and cooperate with each other. Such a higher-level consensus can be revealed and summarized through trilateral dialogues.

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# Making Sense of North Korea: The Full Transcript

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Former Commander of the Pacific Fleet

**Ambassador Christopher Hill**

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**Susan Glasser:** I'm Susan Glasser and welcome back to The Global Politico. This week: a deep dive on the North Korea crisis, with Admiral Dennis Blair, who's spent decades working on this. He is the former Director of National Intelligence and a former admiral whose job as commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet was to confront the North Koreans. And then we'll hear from Ambassador Christopher Hill, the last senior U.S. diplomat to negotiate face to face with the North Koreans when he did so during President George W. Bush's second term.

**Chris Hill:** Look, it is a very frustrating issue to deal with North Korea. I'm still in therapy over dealing with North Korea. But it doesn't mean that we shouldn't keep our cool and keep at the task.

**Glasser:** Well, we may all need to be in therapy soon at this rate. Look at what's happening just about every day: The North Korean missiles are flying. So are the intemperate American tweets. Here we are all wondering: Are Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump once again bringing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war? Kim just tested his biggest nuclear bomb yet; he's twice in the last few weeks flown missiles over Japan. Trump appears to have drawn his very own red line: saying North Korea obtaining an ICBM capable of launching a nuclear weapon to hit the U.S. mainland is unacceptable. And of course he's doing it in very Trumpian, very un-presidential language, taunting Kim as "Rocket Man." So: is the war scare this time different? How worried should we be? First, Admiral Dennis Blair:

**Glasser:** Admiral Blair, you've been a voice of sanity on this to a certain extent. What do you make of the fire and fury and the war panic? Should we really be worried this time? Is it something different?

**Blair:** I don't think we should be relaxed, Susan, but I don't think that we are running a very high risk of a nuclear exchange between North Korea and the United States. My experience with North Korea goes back to 1994, I guess, when I was a commander of a battle group in the western Pacific around Korea, and at that time the United States put some sanctions on North Korea in response to some illegal activity, and this same sort of bellicose rhetoric from Pyongyang, I think "sea of fire" was the term that was used back then in '94, and then that crisis ended by Kim Jong Il, the grandfather of the current leader, dying, actually.

And then, when I was director of national intelligence back in 2010, we had the incident when a North Korean submarine sank the Cheonan, the South Korean frigate, and 60 South Korean sailors were killed. At the same time, North Koreans fired artillery at two islands, killing some South Korean citizens, and there was a great uproar with high tension at that time.

So, these crises and this brinkmanship from North Korea and confrontations with the United States and extreme bellicose rhetoric have been going on for quite some time, and I think it's good to be aware of that as you face what we have to deal with right now.

**Glasser:** Well, that's right. So, let's talk about what we have to deal with. You saw North Korea under the grandfather; you saw it under the father; and a lot of people believe this current crisis is a result of the fact that the grandson, the current leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, is something a little bit different. What is your assessment of North Korea's leader and how much are we seeing this increase in capacity in the nuclear program a result of his leadership?

**Blair:** His leadership has certainly been more active and he has followed a more consistently confrontative policy; but, if you look at the things that he has done, interestingly, they are all confined to measures within North Korea: tests, nuclear tests, missile launches. When I was in the business, there were special forces teams of North Koreans who would come down and abduct South Korean citizens. I mentioned these ship sinkings and killings.

These things really had the potential to light the powder train and put us into a true conflict situation between the combined forces of South Korea and North Korea, but I think that Kim Jong Un has found this formula where he can do things within North Korea, technical things in missiles, and nuclear tests, and then parlay them into the sorts of influence that he wants, and continue to develop this nuclear capability, which he has decided—and he is just finishing a decision which I think was made by his father, and presaged by his grandfather, that North Korea is well served by having its own nuclear capability.

So, he wants it to, for what he sees as protection, but, in fact, the degree of tension that these actions cause depends on our reaction to them, not on the incidents themselves.

**Glasser:** Well, that's a good point, and I guess one of the questions is, have we correctly read the actions of the North Koreans? Did we correctly understand the nature of Kim Jong Un and his determination to pursue this level of nuclear program? You were the head of the national intelligence in exactly this period, right? During the decline of his father, and sort of the—

**Blair:** Right.

**Glasser:** —sudden emergence of him as the unexpected successor to his father. What was our view of him at the time, and how has that changed?

**Blair:** He was kind of a blank slate. We didn't have a lot of information on him. In fact, we don't have sort of detailed information on many of North Korea's leaders. The individuals do make a difference, but the overall consistency of North Korean policy has been pretty remarkable over, I'd say, 50 years or so, and he basically is carrying on that policy, which is to provoke, take outrageous actions below the level of triggering a major conflict with the United States and South Korea.

Then he takes the results of those provocations and he tries to turn them into political gains that may be something like an aid program. We responded to some of the North Korean provocations by trying to work out a deal with them to provide them peaceful nuclear power in return for giving up military weapons.

Sometimes they turn them into negotiations to get simple recognition that they have achieved a new status. Sometimes they use them to try to divide their adversaries: the United States, Korea, Japan,

occasionally Russia. So, this pattern of operating below the level of a major war, but sufficiently alarming to get the attention of other governments, is quite consistent, and he seems to have updated it, pursues it perhaps more vigorously than others, but I don't see a radical change in the North Korean game as I've seen it played out.

**Glasser:** Right. So the big departure, then, is here in Washington, where we have a new president who has engaged in some very unorthodox approaches to this North Korean saber-rattling, including rhetorical—what's the right word?—heights of his own, when it comes to countering them.

So, do you see that as being a changed ingredient? And how will that affect this latest round of recriminations?

**Blair:** I think our rhetoric is scaled up a bit. We used to be the strong, silent type on all of this crazy rhetoric coming out of Pyongyang, and we were the models of restrained, careful statements, and that's not the style of this president. He's sort of weighing back at, or firing back at the rhetorical level, which has been his specialty. And so that is unusual.

People are used to the United States—you know, it's like a little dog yapping at you. The general thing has been that the United States sort of marches through and doesn't talk too much about it; may give a "bad dog" occasionally—and now we have this rhetorical stream going back at North Korea itself. So that is different, and I think that's what's throwing off the calculations of people who observe the situation. But, I think in the case of the United States, as well as in the case of North Korea, there is a difference between rhetoric, and even presidential rhetoric, and the underlying interests and policies, which tend to have more durability. So, I think that is a big factor.

One other very important thing to keep in mind on this whole point is that the point that the Trump administration seems to be making is that if North Korea achieves an ICBM capability, that is a missile that can reliably reach the United States with a nuclear weapon, that changes everything.

Well, it doesn't. It never has. For, when I was CINCPAC [commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet], which has gone on 20 years ago now, we thought that North Korea had two or three crude nuclear weapons which could be delivered quite effectively to South Korea; they could be put in a submarine and the submarine goes down the coast, pulls into a harbor and detonates the weapon. It could get to Japan in that fashion.

It would be risky, but there would even be ways in which a weapon like that could be smuggled into the United States on a tramp steamer, on another submarine, and North Korea could have said, "There's a nuclear weapon in Puget Sound, in San Francisco Bay, and we need you to do such-and-such." We maintain deterrence; we've maintained nuclear deterrence against North Korea now for 20 years; despite the threat to South Korea and Japan, certainly, and to a lesser extent, to the United States.

And remember, a threat to South Korea and Japan includes the 300,000 Americans that are in South Korea, the about twice that number who live in Japan, so for two decades a North Korean leader has been able to kill a lot of Americans, but he hasn't. Why? Because he would be destroyed in return. No president would stand for an attack like that on our allies, as they also killed American citizens. He may have 20 weapons; we've got 2500; and we would blow him away.

So, I think this hyping of the nuclear missile, which is merely one form of delivering a weapon, being able to reach the United States is a self-inflicted policy disadvantage which this administration has placed on itself.

**Glasser:** Self-inflicted because they've inflated the threat by talking about it?

**Blair:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because they've said everything changes, and we won't allow it to happen. Well, it may be two weeks from now; it may be six months from now that we receive an intelligence estimate that says North Korea has successfully tested an ICBM weapon and successfully tested the re-entry capability of a weapon like that carrying a nuclear device to the range that would reach the United States, and so what's the United States going to do at that point?

It's something we've said is unacceptable. You don't say something's unacceptable in my experience unless you can do something about it.

**Glasser:** So this is the red line, basically, that they have created, even if he didn't call it that name?

**Blair:** Looks like it to me. Doesn't it to you? It's pretty—

**Glasser:** You know, if it barks...

**Blair:** Yeah, right, exactly, exactly. And so, I don't mind—I mean, red lines judiciously used are something a superpower ought to have, but if you put a red line out there, you have to be able to enforce it at acceptable cost, if your enemy miscalculates and the line is crossed.

And based on my experience, the only options which would stand any chance of disarming North Korea of its nuclear capability in a short, quick, and effective manner are very high-risk. North Korea are master tunnelers; they've been moving stuff around and hiding it for generations, and it would be a very brave director of national intelligence who could go to the president and say, "Yup, we've got them all located. We know where every single weapon is. We have the bunker-buster weapons that can get down deep through these mountains. We can take care of it all in 30 minutes and North Korea won't have time to pop one off before we get it done."

I mean, that is just a very high-risk option to take care of. So don't put a red line out there if you don't have a way to enforce it with acceptable risk, should it be crossed.

**Glasser:** Well, it's interesting. You know, right now there really is this sort of different schools, different camps if you will, and certainly the ones who are very experienced in this, like you, say, effectively, there is not credible military option for the United States to stop this program. And that seems to be what you're saying.

**Blair:** Well, I'd say we could give it a shot and we would be able to take out a significant portion of the North Korean nuclear capability. Then the question is, what would be the North Korean response? It's high risk. You don't know how a government, how very isolated, power-hungry, megalomaniac leaders like Kim Jong Un would react under those conditions.

Now, even if he issued the order, at that point the question is, would more sane North Koreans who have to actually push the buttons carry it out?

**Glasser:** Can I flip that around on you?

**Blair:** Yes.

**Glasser:** What if Donald Trump ordered General Mattis and the Pentagon to pursue a military option?

**Blair:** Conventional or nuclear?

**Glasser:** Well, let's just go with conventional.

**Blair:** I think if President Trump—and let's get a little more clear on the circumstances—this would be in response to North Korean development of an ICBM capability, or in response to some provocative action?

**Glasser:** Let's say it's in response to an action over the next couple of months. Diplomacy clearly isn't going anywhere; he continues to fire provocative missiles and threaten the United States and Japan as well as South Korea, and something happens that Trump and others believe requires a response. Perhaps a preemptive strike on a nuclear facility.

**Blair:** Right, right. It's not an impossible situation. If you look at the history of when we have worked ourselves up to the point that we were, no kidding, going to strike North Korea—the famous one was the cherry tree incident in the DMZ, and we deployed several carrier battle groups, lots of land forces, air forces—we just turned the Republic of Korea into an armed and ready camp; we made it absolutely clear that if North Korea started any action we would finish it. And that's not an impossible situation. In that incident that I was involved in '94, the United States also took a number of actions of which my battle group was part of it, to really reinforce our forces around North Korea. We made it clear that we were prepared to take military action in response to Korean provocations, and North Korea backed down.

**Glasser:** What would your job have been if that had come to military action in '94?

**Blair:** It would have been to carry out the opening stages of our war plan against North Korea, which is take down their air defenses, neutralize the artillery threat that faces Seoul, and prepare for a land force invasion of North Korea if things went to that point.

So, yeah, if the United States gears up, conventionally deploys a lot of force there, and then takes a military action, which would be anything from a strike against suspected nuclear sites to strikes against these very dangerous artillery emplacements that threaten Seoul, part of that preparation would have to be civil defense for the Republic of Korea, getting citizens out of Seoul into civil defense shelters, underground and so on.

That response we have taken to North Korea in the past, and they have backed down on those occasions. So, that is the kind of military option that I would think. But, you know, in military encounters, Susan, what we've learned over time is, it matters who starts these things, right? When you get the U.S. public behind an administration, it's when we're attacked.

Pearl Harbor is a classic example, but 9/11 is a much more recent one—the blood is up, we're going to punish those who punished us. It's the same thing in South Korea. When just two South Korean civilians were killed back in 2010, public opinion in the Republic of Korea was just at a feverish edge, and there was strong pressure on the South Korean government to do something.

So, what you want to do in most of these situations is maneuver the other guy into taking the first step, and then you crush him after he started it. There's much less support; it's much more divisive if you are the one who initiated, as we found out to our sorrow in 2003 with the second Iraq war, and so on.

**Glasser:** It's a really interesting point you make. When you were the DNI, the director of national intelligence, it was this period where South Korea was very eager for more aggressive steps to be taken to contain this threat against them. You mentioned the sinking of the Cheonan and the like. I was talking

with another veteran of the Obama administration today from the Pentagon who was making this point to me, and this person said it's almost as if we've changed places. We saw our role as trying to ratchet down the desire of the South Koreans for more aggressive actions at the time, and now you have a situation where arguably it's the United States that's demanding more, and it's almost like a reversal from the situation that you experienced back then.

**Blair:** I think that's a valid consideration. These things are never 90/10, you know; they're 60/40 kinds of things. But when I was involved after I left government after the Cheonan and the Pyong Ni incidents, I went over to Republic of Korea to do some advisory planning, and the South Koreans explicitly developed a doctrine that they called "immoderate response," they were not going to, I don't—

**Glasser:** That's very far away from strategic patience.

**Blair:** That's right. I didn't know what the Korean word for it was, but—

**Glasser:** Immoderate response?

**Blair:** Immoderate response. They were determined not to play tit for tat with two artillery shells for two artillery shells, and so on, and so—but, the United States was right there in the planning situation, and eventually worked out our different approaches.

You know, the last thing that we want out of a crisis with North Korea is to mess up our alliances with Korea and Japan—good God, if we take action that is high risk, and the result of it is that we fracture the alliance with the Republic of Korea, the alliance with Japan, because we haven't consulted them; we haven't thought it all the way through; we don't have a backup plan; then the North Koreans win big time, and frankly, I see a little too little concern for that and talk about that from the administration, when to me that's right up there with our top objectives.

**Glasser:** It's interesting you raise that point. I have, in more than a decade in listening to this conversation here in Washington play out, this is the first time—people are, I've observed, scratching their heads and saying, "Well, maybe this really is something different." You have people speculating in informed conversations, "Well, is Trump really willing to risk civilian casualties in Seoul at this point in order to secure the U.S. homeland in a way that we haven't seen before?"

**Blair:** I think it's stupid. I mean, the primary advantage we have is our alliances with the forward presence it supports; our goals are all the same.

Look at it from a Republic of Korea view. We've been living under a nuclear threat for 20 years now, and when you think that you were now under a nuclear threat, the United States, you go crazy. Where were you when we were working on this? And the thing is, we were there. We talked about and practiced extended deterrence, that is an attack on one of our allies, specifically Republic of Korea, would be like an attack on the United States, would be met by a nuclear response, thereby, as I mentioned, deterring it from happening. And the reason we did that was to maintain the advantages of the alliance and our forces that are stationed there, and the overall—both military and geopolitical and economic advantages that the United States has in that part of the world, which rests on our relationships with the Republic of Korea and Japan.

To lightly throw those away for some theoretical chance that Kim Jong Un might take a completely uncharacteristic suicidal action seems to me a bad way of analyzing the problem.



**Glasser:** Very understated. Well, I want to ask you about something that hasn't been so understated, which is President Trump and his views toward the U.S. intelligence community of which you were the head for some period of time.

Are there potential consequences now that we are in a geopolitical crisis to that? What have you observed as the fallout from having this extraordinary situation of a president who has so openly and publicly been critical, and very much saying he wants to lay the blame for different conflicts and wars at the intelligence community, right? That's what he continues to say about Iraq, that that was an intelligence failure. One could imagine a situation where if he's forced into something with North Korea, he would also blame that as an intelligence failure.

**Blair:** There's been a tawdry little bargain between the intelligence community and politicians in recent years, and it goes like this: The politicians say, "Okay, intelligence community, you need to warn me against any event that might affect the interests of the United States, and you need to inform me in precise tactical detail so that I can take precise tactical action to forestall it. And if you don't, then it's your fault, and I can blame you publicly."

So, that's the bargain on the political side. Remember 9/11, all of that controversy about was there a president's daily briefing item about Al Qaeda, or wasn't there?

**Glasser:** "Bin Laden determined to strike in the U.S."

**Blair:** Yeah, yeah. Right, right. And the bargain on the intelligence community's side goes this way: It does the best it can, but it's a lot more limited than Matt Damon movies would lead you to think, and so a lot of what you do is a combination of really good insights into your adversaries, and assumptions, and assessments, and guesses, based on your knowledge. And every once in a while you'll screw up, and when you miss one—as 9/11 was clearly missed, that's the extreme example—then you say, "Oh my God, it was an intelligence failure. We really screwed up, but we're so busy, we need another x-billion dollars in order to develop the resources to be able to watch that." And the politicians say, "Okay, it was your fault, but here's 10 billion more dollars a year, and don't let it happen again."

Maybe an intelligence leader or two is pushed off the gangplank, and the intelligence budget continues to grow, and the bargain resumes. So, what's going on? That's part of it. The politicians want to put the bills in the position in which they should have perfect foresight of bad things that might happen to the United States.

The reality is that intelligence can only do so much along that regard. Now, military commanders have understood this for years, and they allow wide margins in their plans for the quality of the intelligence that they have.

Politicians don't allow margins in their policy. I guess this was most vividly brought home to me in the Iranian nuclear debate, when the politicians were putting tremendous pressure on us to give sort of—to know as much about the Iranian nuclear program as the Iranians did. You know, this is stuff that Iranians are trying hard to hide. If they find any leaks, human spies, they kill them. So the chance that we can get it exactly right is low, and you shouldn't say, "Well, Iran has exactly 172 kilos of highly-enriched uranium this month, and in two months they'll have 185, and therefore, they are exactly four months away from a weapon, and therefore we should take action."

I mean, I would constantly emphasize in my briefings that here's our best guess, but here are the error margins that you should put around it. So that's the other standing tension between the—well, I guess there's a third. The third is, the intelligence chief so often has to be the bearer of bad tidings. I saw it most

poignantly. You know, I'd sit in a National Security Council meeting when one of my fellow secretaries would report a conversation that he or she or one of his or her subordinates had had with an adversary, or even an ally, and they'd say, "Oh, I really put the U.S. point over, and they understood when they walked out what the United States is going to do."

And then, through one means or another, we might get a copy of what that same person reported back to his own government about the same meeting: "God, did I take in that rube of an American. He thinks that we are going to do this stuff he's asking us; we have no intention of doing that." And so, so often you're the teller of truth.

And so, I don't mind a standoff relationship between the DNI, or between the intelligence community and the politicians for all those reasons. You don't want to get too close; you don't want to fall under this bargain of intelligence has to be perfect, and you don't want to sign on for being able to produce tactical perfection when you know that you can't.

And so, there's always been that sort of a tension, but as we said before, the personality of this president sort of exacerbates and gives new dimensions to these underlying tensions of the role of intelligence in a democracy.

**Glasser:** But I have to ask you, he's explicitly rejected the findings, the more or less unanimous findings of the intelligence community, that Russia intervened in the elections. How does that kind of standoff get resolved?

I mean, doesn't that mean that he's going to get less good advice, or less candid advice, or less support when he needs it, whether it's a nuclear confrontation with North Korea or somewhere else?

**Blair:** Depends on the leadership within the community. Left to themselves, the analysts will trim. I mean, if you put your—if you've got a president and high-level White House staffs who are beating directly on intelligence analysts, saying, "How can you come to that conclusion? Where's your evidence?" and so on and so on, they will bend. I mean, they're humans.

But, if after one of these briefings in which it's rejected, you bring your guys and gals back to the room and you say, "Okay, looks like what we told them didn't go down very well but I want you to go out and continue to do as good a job you can.... But if they're just talking nonsense disregard it and go ahead and continue to do your analysis and we'll go back the next time with our best estimate." And so that's a real leadership job and frankly I had that trouble within the Obama administration and I feel sorry for Senator Coats now, because he's clearly subject to it. But so what? You've got to pass the look-in-the-mirror test. You take an oath to the Constitution, not to some individual. And you do your job and you know that's the best for the country.

**Glasser:** Well, let's end on North Korea again. Admiral Dennis Blair is our guest this week on The Global Politico. I have to ask you: Do you think that there was anything that could have been done differently on North Korea? Do you feel it was inevitable that they would end up with this nuclear program? Could it have been stopped?

**Blair:** My observation is that if a country is willing to pay any price, bear any burden, it can develop the technical expertise, the engineering programs, and can either steal or develop the materials you need to develop some form of nuclear weapons. We've seen that in Pakistan. We saw it in programs that have been stopped short that were started in places like Syria and South Africa and other places. So I think the cold hard reality is, the shibboleth you hear that you can go on the internet and find the design for a nuclear weapon is true. The hard part is how do you do the engineering, the metallurgy, all of the other

very tough engineering feats that are required to make it work. And I have very high regard for North Korean technical capability. They have shown themselves not to have a broad-based capability but they have some smart people who can do some quite innovative and impressive things. We've seen some of their hacking opportunities; when there are only—what?—four internet sites in North Korea and yet they were able to take down Sony. So no I think the answer is if a country is absolutely determined to develop nuclear weapons it's going to do it.

In the peculiar North Korea case, with this philosophy they have of *juche*, self-reliance, it's actually an advantage to be isolated by the international community. Then you have a reason for people having no food. Then you have a reason for spending less money on your armed forces, and the nuclear weapon is the apotheosis of that. Then you have a reason: I may be starving but I am defying the great United States. The curious thing about North Korea is that it plays into their narrative, which keeps their grip on government, and that is what matters to them the most. Contrast that with Iran. Iran does not see itself as an international pariah. It sees itself as a powerful, connected part of the world community. Now, it wants to have nuclear weapons too if it could. Now when it made that agreement it decided that being a near-nuclear power and having better economic ties with the rest of the world was the smartest thing it could do. North Korea has taken the other approach completely.

**Glasser:** So Admiral Blair I think I'm coming away from this conversation with two takeaways. Number one: North Korea is not going to give up its nuclear program. And number two: we're not headed to war, at least not anytime in the next few weeks. So I'm going to sleep better at night. I hope that was your intention. Either way I feel enormously more enlightened about this really long-term policy dilemma for the US and I know that all of our listeners will thank you for sharing your insights with us.

**Blair:** Well, thank you, Susan.

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**Glasser:** And so now we're back with Ambassador Chris Hill, who has joined us to talk all things North Korea. And I have to say this is somebody who has something which is a real rarity when it comes to North Korea and American foreign policy; he has actual face-to-face experience with North Koreans. So what can you tell us on the basis of having actually interacted with North Koreans, negotiated with them face-to-face over a period of some months during the second term of the George W. Bush administration? What does that experience tell you about what's going on right now?

**Hill:** Well, I think first of all to understand North Koreans is to understand Koreans. I mean, these are very intelligent people. You know, we're not dealing with people who don't know anything about the world. But they've lived their lives over the decades and, frankly, centuries in a way to be very sort of distrustful of foreigners and otherwise very skeptical of anything we say. But as negotiators they did not take out paper and read it to us by any means. They did engage in back and forth. Of course, the problem has been that they didn't want to denuclearize, so we had to kind of take it one step at a time. When I was working with them we were launching really the six-party process. And I must say they did care what China thought. And so often when I'd reach an impasse or when the North Koreans would go back on something that they had already agreed with I would shut it down and go and talk to my Chinese counterpart. Most of these negotiations—almost all of these negotiations took place at the Diaoyutai, which is a large complex in the center of Beijing. And so I would tell the Chinese, "Look, we agreed to talk to the North Koreans because you wanted us to, but our condition was we would agree to talk to them provided we could make progress. And I'm not seeing that progress right now, so I don't see any purpose in having any additional sessions with them."

And the Chinese would then kind of swing into action, talk to the North Koreans, and then finally come back to us and say, “Well, I think you’ll find some more flexibility on that position, if you’re prepared to go back.” And, sure enough, the Chinese had some say in issues. They did make progress. I mention all of this because I think there is a sharp contrast between then and now. I mean, I’m talking about negotiations that took place over 2005 to 2008. And I don’t mean to sound nostalgic about Kim Jong Il, but he did seem to care what the Chinese thought, and he might have even cared what we thought.

What is pretty clear today and pretty clear in terms of why there is no progress is that Kim Jong Un does not care what the Chinese think or what we think. And frankly he is not prepared, from what I can tell, to restart negotiations on the basis of what the purpose of the negotiations was in the first place, which was denuclearization. So I think we have a very serious problem combined with the fact that I think North Korea has made a lot of progress on their missile and nuclear development.

**Glasser:** Well, there’s certainly a lot to unpack there. But let’s stay for a moment in your own experience of that period of time right before Kim Jong Un came to power. And in many ways, right, it was the decline of his father which spelled the end of the process of negotiations that you took part in with the North Koreans. In hindsight—recognizing it’s 20/20—was that our last best chance to stop them from becoming a nuclear power that could threaten the United States?

**Hill:** It might have been. But let me make very clear we negotiated on a step-by-step basis. First we got them to shut down the reactor. Then we got them to take some disabling steps, including blowing up the cooling tower. These disabling steps were not meant to essentially make the reactor and other facilities unusable for the rest of history, but they were meant to make it difficult to reuse them. And we had estimated it would take about five years, which I think proved to be more or less accurate.

So we had done that. Then we got people in to look at how much plutonium was probably developed through the reactor. We got to take a lot of records from the reactor, so we understood its whole development history. So we were able to make progress there. Ultimately the negotiations collapsed because although we were able to make progress there, we were never able to come up with a verification agreement. So North Korea did give us a declaration. We felt it was incomplete and incomplete especially for the fact that they never explained what they had done with all this equipment purchased in various channels, which was equipment that was consistent with a highly enriched uranium facility, that is the other means to attain a bomb.

So we were not prepared to go forward without an adequate verification. It’s one thing for them to give us an inaccurate declaration. Frankly, nothing they would have produced would have necessarily been accepted as fully accurate, but in the absence of verification we weren’t able to go forward. So the real question is why weren’t they amenable to verification? And was it because Kim Jong Il was at that point very ill and not able to issue instructions? That was one theory. Another theory was that they felt they wanted to wait for the new U.S. administration in 2009.

But still another theory—and this may be proved to be the accurate one—is they never really intended to fulfill the requirements set out in September of 2005 of abandoning all their nuclear programs, and to agree to verification or a standard of verification acceptable to us would have meant they’d have to make progress on that specific issue of abandoning all of their nuclear programs. And by 2008 they were pretty much clear that they were not going to go forward with that.

**Glasser:** Well, so that’s the really interesting question. Were they, in the end, just successfully, as it turned out, buying time for their nuclear program? And if that’s the case—again, recognizing this is all in hindsight—was it a mistake to have engaged in those negotiations?

**Hill:** Well, I don't see how not engaging would have necessarily helped. I mean, they would have continued to develop their nuclear programs. In fact, there were very few negotiations in the course of the Obama administration, and there is no sign whatsoever that nuclear programs were in any way slowed up during that time. So I don't quite understand the notion that somehow they were buying time, that we could have otherwise done something else to hasten the denuclearization.

I think there is also another absolutely critical point, which is maybe a bit of an elusive concept in the U.S. because we don't often think about how other countries, specifically how other allies, regarded all of this. In the first Bush term there were many voices within the administration adamantly opposed to any type of negotiation. And with respect to the North Korean negotiations one of the reasons to engage was to make sure your partners and allies who after all live in the shadow of North Korean artillery feel that the U.S. is adequately addressing the problem. It's very easy to be in Washington and say, "Don't negotiate." It's a little more difficult when you're some 25 miles away from North Korea.

So I don't think it's surprising to me that the Trump administration would rather like to get going with some kind of negotiation, provided it's on the basis that we pursued the negotiation, which was the denuclearization of North Korea.

**Glasser:** Well, you raised this issue, which is a fascinating one, which is that in negotiations often it's the politics back in Washington and on your own side that influence these things as much as your direct interactions with the others. And the politics of the Bush administration were—what's the right word— toxic when it came to this issue. As far as I can tell, your enemies from that period of time are still writing about and litigating this war with you over whether we should have negotiated.

You have a fabulous memoir, which I recommend to all our listeners, called *Outpost: Life on the Front Lines of American Diplomacy*, in which you recount what it felt like to have this internal politics of the Bush administration constraining you at times, subjecting you to a lot of second-guessing from what you call the neocon hawks in the Bush administration who pressed for the war in Iraq. That wasn't going so well. This issue of the North Korea talks came up, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice empowering you to go ahead and conduct this diplomacy.

There was an awful lot of second-guessing. Vice President Cheney was a very public skeptic of what results you would achieve. And even now *The Wall Street Journal* just wrote an editorial saying, "a noted appeaser on North Korea, Chris Hill," right? So tell us a little bit about the politics in Washington and how that might have affected our relationship with North Korea.

**Hill:** Well, I think you have to go back to the extreme skepticism about the so-called Agreed Framework, which was the Clinton-era negotiations. And that too was a negotiation that succeeded in getting the reactor shut down and succeeded in getting people on the ground and had a kind of way forward with respect to eventually somehow supplying North Korea with civilian-use nuclear power that would be, if not bombproof, but certainly more difficult to produce bombs.

Now, of course, later, at the end of the Clinton administration and the beginning of the Bush administration, it came to light that lo and behold the North Koreans were making purchases consistent with developing a highly enriched uranium facility. In short they were clearly obfuscating that and, frankly, lying about it. And so when the Bush administration came in there was a feeling, you know, "Why are we negotiating with those people when they're not telling the truth?"

So I think in the first Bush administration people kind of held the line, "We're not going to talk to those people." And, in fact, I think the creation of the six-party process was an effort by President Bush and the Chinese president Jiang Zemin to say, "Okay, we can talk." You know, "The U.S. will talk to the North

Koreans, but we need to do it in a multilateral context where there will be Chinese there and that therefore the obligations North Korea makes are not just made to the U.S. but rather to all of their neighbors.” So by being advocates of multilateral diplomacy, which by the way is not something the Bush administration is particularly well known for, they were able to kind of get going with the negotiations. But still there were extreme skeptics of this. And certainly as the negotiator out there I was often the brunt of their ire about it. My answer to them then and my answer to them now is that rather than Vice President Cheney speaking to the journalists or worse yet talking about it in his memoirs, if he had problems with what I was doing he should have walked the 10 feet or so to the Oval Office, sat down with the president, and made his case. Because if the president didn’t want a negotiation with North Korea or didn’t want me to conduct the negotiations with North Korea, I wouldn’t be conducting them. This was entirely up to the president and, frankly, the secretary of state. And yet there is this kind of weirdly romantic notion that a diplomat can be out there making up his own foreign policy and doing things on his own without any kind of instruction. So my advice to Dick Cheney is to have talked to his boss. And if President Bush didn’t want us to pursue this he would have shut it down.

**Glasser:** So speaking of advice let’s flash-forward to today. You are the last senior American to negotiate with the North Koreans. Have you given any advice to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson or H.R. McMaster or the Trump administration?

**Hill:** I have not. I’d be happy to, but they seem to have the problem in hand. My own view is that we need a lot of diplomacy on this issue but not necessarily with North Korea. I think we need diplomacy to make sure our allies feel comfortable with how we’re pursuing it, namely South Korea and Japan. But we also need diplomacy to try to sit down with the Chinese and do a very deep dive with them about what exactly are their expectations from all of this, what are our expectations.

It’s extraordinary to me, for example, that for years the short form of China’s policy was somehow they didn’t want North Korea to collapse because they’re worried about refugees. I think the first part is correct; they don’t want North Korea to collapse, but I think their concerns have to do with how we could take advantage of that. Would there be a perception that this is an American victory? Because, after all, the American ally, South Korea, would be the successor state, so would there be a perception among the Chinese public that it’s an American victory and a Chinese defeat? How would China look at this?

And so I think it’s very important that we try to have these kind of deep dives with the Chinese on this. And so far we sort of communicate with them by the occasional dead-of-the-night tweet or a few phone calls, maybe one or two visits, but we haven’t had the sustained kind of discussions. You know, when Nixon went to Shanghai and pulled that rabbit out of a hat, well, you know, rabbits don’t live in hats. Henry Kissinger spent days on end stuffing that rabbit down the hat.

And so I think we need that kind of approach because as difficult—and it is difficult to get the Chinese to take this problem seriously and deal with us as a partner in it as opposed to an adversary. As difficult as that is, I think we’ll see that if we eventually solve this we’ll look back and realize we solved it because we worked with China, not because we worked against China. So that would be my advice to President Trump, and I hope he listens to this podcast.

**Glasser:** Well, me too. But I have to say, you know, there’s a certain circular even Groundhog Day quality to some of this, right? You write in your book that in your own interactions—and this is now a decade ago—with the North Koreans, the Chinese were the key actors. And the key question even then was were they willing to graduate from this legacy problem of being tied to the North Korean regime that they had inherited. And here we are having that same conversation.

You wrote in your book when it came to sanctions, for example, “the fact was that North Korea was the most heavily sanctioned country in the world, and it was unclear that any additional imposition of sanctions would yield a different result.” Well, here we are again more than a decade later. The United Nations just the other day has passed another package of sanctions in response to what appears to be one of the biggest North Korean nuclear tests yet. And so why should anything be different this time?

Hill: Well, I think the sanctions have moved somewhat from those days 10 years ago. Even though North Korea was the most heavily sanctioned country at the time, it’s even more heavily sanctioned than it was 10 years ago. North Korea does not have refined petroleum. That is, they don’t have gasoline. They don’t have refinery capacity. So I think there is a kind of further effort than ever before. But I think most importantly that China has agreed with this every step of the way.

So it hasn’t worked yet, but it’s still the right approach to take. And the question is—it’s not that we’ve been rebuffed and have gotten nowhere; we just haven’t gotten the distance that we need to get to in order to have real pressure.

Those who would try to kind of size the problem to fit the solution, that is, say that North Korea is a country interested in a couple of nukes because after all they’re a poor country and they don’t have a lot of prestige in the world or, “North Korea wants a couple of nukes because they think everyone is going to attack them,” I don’t think that is really what we’re dealing with here.

I think we’re dealing with a country that has much more ambitious objectives with those nukes, namely to try to decouple the U.S. from South Korea, to force a U.S. president to consider that in helping South Korea he or she would be subjecting the American people to a possible nuclear attack. So I think it’s an extremely serious effort by North Korea. And if we don’t live up to our obligations in those treaties I think that would undermine our alliance systems around the world.

So I put this at number one, and I really wonder why people say, “Well, let’s ignore it for a while.” I don’t think strategic patience or strategic neglect is going to help us.

**Glasser:** Well, you know, this is the question that really is why I wanted to do this week’s podcast on North Korea. For many, for a long time this “strategic patience” notion really came into play during the Obama administration. Then it became clear that North Korea was on the verge of this breakthrough. You had President Obama telling President Trump in their first meeting that this was going to be the number-one foreign policy crisis on the agenda.

We now seem to have moved into crisis mode, but my question to you and to others who have looked at this is: Are there really any different options than there were before, or is the nature of the threat now revealed to be so much more serious that President Trump and his national security team really might be considering something like a preemptive attack on North Korea or sacrificing citizens in Seoul to protect citizens in California? How alarmed should we be?

**Hill:** I think the problem with a preemptive strike is you have some 20 million South Koreans within range of North Korean artillery. So with a preemptive strike you run the risk, or certainly a risk that’s greater than zero, that North Korea would retaliate against South Korean civilians. And so if we fail to tell our ally that we’re launching this preemptive strike I think that does, to put it mildly, some serious damage to the U.S.-South Korean alliance, which, by the way, the North Koreans would love to see happen.

So I think we kind of have to tell the South Koreans. And then if you tell the South Koreans, you face the prospect where they would try to protect some 20 million people in bomb shelters, which of course is not

an easy proposition. So I think the preemptive strike idea has a big problem with, frankly, the whole purpose of the whole exercise, which is to defend our alliance with South Korea.

Now, the question is, are there other ways to address this? And I think we should be looking at the very small space, albeit small space, between peace and war. We should be looking at things that I think the Obama administration did more than look at, and that is cyber attacks. We should be looking at whether there are other means to sabotage this program such that the risk of an intervention in the form of a retaliation against those South Korean citizens is truly minimal.

So I think we should just continue to explore this space, and I think in so doing we need to make clear to China that when a country aims nuclear missiles at us, we cannot be indifferent to it and we cannot be patient about it. We need to deal with it. And I think we can work with the Chinese and get them to understand that, because that was not the situation 10 years ago. So I think there is some scope there for working with China, even though it does appear to be the triumph of hope over experience.

**Glasser:** Okay, but “fire and fury.” Is this rhetoric that we’re hearing? Is it something real that we’re hearing from the Trump administration? Or, to be polite about it, are they just merely trying to restore the credibility of the military deterrent? People widely believe that there is no viable military solution. You just sort of suggested that yourself. If there’s no viable military solution, how can the Trump administration really succeed at diplomacy where others have failed?

**Hill:** I think the Trump administration was very wise to take its most credible spokesman on foreign policy, that is General Mattis, and have him go out in front of the cameras and explain the fact that we will defend our allies and ourselves, that we have the capability to do this, and that what we’re looking for is denuclearization, but if North Korea wants something different, we are certainly prepared to obliterate that country. I think those were much wiser words actually than talking about fire and fury in an impromptu press conference at a golf-course clubhouse.

I think it was important. We need to be careful not to start sounding like North Koreans and really not to upset our allies. And, you know, remember, why are we there? We’re there to support an alliance. Why are we supporting an alliance? Because our whole system of national security depends on alliances around the world. We can’t walk away from alliances. So I think talking about fire and fury was not very comforting to the South Koreans and moreover I think when the president also suggested that South Korea is appeasing the North Koreans or that we need to abrogate our trade deal with South Korea that didn’t really help in the game either.

Look, it is a very frustrating issue to deal with North Korea. I’m still in therapy over dealing with North Korea. But it doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t keep our cool and keep at the task. And, again, I really feel that just because we’ve had these episodic occasional discussions with the Chinese or the suggestion that somehow if they take care of the North Korea thing we’ll go easy with them on intellectual property rights or something, I don’t think that’s a serious approach to China.

**Glasser:** Okay, so you’re still in therapy, but are the rest of us going to now have to be traumatized by this too? Can you imagine a situation with the president of the United States, President Trump sitting in the Situation Room being briefed on casualties of hundreds of thousands of people in Seoul and in South Korea and still potentially going forward with a military course like that? Is that a conceivable option for the president of the United States?

**Hill:** Again, I am skeptical that the preemptive strike, A, would get all the missiles and nuclear material or be—



**Glasser:** What about a conventional war?

**Hill:** If we are prepared to have a conventional war, if the American people are prepared for that, if the South Koreans who would so to speak host the conventional war, sure, let's put our helmets on and go for it. But I think war is a very serious means to a serious end, and I'm not hearing in the United States a real conviction that that's what people want to do.

**Glasser:** I was really struck by the fact that you wrote in your book about taking on this role as the assistant secretary of state for East Asia. You talked about what a pedigree it had, these great diplomats, Averell Harriman, Dean Rusk, and of course your mentor Richard Holbrooke had had the position before you had the position in the Bush administration. There has not been anyone appointed by the Trump administration to that job, to many others. They're in the middle of drastically cutting back, it looks like, the footprint of American diplomacy in the world. And yet you're suggesting what amounts to a very complicated diplomatic series of maneuvers as the correct response to North Korea. Is that even a feasible policy option, given the Trump administration's seeming disdain for diplomacy?

**Hill:** Well, I think sometimes they appear to have disdain or certainly the view that diplomacy is weakness. Actually if you consider diplomacy in the context of keeping your allies close and pushing your adversaries to do something they might not have done if you didn't push them hard, I think they've misunderstood the concept. But to your basic point, if you're going to conduct diplomacy it would be useful to have a few diplomats around. .

**Glasser:** So recently when I interviewed Tom Donilon on this podcast we talked about North Korea. And I was struck by his willingness to sort of say, "Yeah, we in the Obama administration and in the previous couple of administrations, we didn't get what we needed out of this." By any indicators, he said, "all the dimensions of the North Korea situation have gotten worse in the last few years." Do you agree with that? And as you look back in the rearview mirror—I know you've been looking back through some of your records of the interactions with the North Koreans in those negotiations—were there turning points along the way that we missed? Was there anything that we could have done to avoid being where we are today?

**Hill:** I think the quick answer is no. I do not blame the Clinton administration. I don't blame the Bush administration nor the Obama administration. I try to keep the blame on the North Koreans. I think at times we could have done things better. That is we could have made sure that we stayed closer together with the South Koreans. As I've suggested, I think we need to engage China in a way that leads to good results. And it doesn't mean that we haven't engaged China. It's just in my view we haven't done it very well.

And I think one of the problems, and certainly this was a problem that existed during the Obama administration, that every engagement with China was a sort of Christmas tree of issues that suggested that we didn't have any real priorities in the world. I mean, the one thing I will say for the Trump administration is they seem to understand that North Korea should be the priority and other issues, alas, are going to have to wait.

I think some of the sort of anger during the Bush administration from within the Bush administration was frustration, and I don't think anger from frustration is ever a good way to pursue foreign policy. So I think we need to kind of keep ourselves cool on this.

Certainly I would hope that some people in the Obama administration would be asking whether perhaps during those eight years they could have been more engaged on some things and try to push China a little harder or something like that. But, again, I don't want to blame people. I think there are problems certainly in how we've all pursued this. If you want to blame the people, there's blame to go to the moon

and back. But I think what we do need is to be very tough on this, very clear about what we need out of this and really resolute in dealing with it because this problem is not going away.

**Glasser:** Ambassador Chris Hill, thank you so much for joining us in this week's Global POLITICO, "Making Sense of North Korea." Thanks again, ambassador.



# Can We Still Negotiate with North Korea?

## A South Korean Perspective

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### Summary<sup>1</sup>

*The Korean Peninsula is back at the crossroads of war and peace. The root cause is North Korea's illegal pursuit of its nuclear ambition that poses serious security threats to the peninsula, all of Northeast Asia and the world. While adhering to the principles of a "denuclearized North Korea" and "no more war on the Korean Peninsula," President Moon Jae-in of South Korea has been advancing dialogue and negotiation, sanctions and pressure, defence and deterrence, and a more proactive role simultaneously. However, such efforts have not produced any tangible progress, fuelling speculation on military conflict. To get out of this deadlock requires talking to each other without mutual demonization. Frankness, two-way understanding and trust-building should be the basic guiding principles of a diplomatic approach. The nuclear issue should be treated as the most urgent agenda. The diplomatic approach must be practical and realistic. Goals for negotiations must be adjusted to*

*changing circumstances and flexible negotiations should be another guideline. A mechanism for dialogue should be restored. U.S.–North Korea bilateral dialogue is the most critical, but the Six Party Talks are still the most viable venue for negotiation. It is not possible to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons through a quick-fix solution. Instead we need to have a patient and long-term perspective.*

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### Introduction

1. A renowned South Korean novelist, Han Kang, contributed a moving column to the *New York Times* with the title "While the U.S. Talks of War, South Korea Shudders."<sup>2</sup> Her wording aptly reflects sentiments of many South Koreans. For 'crisis of April,' 'crisis of August,' 'crisis of October,' and now protracted crises characterize the country's sombre geopolitical reality. Foreign correspondents have been rushing to Seoul to report on the potential escalation of military

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for presentation at the symposium on "Where Are We headed, War or Peace?" at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan, 30 October 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Han Kang, "While the US Talks of War, South Korea Shudders," *New York Times*, 7 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/opinion/sunday/south-korea-trump-war.html?emc=eta1>.

conflict in Korea and North Korea is the lead item in broadcasts in the United States night after night. Foreigners might enjoy watching such on-the-ground news reports with thrill and suspense, but South Koreans shudder at and prefer to block them out.

2. Indeed, the Korean Peninsula is back at the crossroads of war and peace. We have not stood this close to the point of no return since the signing of the armistice agreement in July 1953. Kim Jong Un's reckless military provocations, Donald Trump's bellicose rhetoric and military manoeuvres, China's tough position over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile system in South Korea, and domestic polarization in South Korea have trapped the newly inaugurated President Moon Jae-in in a security dilemma with grave implications. The root cause of this quagmire comes from North Korea's illegal pursuit of its nuclear ambitions.

### **A Nuclear North Korea? Assessing the Reality**

3. Is North Korea a nuclear weapon state? Legally, no. In accordance with the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), North Korea cannot be recognized as a full-fledged nuclear weapon state. In point of fact, however, it cannot be denied that Pyongyang is on the verge of becoming a country with nuclear weapon capabilities. Several factors point to its nuclear status.

4. First, over the past eight years – while the Six Party Talks have remained stalled – North Korea is believed to have steadily amassed nuclear materials and is now estimated to possess an arsenal of more than 10 nuclear warheads. According to a recent analysis by Siegfried Hecker, a renowned nuclear weapons expert, who was the last outsider to visit North Korea's nuclear complex at Youngbyon, North Korea might have secured sufficient fissile materials for 4-8 plutonium weapons and 6-20 highly enriched uranium (HEU) weapons, with an annual production capacity of at most one plutonium weapon and possibly six HEU weapons. According to news reports this summer, the intelligence

community in the United States assessed that North Korea could already possess as many as 60 nuclear bombs. Some analysts project that North Korea could acquire 100 nuclear warheads by 2020, if its efforts are not interrupted.

5. Second, North Korea has developed an array of delivery capabilities ranging from short-range Scud B and C missiles (with a range of 300km-500km) and Nodong (with a range of 1,000km) to Musudan intermediate-range missiles (with a range of 3,000km). The Scud B and C as well as the Nodong missiles are currently operational, but the operational effectiveness of the Musudan has been questioned because four out of its five previous test launches have failed. Nevertheless, Pyongyang was successful in test-launching the Hwasung 12 intermediate-range missile (IRBM) in May and September and the Hwasung 14, a long-range intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), on 4 and 28 July this year. As Kim Jong Un stated, North Korea is in the "final stage" of developing ICBMs, and Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho stated in his speech to the United Nations that North Korea was "a few steps away" from the "final gate." This can be seen as a game-changing development. Equally worrisome is its acquisition of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).

6. Third, North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests since 9 October 2006, of which five are known to have been successful. The destructive power of its previous five tests was less than 25kt each, roughly the same as the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki in 1945, but the 3 September 2017 test is estimated to have yielded more than 100kt, which Pyongyang claims was a hydrogen bomb. Although the reliability of this latest nuclear device is still being questioned, Hecker noted that North Korea must have gone beyond primitive fission-bomb technologies, signifying real progress towards if not initial mastery of a thermonuclear detonation.

7. Finally, North Korea claims that it has succeeded in diversifying nuclear bombs (fission, boosted fission and hydrogen bombs) as well as making nuclear devices smaller and

lighter. It has even declared that it has achieved the standardization of nuclear bombs for mass production.

8. Judged by its acquisition of nuclear warheads, delivery capabilities, nuclear testing and the sophistication of its nuclear weapons technology, North Korea is nearing the status of a country with undeniable nuclear weapons capability. International pressure and sanctions notwithstanding, Kim Jong Un has made it clear that he will not jettison the North's *byungjin* policy (the simultaneous pursuit of economic development and nuclear weapons). Thus, nuclear and missile development will continue not only for their minimal nuclear deterrence, but also for the protection of North Korea's leader (*suryong*), institutions (*jedo*), and people (*inmin*). Also, domestic legitimacy-building and international prestige have become additional driving forces behind Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. North Korea's leadership could temporarily halt the country's nuclear and missile development, but is not likely to return to negotiations with denuclearization as a precondition.

### **We Cannot Tolerate a Nuclear North Korea**

9. The North Korean nuclear threat is thus no longer hypothetical but real, no longer future tense, but here and now. It poses serious security threats to the peninsula, all of Northeast Asia and the world. We cannot tolerate a nuclear North Korea for several reasons:

- North Korean nuclear weapons would significantly alter the military balance on the Korean Peninsula and ultimately impede inter-Korean peaceful coexistence. Moreover, it will trigger an immense conventional and nuclear arms race on the peninsula;
- Pyongyang's superiority in military power could also tempt its leadership to deliberate on reviving its old strategy of a unified front (*Tongil Jeonsun*) that attempts to communize South Korea on its own terms. The North has pursued this strategy whenever it was militarily

stronger than the South. It might sound illusory, but such possibility cannot be ruled out. For the by-law of the Korea Workers' Party still retains such goal in its preamble;

- The regional security impacts would be profound. In addition to strategic instability and spiralling arms races, a nuclear domino effect might lead to proliferation elsewhere in Northeast Asia;
- And the possibility exists that North Korea will export nuclear materials, technology, and even warheads to other actors, threatening the very foundations of world security in this age of global terrorism.

### **The Moon Jae-in Government's Strategy: Dialogue, Sanctions and Pressure, and Deterrence**

10. President Moon Jae-in's policy goal is to realize a nuclear-free, peaceful and prosperous Korean Peninsula along with North Korea. He has adopted two principles and four strategies to achieve the goal.

11. The first principle is to denuclearize North Korea. He firmly believes that South Korea cannot peacefully co-exist with a nuclear North Korea and that Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions should be stopped.

12. The second principle is that there should not be another war on the Korean Peninsula and that the North Korean nuclear problem should be resolved peacefully through diplomatic means. He has said clearly that no country can take military actions on the Korean Peninsula without prior consultation with and the agreement of the South Korean government. This underscores his commitment to peace and opposition to military actions and war.

13. While adhering to the principles of a "denuclearized North Korea" and "no more war on the Korean Peninsula," President Moon has advanced four strategies. They are dialogue and negotiation, sanctions and pressure, defence and deterrence, and a more proactive role in improving inter-Korean relations and

facilitating the resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem.

14. President Moon's first strategic choice is to restore dialogue and negotiation as a viable means of resolving the North Korean nuclear problem. He is well aware of inherent limits to dialogue and negotiation, and absorbed the lessons of the failure of the Six Party Talks as well as bilateral talks between Pyongyang and Washington. He proposes a two track approach in which Pyongyang and Washington engage in bilateral dialogues to resolve the nuclear problem, while Seoul and Pyongyang resume talks to address issues pertaining to inter-Korean relations.

15. He insists that Pyongyang and Washington should find a way to revive their broken channels of communication and engage in meaningful dialogue and negotiation, ultimately including the resumption of the Six Party Talks. Along with this, President Moon is determined to establish parallel bilateral talks with North Korea. He has already proposed to Pyongyang to have Red Cross talks over humanitarian concerns and military talks for tension-reduction along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The Moon government also wants to resume inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, especially on the non-governmental level, within the boundary of international sanctions.

16. But the North has not yet responded to his proposal. While arguing that dialogue and sanctions cannot go in tandem, Pyongyang has defied Seoul's call for dialogue. More critically, it has repeatedly ignored UN Security Council Resolutions by undertaking one underground nuclear testing and ten missile test launches. As long as South Korea resorts to sanctions and pressure against the North, following the U.S. line, Pyongyang sees no

prospect for improving the inter-Korean relations.<sup>3</sup>

17. Facing this reckless challenge from Pyongyang, President Moon's second strategy is sanctions and maximum pressure. The Moon government has closely cooperated with the United States and Japan in pushing for tougher sanctions resolutions at the United Nations Security Council and has fully complied with them. Seoul has also pledged to go along with U.S. unilateral sanctions, including secondary boycotts. More importantly, the Moon government has decided to sustain sanction measures adopted by previous conservative governments such as the 24<sup>th</sup> May measure that bans exchanges and cooperation with the North and the suspension of the Kaesung Industrial Complex and the Mt Geumgang tourist project.

18. Third, the Moon government is pursuing a strategy of deterrence and missile defence. Deterrence is a strategy aimed at preventing North Korea from acting in a certain way by threatening to retaliate with credible military force. It is composed of two elements. One is conventional deterrence through the strengthening of South Korea-U.S. combined forces and South Korea's self-reliant defence posture. The other is nuclear deterrence through close cooperation and coordination with the United States on extended deterrence and the provision of America's nuclear umbrella. That said, the Moon government is strongly opposed to the redeployment of American tactical nuclear weapons on South Korean soil, as well as the development and possession of independent nuclear weapons.

19. Missile defence constitutes another important component. It is composed of active defence (the Patriot and THAAD systems), passive defence (monthly civil defence exercises), offensive defence (kill chain and massive punishment retaliatory measures), and

<sup>3</sup> In his interview with TASS, a Russian state news agency, Foreign Minister Ri Young-ho of North Korea underscores this point by arguing that "it is first of all necessary that the South Korean authorities should halt their humble submission to the USA in its hostile policy and the campaign of sanctions and pressure against the DPRK. It is important

that they should change their policy in favor of the pan-national interaction and measures to cut short acts of aggression and interference from outside." "DPRK people demand US be punished by 'hail of fire' for aggressive policy - top diplomat," Tass, 11 October 2017, <http://tass.com/world/970085>.

battle management (command, control, communications, intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance).

20. Some suggest compellence as an option that refers to a strategy to make North Korea alter its behaviour through the threat or use of force. Whereas deterrence is rather a passive manoeuvre, compellence is a more assertive move through the deployment of coercive diplomacy. Forward deployment of strategic bombers such as B1B, B-2, B-52, carrier battle groups, and nuclear propelled submarines over the Korean Peninsula have been the core of compellence strategy. The United States has recently taken this posture, but the Moon government has only passively participated in it through mutual consultation.

21. Finally, President Moon wants to take a more proactive role in resolving the North Korean nuclear problem by facilitating inter-Korean dialogues as well as seeking close consultation with China and Russia. Despite his commitment, however, this strategy has not been effective not only because Pyongyang has not responded to his call, but also because of a soured relationship with Beijing and Moscow over the issue of the deployment of American THAAD to South Korea.

22. These four strategies might look contradictory. In reality, however, they are not. President Moon has always placed top priority on dialogue and negotiation. Nevertheless, he has to combine it with other options, depending on changing circumstances. It should be noted that for him, sanctions and pressures are not ends in themselves, but the means to bring the North to dialogue and the negotiation table.

### **The Moon Government's "Three Nos": No Nukes, No Military Action and No Regime Change**

23. While advocating a three-pronged strategy, the Moon Jae-in government has also been clear in what it rejects. President Moon strongly opposes three options that have been widely discussed in South Korea, the United States and elsewhere. The opposition can be summarized as the "Three Nos": no nuclear

weapons, no military action, no regime change.

24. First, the Moon government opposes the nuclear armament option. A growing number of people in South Korea are beginning to favour the development of an indigenous nuclear arms program to deal with Pyongyang's nuclear threat. They advocate the independent acquisition of nuclear weapons by arguing that America's nuclear umbrella, provided under the scheme of extended deterrence, is a broken umbrella.

25. But their argument is faulty because American commitment to extended deterrence and its nuclear umbrella is unquestionably firm. Worse is that as soon as South Korea declares its intention to pursue this course, it will face strong headwinds. The nation's nuclear power industry would be ruined, as would the country's traditional alliance with the United States. The South Korean economy would risk facing international sanctions that could send it into a tailspin. Moreover, South Korea going nuclear could be a tipping point that triggers a nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia. These factors have made the Moon government oppose the nuclear option.

26. Moreover, a nuclear armed Northeast Asia would not benefit the United States. Judged by the overall public sentiment in Washington, it would be extremely difficult for the United States to maintain alliances with a nuclear Japan and/or South Korea. Such a development is likely to lead to a loss of American allies in the region. More importantly, the United States would lose its "hegemonic" influence over the region. Japan and South Korea armed with nuclear weapons would not be likely to comply with American demands. They would comply only when extended deterrence and America's provision of its nuclear umbrella remain valid and operational.

27. Some South Korean pundits advocate the redeployment and co-sharing of American tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, if an independent nuclear option is unworkable.

But the Moon government has formally rejected bringing U.S. nukes onto South Korean soil since it violates the principle of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and undermines the demand for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantling (CVID) of North Korean nuclear programs and weapons.

28. Such deployment could also trigger tense nuclear arms races in Northeast Asia. The introduction of nuclear warheads would also introduce *new* risks both in terms of public safety to South Koreans and escalatory risks and miscalculations in deterring North Korea. It is playing with fire. Despite remarks by certain U.S. officials hinting at such a possibility, the United States is not likely to accommodate such a request because of strategic, tactical, budgetary and logistic reasons.

29. Second, the Moon government resolutely opposes military actions, be they pre-emption and/or preventive war. This opposition is grounded in basic cost-benefit analysis. Once initiated, a conflict would be difficult if not impossible to contain and the human and economic costs of war on the Korean Peninsula would be staggering. With a huge civilian population living within artillery range and the largest economies in the world within missile range, South Korea, Asia and the world simply have too much to lose from a war with North Korea – which has very little to lose and will fight to the death.

30. And for what benefit? There is a low probability of achieving the desired military and political objectives. Destroying North Korea's nuclear assets (facilities, materials and warheads) that are distributed, concealed and bunkered, as well as its mobile missile-launching sites, will not be easy. Given the fortified command-and-control system, targeting and decapitating the country's political leadership and solving the "designated survivor" problem will be virtually impossible. Meanwhile, North Korea's massive retaliatory capabilities and subsequent escalation of military conflict would entail grave human casualties in the South and economic catastrophe on a global basis.

31. Finally, the Moon government is also sceptical of regime change involving the removal of the North Korean leadership. On several occasions, including his speech in Berlin on 6 July, President Moon clearly said that he will seek neither regime change in the North nor unification by absorption on South Korean terms. He believes these are neither desirable nor feasible. It is not desirable because such a move would undermine mutual trust, while stiffening Pyongyang's hostility. And it is not feasible in the short run because removing North Korea's leadership is extremely difficult from a practical standpoint.

32. Moreover, the collapse of the Kim Jong Un regime would not necessarily mean the end of the DPRK as a sovereign state. The military or military-party collective leadership could easily replace the Kim regime, and any new leadership is likely to show the same behaviour. Mass uprisings could bring about an abrupt end to the regime, but at present this seems very unlikely. In addition, loss of control over weapons of mass destruction in the wake of political and social chaos is another reason why the Moon government is less receptive to leadership or regime change. We must be vigilant in opposing "solutions" that actually make the original problem worse, while creating new ones that are even more dangerous.

### **Dialogue and Negotiation are Still Possible: Some Personal Observations**

33. It is not easy to talk about the resumption of dialogue and negotiations with North Korea. Washington, the principal partner for dialogue, argues that Pyongyang has not only shown intolerably provocative behaviour, but also breached trust on numerous occasions in its negotiations with the United States. And such brutal acts as the assassination of Kim Jong-nam, an elder brother of Kim Jong Un, critically ruined its international image. Sanctions and pressure cannot be avoided as long as North Korea violates UN Security Council resolutions. Therefore the Moon Jae-in government will continue to take a tough stance on North Korea in close cooperation with the



United States and the international community.

34. However, I believe that there is still room for dialogue and negotiation with North Korea. In an article at the start of this year, William Perry argued that we need to “talk first, get tough later.”<sup>4</sup> I agree. I believe engagement, dialogue and negotiations with North Korea are still the most credible way of handling Pyongyang. President Barack Obama’s policy of “strategic patience” and President Park Geun-hye’s “trust politics” ultimately failed because pressure and sanctions outweighed engagement and dialogue, which in turn demolished the foundation for mutual trust-building. Nevertheless, past failure should not serve as an excuse for not engaging with the North.

35. Washington and Pyongyang are the only two countries that can resolve the North Korean nuclear problem. They should talk. Despite its chronic rhetorical rejection, I personally see some signs of North Korea’s willingness to talk with the United States, and it is up to the United States to probe in a proactive way at the highest level possible. The role of President Trump is, thus, of paramount importance. He should avoid a war of words. Such hostile rhetoric as “no choice but to totally destroy North Korea” and “little rocket man on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime” is counter-productive. He needs to open channels of communication with the North and should even consider dispatching a high-level special envoy to Pyongyang.

36. It is also essential to avoid demonizing the North. Incentives and disincentives should be flexibly combined and presented. Finally, President Trump should send a clear and encouraging message to North Korea and the world that the North Korean nuclear quagmire can be peacefully resolved.

37. In doing so, five things should be kept in mind. First, frankness, two-way understanding and trust-building should be the basic guiding principles of a diplomatic approach. We must speak our minds and also hear out Pyongyang in order to find mutually acceptable solutions. Being deaf to the North or yelling back at Pyongyang, while insisting on unilateral preconditions, won’t lead us to a way forward. Portraying the North as a “band of criminals” will only reinforce the perception that relations are asymmetrical, hindering meaningful dialogue and negotiation. North Korea might be demonic, but we should not demonize Pyongyang.

38. Second, prioritization of the agenda in dealing with North Korea is essential. Pyongyang has been subjected to international criticism over several issues such as nuclear weapons, chemical-biological weapons, reckless behaviour in cyber security, massive violations of human rights and deteriorating conditions of basic human needs. We cannot solve all these issues at once but need to prioritize them in the order of urgency. Primary attention should be paid to the nuclear issue. Progress made on this issue will eventually lead to breakthroughs in other areas through mutual trust-building. Otherwise, there will be no way out of the North Korean quagmire.

39. Third, the diplomatic approach must be practical and realistic. Goals for negotiations must be adjusted to changing circumstances. We must face the reality that we cannot make North Korea completely dismantle its nuclear weapons and facilities in the short term. Instead, we should seek a moratorium on its nuclear program to prevent further production of nuclear materials. Pyongyang repeatedly said it would cease nuclear activities if terms were met. In this regard, Siegfried Hecker’s step-by-step approach of “freeze, roll-back, and verifiably dismantle” might provide us with a viable exit strategy. Practical ways to resolve the North Korean nuclear conundrum

<sup>4</sup> William J. Perry, “To confront North Korea, talk first and get tough later,” *Washington Post*, 6 January 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/to-confront-north-korea-talk-first-and-get-tough-](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/to-confront-north-korea-talk-first-and-get-tough-later/2017/01/06/9334aee4-d451-11e6-9cb0-54ab630851e8_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-north-korea%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-north-korea%3Ahomepage%2Fstory)

[later/2017/01/06/9334aee4-d451-11e6-9cb0-54ab630851e8\\_story.html?](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/to-confront-north-korea-talk-first-and-get-tough-later/2017/01/06/9334aee4-d451-11e6-9cb0-54ab630851e8_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-north-korea%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-north-korea%3Ahomepage%2Fstory)

might be found in existing agreements that emerged from the Six Party Talks.

40. Fourth, flexible negotiations should be another guideline. We must put all possible cards on the table, including a temporary halt to joint South Korea–U.S. military drills, replacement of the armistice agreement with a peace treaty, allowance of North Korea’s peaceful use of atomic energy and space/satellite programs, and normalization of diplomatic relations between North Korea and the United States. We must not exclude these options just because they are being demanded by Pyongyang. While addressing issues through dialogue, we could probe Pyongyang’s intentions and demand accountability for any breaches of faith.

41. Finally, a mechanism for dialogue should be restored. The Six Party Talks are still the best forum for negotiation. Concerned parties can have bilateral, trilateral, four and five party talks within the Six Party Talks framework. In addition, the 19 September joint statement is still the best diplomatic document for denuclearizing North Korea. Deliberating on alternative mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation will be time-consuming. The situation now is critical and we have no time to spare.<sup>5</sup>

### **APLN/CNND Policy Briefs**

These express the views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of APLN members or the CNND, or other organizations with which the authors may be associated. They are published to encourage debate on topics of policy interest and relevance regarding the existence and role of nuclear weapons.

<sup>5</sup> The idea that dialogue and negotiations are still possible hinges critically on whether Kim Jong Un, in fact, believes this. Dialogue with North Korea without any preconditions

### **APLN and CNND**

The **Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (CNND)** contributes to worldwide efforts to minimize the risk of nuclear-weapons use, stop their spread and ultimately achieve their complete elimination. The director of the Centre is Professor Ramesh Thakur. See further <http://cnnd.anu.edu.au>.

The **Asia Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)** comprises more than ninety former senior political, diplomatic, military and other opinion leaders from fifteen countries around the region, including nuclear-weapons possessing states China, India and Pakistan. The objective of the group, founded by former Australian Foreign Minister and President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group Gareth Evans, is to inform and energize public opinion, and especially high level policy-makers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and ultimately eliminated. The Co-Convenors are Professors Chung-in Moon and Ramesh Thakur. The Secretariat is located at the East Asia Foundation in Seoul, Republic of Korea. See further [www.a-pln.org](http://www.a-pln.org).

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is needed to figure out his real intentions and terms of negotiation.

# Moon's Bet on the Olympics: What Comes Next?\*

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Although peace was the prevailing theme of the opening night at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, the air in the VIP box was charged with awkwardness and intimidation. According to International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, North and South Korea had sent a 'powerful message of peace'<sup>1</sup> to the world by uniting as one for the Winter Olympics. It was clear that not all countries found this showcase of peace and unity easy to swallow.

Only a few feet away from U.S. Vice President Mike Pence sat Kim Yo-jong, sister of and special envoy for North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Pence's stony face announced his determination not to make the first visit from a member of the Kim dynasty to South Korea a welcoming one. No eye contact or nods of acknowledgement were exchanged between the two adversaries. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who was positioned awkwardly between an increasingly distant ally and an increasingly charming enemy, altered between looks of pride, excitement, discomfort, and frustration.

In the lead-up to the event, Moon had gambled on a strategy with much greater risk than expected return. He immediately welcomed North Korea's abrupt decision to participate in the games, betting that it would alleviate the possibility of a North Korean provocation during the events and would build crucial momentum for peace on the Korean peninsula.

At least initially, that gamble has paid off: North Korea's participation did ease international concerns and signaled a dramatic diplomatic breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. The two Koreas marched together under a 'unified flag' at the opening ceremony, fielded a unified women's ice hockey team, and held two musical performances by a North Korean band in South Korea.

While much of the international community greets these developments with a cautious hope for peace, the United States and Japan remain cynical if not outright critical. The United States warned against Pyongyang's propaganda efforts, and many of Pence's activities on his visit to Korea were aimed at rebuffing the North's charm offensive and highlighting its brutalities. Accompanied by the father of the late Otto Warmbier (who died a few days after he was released from a North Korean prison in a coma), Pence began his trip by touring and paying respects at the Cheonan Memorial and meeting with a group of North Korean defectors.

Also pressing is the South Korean public's backlash against what they seem to perceive to be South Korea's unreasonable concessions to an undeserving country. The concept of one Korea and ethnic nationalism no longer has much appeal for the current generation of South Koreans. Critics and opponents of Moon's appeasement have tagged the games in Pyeongchang the 'Pyongyang Olympics.'

The odds are probably in the critics' favor. It would be naïve to think that any of these colorful developments would lead anywhere near a denuclearized North Korea<sup>2</sup> and permanent peace on the peninsula. There have been several attempts to use sports as an avenue for inter-Korean reconciliation, and the two Koreas have now marched together 10 times at international sports events. But peace and reconciliation through joint sports teams have proven elusive, and overtures from the North have a history of being fleeting and deceitful.

Tensions may resurface or even escalate<sup>3</sup> soon after this festival concludes—the North Korean regime may react furiously to the resumption of the U.S.- South Korea joint military exercises or take advantage of South Korea's rapprochement momentum to drive a wedge between the allies. Moon will then have to pay a great political price, both domestically and internationally.

Nevertheless, Moon was wise not to pass on this opportunity<sup>4</sup>. Inter-Korean relations had reached a deadlock, and the only way out was to bring the South's stubborn counterpart back to the table. The North's participation in the Olympics offered just that. Kim Jong-un, with whom no head of state has ever met, has officially invited Moon to Pyongyang for his first-ever summit "at the earliest date possible."<sup>5</sup>

South Korea now sits in the driver's seat and is trying to navigate a way forward. The North's motivations may be suspect, but Pyeongchang presents an opportunity too good to miss for South Korea to exercise much greater leadership in its foreign relations. After all, no other state has South Korea's combination of potential influence and desire to change the status quo on the Korean peninsula.

There is no alternative but to resume talks with the rogue state. Every nation involved agrees that a military option should only come second to diplomacy. While the international community sends its support for increased South Korean leadership, Moon, for his part, should take additional steps to reassure his worried

friends—not to mention his own people—that he has a clear denuclearization agenda. He needs to show he will not allow Kim Jong-un to hijack the driver's seat and lead the international community to Kim's desired destination: the recognition of a nuclear North Korea. The real test for Moon's leadership begins now.

[1] powerful message of peace:  
<https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Documentper cent20Library/OlympicOrg/News/2018/02/opening-ceremony/President-speech-PyeongChang-2018-Opening-Ceremony.pdf>

[2] denuclearized North Korea:  
<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/12/04/what-explains-nuclear-choices-in-east-asia/>

[3] Tensions may resurface or even escalate:  
<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/23/ending-north-korean-brinkmanship/>

[4] wise not to pass on this opportunity:  
<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/13/balking-at-talks-not-an-option-with-a-nuclear-north-korea/>

[5] at the earliest date possible:  
<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2018/02/10/0200000000AEN20180210003700315.html>

# North Korea in 2017: *Closer to Being a Nuclear State*

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## ABSTRACT

Kim Jong Un continued to consolidate his power through personnel changes, and North Korean society saw increasing consumerism, along with signs of growing inequality. The economy did well through early 2017 but the subsequent effects of sanctions remained uncertain. North Korea conducted its first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile and its sixth nuclear test, triggering heated debate in the US and elsewhere about how to respond. Kim clearly is not going to give up working on weapons of mass destruction.

In January 2017, Kim Jong Un gave his fifth new year speech, stating that North Korea was in the final stages of developing long-range guided missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. A month later, his estranged half-brother, Kim Jong Nam, was killed by a highly toxic nerve agent in Malaysia, with investigators suspecting North Korean involvement. The fifth session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly, North Korea's highest organ of state power, convened on April 11, issuing a report on the status of the Implementation of the Total 12-Year Compulsory Education law and establishing the Supreme People's Assembly Diplomatic Commission. In July, Pyongyang test-fired a long-range missile into the Sea of Japan, with

some experts stating that the missile could potentially reach Alaska. Two months later, Pyongyang conducted its sixth nuclear test, which had a much larger explosive yield than earlier ones, plausibly claiming it to be a thermonuclear weapon. The Second Plenary Session of the 7th Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Korea convened on October 7, signaling significant intergenerational shifts in leadership as well as a continued emphasis on Kim's byungjin ("parallel") policy of simultaneous nuclear and economic development.

## POLITICS AND SOCIETY

At the age of 33, Kim Jong Un began his sixth year as the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and all indicators point to further consolidation of his power. He had already reorganized the government, replacing his father's "military first" policy, in which the National Defense Commission was the country's most powerful institution, with a structure more akin to that put in place by his grandfather, transferring power to the Workers' Party of Korea and the cabinet. Now he holds the continuing chairmanship of the State Affairs Commission, replacing the National Defense Commission established in 1972 and chaired by his father.

Ongoing personnel changes have also been made to enhance Kim Jong Un's political power. In the last five years, members of the Kim family and other high-ranking bureaucrats have been promoted to or demoted from key positions—or executed—based on their proven or presumed loyalty to Kim. His half-brother, Kim Jong Nam, was assassinated at the Kuala Lumpur international airport in February 2017, removing a potential family rival. But his sister, Kim Yo Jung, was elevated to important positions, including alternate member of the Politburo. Key appointments announced at the Second Plenary Session show that seven out of 27 (including alternate members) in the Politburo and four out of 11 in the Military Commission of the Central Committee are new members (excluding Kim himself), amounting to 26% and 36%, respectively. The number of vice chairmen of the Central Committee increased from nine to 11, with six new members (55%).<sup>1</sup> These new appointments and generational shifts in the political elite indicate continued consolidation of Kim's power, even distancing himself from the power base of his father, the longtime leader Kim Jong Il.

North Korean society showed signs of subtle but important changes. The most notable is the rise of a new middle class and the growth of consumerism in Pyongyang and other major cities. Signs of this can be seen in the widespread use of mobile phones, cars, and motorized bicycles, plus the expanding number of shopping opportunities in the capital and of solar panels in the countryside.<sup>2</sup> Some experts even suspect the country to be undergoing a consumerist transformation, with competition (for example, between travel agencies, taxi companies, and restaurants) and a market-oriented logic becoming an integral part of ordinary life and the country's social fabric. But these changes have increased inequality—a growing gap is arising between the new middle class and the rest of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Closely related to these trends are intergenerational change and the different mindset of North Korean youth, who have grown up accustomed to Western tourists, South

Korean soap operas, and modern consumer goods, especially from China. The fifth session of the Supreme People's Assembly, held in April 2017, included a speech and a separate report regarding the role of youth and the implementation of a 12-year compulsory education system (introduced in the fall of 2012), which adds an extra year of schooling. These reforms and the extra resources devoted to youth education suggest that the North Korean leadership is wary of the younger generation and eager to secure its allegiance amid social change.<sup>4</sup>

Some observers have conjectured that this new middle class will expect more and eventually face economic frustration, pressuring the government into providing the necessary framework for greater commerce and economic openness. Others have even entertained the possibility of social revolution. However, the latest series of anti-US mass rallies in Pyongyang, in reaction to US President Donald Trump's September speech at the UN taunting Kim Jong Un with the name Rocket Man, are a reminder that state-orchestrated nationalism and the repressive state apparatus remain powerful instruments. In tandem, they are likely to overcome any organized opposition to the Kim regime. Also, the number of defectors declined (by 15% in the first nine months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016), suggesting that the North Korean regime has further tightened its control over the population.<sup>5</sup>

## ECONOMY

Despite tightened international sanctions, accounts and indicators suggest an overall picture of a North Korean economy that did relatively well through July 2017. The growth rate of state budgetary revenue was reportedly 6.1% in 2016, suggesting robust growth of the economy.<sup>6</sup> Markets and market mechanisms continue to be widespread and seem to include a growing range of activities. Reports estimate there to be 404 officially licensed markets, with an average of 40.6 markets in each province. In addition, 40.5 unofficial markets, known as *jangmadang* (market grounds), are located in each province. A recent estimate by the (South)

Korea Institute for International Economic Policy places the degree of marketization at 83%, suggesting that 400,000 of the 500,000 businesses in North Korea are using unofficial financial institutions, and that 17.4 million people (out of a more than 25 million total population) engage in informal economic activity through markets.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the share of state budget revenue from “local areas” has been rising, from a mere 16.1% in 2011 to 23.2% in 2016; it was expected to hit 26.7% in 2017, implying growing economic independence at the local level.<sup>8</sup> Another indicator of marketization is the availability of alternative, competing products. Anecdotal evidence shows that North Koreans can choose, for example, from a variety of locally made goods: toothpaste, refrigerators, the popular liquor soju, clothing, and many other items, although the overall menu is still limited.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, revenue from the special economic zones, a major policy initiative under Kim Jong Un, is expected to increase by only 1.2% in 2017, significantly less than the 4.1% in 2016.<sup>10</sup> North Korea reportedly restarted operations at its Kaesong Industrial Zone, a previously jointly run industrial complex with South Korea just north of the border that had been closed since March 2016. South Korea had pulled out in the wake of the North’s nuclear and missile testing.<sup>11</sup>

A key question is the impact of tightening sanctions by the United Nations and others on the North Korean economy. A series of sanctions imposed this year by the UN banned 90% of the North’s US\$ 2.7 billion of publicly reported exports, ordered closure of all joint business ventures with North Korea, and added textiles to the list of banned exports on top of coal, iron ore, and seafood.<sup>12</sup> While the actual effects have yet to be seen, given past experiences of little or limited impact, this time they might have a serious impact, especially with China’s active implementation of the sanctions. North Korea continues to depend heavily on China.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it appears that prices are higher than normal (corn prices, for example, have been reported to be 42% higher than normal, and gasoline prices are increasing, too),

as a result of news of added sanctions and an embargo on fuel sales to the country.<sup>14</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The year 2017 saw rapid and significant developments in North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. The country conducted its first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (Hwasong-14) on July 4 and its sixth nuclear test on September 3. According to North Korean state media, the Hwasong-14 flew 580 miles (933 km) and reached an altitude of 1,741 miles (2,802 km) in its 39 minutes of flight, before crashing into Japanese waters. If fired to the east, the missile is expected to have a range of between 7,000 and 9,500 km (4,300–5,900 miles). Another Hwasong-14 tested on July 28 showed a range of over 10,000 km (6,200 miles), which could reach mainland North America. The destructive power of the latest bomb, believed to be a hydrogen bomb, is estimated to be greater than 100 kilotons (five times that of the bomb dropped in Nagasaki in 1945). Kim Jong Un tested more missiles (88) than his father (16) and grandfather (15) combined, in addition to four nuclear weapons tests.<sup>15</sup> The Kim regime appears determined to speed up the process and to complete its mission to become a fully recognized nuclear power.

The international community reacted strongly to the North’s provocations with a range of tough measures. The UN unanimously passed resolution 2371 on August 5, 2017, which targeted North Korea’s principal exports, imposing a total ban on all exports of coal (North Korea’s largest source of external revenue), iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore, and seafood, as well as targeting North Korea’s arms smuggling, joint ventures with foreign companies, banks, and other sources of revenue. Resolution 2375, adopted on September 11, banned the export of textiles (worth nearly US\$ 800 million annually) and prevented overseas workers (an estimated 60,000 in 20 countries) from earning wages that finance the regime (over US\$ 500 million annually). The measures would also reduce the oil provided to North Korea by about 30% by cutting off over 55% of the refined petroleum products going there. They

would ban all joint ventures with North Korea to cut off foreign investments, technology transfers, and other economic cooperation. The resolution also included strong maritime provisions enabling countries to counter North Korean smuggling of prohibited exports by sea. The latest UN resolution, of December 22, 2017, cuts 90% of petroleum exports to North Korea and demands that North Koreans working for Kim Jong Un's regime abroad return home. Since North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006, the UN has now passed 12 sanctions packages against North Korea. China and Russia were on board but weakened sanctions proposed by the US. For example, both countries objected to the original language calling for an oil embargo and other severe penalties, resulting in a revised draft that set a cap on oil exports to North Korea, without blocking them altogether.

In April, the Trump administration announced a new North Korea policy of "maximum pressure and engagement." This would, first, try to curb North Korea's missile and nuclear activity through sanctions and other diplomatic means, and second, seek engagement if North Korea changes its behavior. The new administration declared that the Obama administration's "strategic patience" had failed, but some observers wonder whether it was very different—both polices increased sanctions but also pressured China to solve the North Korean issue.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, some important differences exist between the two administrations. Of particular note is the "war of words" and personal insults exchanged between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un. While the two countries had exchanged tough words in the past, such personal attacks, especially the use of Twitter by the president, added new dimensions to the conflict:

TRUMP: North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen. (August 8)

KIM: Let's reduce the US mainland to ashes and darkness. (September 14)

TRUMP: If the US is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. . . . Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself. (September 19, at the United Nations)

KIM: I will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged US dotard with fire. (September 21)

TRUMP: Kim Jong Un, who is obviously a madman who doesn't mind starving or killing his people, will be tested like never before! (September 22)

Observers have noted that publicly and personally attacking a godlike figure such as Kim can only be counterproductive in solving the North Korea issue, as it will make it more difficult for policy-making elites around him to advocate negotiation or compromise.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the novelty of personalized attacks and the use of social media, 2017 saw more heated debates on diverse options regarding US policy on North Korea than in the past, when policies were largely based on a simple logic of "sticks and carrots." The US administration's reference to military options is not new, but its increased frequency reflects its sense of urgency about North Korea's faster-than-expected pace in developing ICBM technology that could reach the continental US. As Trump stated, "Military action would certainly be an option. Is it inevitable? Nothing's inevitable."

Hopefully, we're not going to have to use it [military action] on North Korea. If we do use it on North Korea, it will be a very sad day for North Korea."<sup>18</sup> Others have advocated containment and deterrence, with continued sanctions, as the preferred option to a preventive US strike. Comparing the North Korean threat to that of the Soviet Union during the Cold War and even to the Cuban Missile Crisis, they argue that US policy needs to reorient from denuclearization to containment of the North's nuclear weapons. For example, Scott Sagan has argued that "North Korea no longer poses a



nonproliferation problem; it poses a nuclear deterrence problem.’’<sup>19</sup>

Still others have argued that engagement, not sanctions (which repress the forces of change and further isolate North Korea), is the appropriate response. They see the seeds of change as coming from below (a small but important rise of the middle class) and contend that the US should seriously engage the North to facilitate this.<sup>20</sup>

Another suggestion, best put forth by Henry Kissinger, is “grand bargaining” with China. In his view, mere cooperation on economic pressures is not sufficient, and a more comprehensive deal between the two powers would be the best option in solving the denuclearization issue. To accomplish this, he prescribed “a corollary U.S.-Chinese understanding on the aftermath, specifically about North Korea’s political evolution and deployment restraints on its territory.”<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, Trump and Washington officials have been sending out conflicting messages regarding the state of “negotiations” with North Korea. For instance, Secretary of State Tillerson said that, “We ask, ‘Would you like to talk?’ We have lines of communications to Pyongyang. We’re not in a dark situation or a blackout. We have a couple of direct channels to Pyongyang. We can talk to them. We do talk to them. Directly, through our own channels.”<sup>22</sup>

The very next day, Trump undercut such claims, tweeting, “I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man ...”<sup>23</sup>

In South Korea, the Moon Jae-in administration is facing a dilemma in meeting the conflicting demands of its key supporters (pro-engagement) versus the demands of the conservatives and the international community (pro-sanctions). In sync with the US and the international community, Seoul joined the sanctions against Pyongyang and did not reopen the Kaesong complex or the Mt. Kumgang tourism site. At the same time, Seoul also attempted to engage the North by proposing

high-ranking military talks (which was ignored by the North) and also by offering US\$ 8 million in humanitarian aid, drawing some criticism from Korean conservatives, Japan, and the US. It has not been implemented.

In the face of the North Korean threat, there is a growing popular demand that South Korea go nuclear. In a Gallup Korea poll conducted in September 2017 (n ¼ 1,004), 60% of those surveyed believed that South Korea should arm itself with nuclear weapons; 35% disagreed. Still, South Koreans today think it is less likely that the North will start a war than they did in the past. In the same poll, 58% of South Koreans said there was no possibility North Korea would cause a war, while 37% said they thought it would, much different from a similar survey conducted in 1992, in which the numbers were 24% and 69%, respectively.

China, too, has shown mixed reactions. While the country joined inter-national sanctions and implemented measures such as ordering North Korean businesses in China to close, ordering Chinese banks to stop working with North Korea, and announcing that it might cut off gas and limit petroleum exports, observers have noted that such moves should be seen as largely tactical.<sup>24</sup> Other indicators, such as China’s not announcing any plans to reduce crude oil shipments to North Korea, as well as ongoing border trade between the two countries, suggest that Chinese pressure on North Korea is limited. China sees the current crisis largely as a US–DPRK problem and continues to urge dialogue between the two adversaries, including resumption of the six-party talks that have not been held for a decade.

### ”RICH NATION, STRONG MILITARY”?

The main pillar of the Kim regime is simultaneous nuclear and economic development, known as byungjin. The logic is that nuclear development not only compensates for the North’s inferiority in conventional military capability vis-a-vis the South,<sup>25</sup> but also contributes to the economy by allowing the regime to reallocate conventional defense spending to the civilian economy. In the 7th

Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee on October 7, economic officials were elevated to more influential positions in the party hierarchy, demonstrating Kim's commitment to economic development.

Thus, while the main objective of developing nuclear and missile development is to defend the nation from external threats, it goes beyond that. In a sense, it is reminiscent of the slogan and ideals of Japan's leaders during

the Meiji Era (1868–1912), *fukoku kyohei* (rich nation, strong military), which was successfully replicated by Park Chung-hee in South Korea decades later. Kim Jong's Un's grandfather Kim Il Sung also attempted this approach, but failed. It remains to be seen whether his grandson will succeed this time around. But if this is his ambition, then it is highly unlikely that he will give up his programs to develop weapons of mass destruction.

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# Trump Should Help North Korea Keep Its Nukes Safe

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Only a handful of nations have ever attempted to acquire a nuclear weapon—the ultimate status symbol—but once they did so, all took seriously the responsibility of managing their nuclear arsenals. Now, a new member is joining the club, one whose track record of recklessness, aggression, and inscrutability make terrifying the idea that it, too, will possess the ultimate weapon. Yet the real worry with North Korea becoming a nuclear power is one U.S. officials have so far ignored: Will Kim Jong Un respect the power of his nukes enough to make sure they are safe and safely controlled?

Despite official pronouncements that the U.S. will never accept a Pyongyang with nuclear weapons, the reality is that, short of a massive war that removes the Kim regime, North Korea appears unstoppable headed to becoming a nuclear-weapons-capable state. It may seem counterintuitive, but the U.S. needs to worry less about the risk of a North Korean nuclear war than about a nuclear accident. And as President Trump embarks on his trip through Asia, he would do well—as crazy as this sounds—to consider how the U.S. can help Kim keep his nukes safe. The best partner in this effort might well be China, the North's only official ally and its major supporter. Regardless of the state of Sino-North Korean relations, which appear to be in a rough patch right now, Beijing remains the only actor close enough to Pyongyang to even try to instill some nuclear responsibility.

The Trump administration could reach out to the Chinese to encourage them to try to offer

some friendly advice to Kim. Kim undoubtedly wants to keep the details of his program as secret as possible, but Chinese President Xi Jinping might offer some basic technical assistance on issues like launch authentication or setting up permissive action links. Helping train missile technicians in damage control and critical repair of launch systems might add another layer of certainty to the daily maintenance of nuclear weapons. And despite the distaste for accepting Pyongyang as a nuclear power, considering some U.S.-North Korean confidence-building mechanisms, perhaps even midwived by Beijing, may come to be seen as a necessary evil in the new nuclear world.

It's worth remembering that it was the specter of inevitable nuclear mistakes that spawned the greatest nightmares of the Cold War—dystopian visions, in books and movies like *Fail Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*, of a world incinerated by an atomic fireball due to a madman, a blown fuse, a garbled message, or a simple computer game. And the public had good reason to worry.

On September 26, 1983, Stanislav Petrov may have single-handedly prevented a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. As a lieutenant colonel in Soviet air defense headquarters, Petrov was the ranking duty officer that night. Just past midnight, the early warning radar alarm sounded, and Petrov looked up to see a single U.S. ballistic missile being tracked inbound toward the Soviet Union. Petrov had just 15 minutes to decide whether the

attack was real. A few minutes later another alarm sounded, and the screens warned that four more U.S. ICBMs were rocketing toward Russia. Once Petrov confirmed that a nuclear attack was imminent, Soviet leaders would almost certainly order an equally devastating counterstrike on U.S. and European territory.

Despite unimaginable pressure and the near-panic of those around him, Petrov did not believe the attack was real. Based on what Soviet nuclear officers thought they understood about U.S. doctrine, a surprise first strike would be massive, designed to destroy the USSR's retaliatory capability. Just five U.S. missiles did not make sense. But if Petrov were wrong, then not only would the Soviet Union soon suffer at least five thermonuclear detonations, there might not be enough time to retaliate if the Soviet leadership or key command and control nodes were destroyed.

Petrov decided the alarm was a false one. With bated breath, he and his subordinates waited to see if he had made the wrong call. When no reports came in of warheads detonated, they could breathe again, shaken by the realization that they had come within minutes of a global thermonuclear exchange. An investigation to determine why the false alarm occurred concluded that what Soviet early warning satellites had identified as the flashes of ICBMs being launched was actually just sunlight glinting off cloud tops.

Such stories of near-mistakes illustrate why “nuclear surety” has become paramount. According to former nuclear-weapons officers I talked with, from the previous commander of U.S. Strategic Command (Stratcom) down to a retired U.S. Air Force Minuteman III launch officer, it was the single most important thing they thought about, trained for, and responded to, day in and day out, every minute that they were on patrol, in the silo, or making national-level decisions about America's nuclear force. Nuclear surety, in other words, is the business of nuclear weapons.

“We have a culture of asking ‘What aren't we doing right?’ to try and avoid mistakes,” said

retired U.S. Navy Admiral Cecil Haney, who was the commander of U.S. Strategic Command from 2013 to 2016, during which time he was the senior nuclear war-fighting officer in the U.S. military. But, he asked, “Will North Korea take shortcuts in a very expensive enterprise?”

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The risks of a nuclear program start with the very act of building a bomb. Americans just don't know how lax the standards may be in the laboratories and assembly plants where North Korea's bombs are ostensibly made, nor how many safety mechanisms will be built into their warheads. The danger of lax standards is compounded by normal wear and tear on nuclear systems. The more use one makes of these systems—by flying bombers, sailing submarines, or moving missiles—the more likely accidents are to occur. During the Cold War, the relentless pace of constant nuclear alerts led to numerous mishaps. In Operation Chrome Dome, for example, U.S. B-52s carrying thermonuclear bombs were kept constantly in the air, flying to predetermined points around the Soviet Union, for eight full years. Between 1960 and 1968, five major accidents occurred, ultimately leading to the cancelation of the program.

Nuclear-weapons accidents such as these, called “broken arrows,” nearly turned into catastrophe more than once. In 1961, a B-52 participating in Operation Chrome Dome flying out of Goldsboro, North Carolina, developed a leak during its airborne refueling. Before the bomber could make it back to base, the crew was forced to eject, and the plane broke apart in midair, releasing two live nuclear bombs. When one of the bombs hit the ground, a firing signal was sent. The four-megaton weapon did not detonate only because its fourth and last safety switch held in place, the other three 50-cent pieces of equipment having armed themselves.

North Korea almost certainly won't have nuclear bombers, but the bulk of its ground-based force will likely be dispersed onto mobile launchers, which can pose its own set of problems. Though some of the North's missiles

are apparently solid-fueled, most are liquid-fueled. Even the more stable liquid propellants used today are among the most toxic substances on earth, and transfer accidents have been a hazard of the job. These mobile launchers are fitted onto large trucks that roam the countryside, making them difficult for enemies to target and destroy, but the very nature of such a decentralized force also means a localized response to any problems. Only on-site North Korean nuclear launch teams would be available to correct an electrical glitch that starts a firing sequence for a loaded missile, or repair a faulty missile or one that has been damaged in some other way while being transported, in order to prevent a potential explosion or unauthorized launch. Such expertise may not be available or reach the problem in time.

It may well be that Kim cannot risk instituting anything near the level of America's nuclear safety regime, since dictators rule by instilling fear, not trust. We have no idea if Pyongyang is planning on developing a similar crisis response infrastructure, since to do so would be to call into question the reliability of the Dear Leader's awesome arsenal. Equally, Kim may feel there is no need to develop such an infrastructure, since he has probably only been assured of the program's unquestioned success.

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Let's assume for the moment that Kim's technicians and maintainers manage to keep his missiles safe and operationally reliable. The next major piece of the nuclear surety puzzle is people.

Not surprisingly, dealing with the world's most powerful weapons requires an extraordinarily highly-qualified cadre of specialists and some of the most rigorous training of any military specialty. Even so, U.S. military personnel have made grave errors. "We are continuously moving towards zero mistakes," said retired Lieutenant General James Kowalski, the former deputy commander of Stratcom, yet others have argued that the pressure to make no mistakes leads to more

shortcuts, cheating, and more stress on the human element of the nuclear force.

Whether the North Koreans will instill a culture of zero mistakes is unknown. Clearly fear will be a major incentive not to mess up, as officers who lose Kim's trust are more likely to be shot than reprimanded or retired. Yet fear can easily become counterproductive, forcing more errors, especially during times of crisis. North Korea might well wind up with a system that buries mistakes (and those who make them), thereby failing to learn to do things better and more safely. That, in turn, makes ever more serious mistakes far more likely, some of which could one day start a nuclear war.

The danger of an unreliable or insufficient command and control system in North Korea is chilling to contemplate. The use of American nuclear weapons is controlled solely by the president, and there is little reason to assume that Kim would allow anything less. But the chain of authority in the U.S. system is clear, from the president to the secretary of defense to the commander of Stratcom. Nobody knows how Kim will delegate authority down his chain.

Each stage of getting a nuclear weapon ready for use, from taking the warhead out of the bunker, to mating it to the missile, to targeting and launching, is fraught with the potential for miscommunication. The more launch systems on alert or fully armed and fueled, the higher the probability for some kind of error over time. As former Stratcom commander Haney asked, "How do you know that nuclear weapons will be taken out only when you want them to be, or that you have a trusted teamwork approach?" Just as vitally, will North Korean nukes be armed and ready for detonation as soon as they are mated to missiles? In the U.S. case, nuclear weapons can be enabled only by entering a 12-digit code, known as the "permissive action link" (PAL), into the weapon itself. Without the PAL, the weapon remains in a safe mode, thus providing yet another layer of negative control, preventing the unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. We may never know whether North Korea has enabled such a system or not.

Nor do we know how North Korea's launch orders will be electronically or physically transmitted. Moviegoers remember scenes of nuclear launch officers cracking open the thin red "wafers" holding the alphanumeric codes, in movies such as *War Games* and *Crimson Tide*. Will there be similar electronic "emergency action messages" confirmed by opening "sealed authenticator envelopes" that contain the unique codes for launch, thus ensuring that only proper commands are received? Perhaps a simple telephone call from Pyongyang will suffice to launch nuclear weapons, but that is less secure and possibly more vulnerable to third-party interference, or possibly even misinterpretation.

Will North Korea institute the inviolable two-person rule adopted by the United States, whereby no single individual has launch authority, or even the ability to be alone at any time with a nuclear weapon? In the case of U.S. missile silo crews, not only must both launch officers turn their launch keys at exactly the same time, but a second two-man crew in a separate complex must also do so at the same instant, thereby launching all the missiles under the control of the two groups. Will Kim trust two officers to work together, or does he believe fear is enough to keep a single officer with launch authority in line?

Here is where communications becomes so vital. The stress of maintaining the required level of training and proficiency, not to mention ensuring operational readiness of nuclear weapons, is all-consuming. The last thing any launch officer needs is to worry about making any autonomous decisions about when to use his nukes. That means having absolute confidence in the communications system that tells him what to do. A former U.S. Navy ballistic missile submarine commander, who requested anonymity due to his current job, recalled that his number-one priority was to stay in communication constantly. That is obviously of critical importance in the seaborne submarine fleet, but is hardly less important on land. Dropped phone calls and network interruptions during a crisis could inadvertently unleash a nuclear strike. However Kim decides to send the orders for strategic operations, a former senior

U.S. nuclear commander noted, they likely would come through systems including the country's fiber optics network, as well as occasional line-of-site radio transmitters to the road-mobile launchers. But how reliable will such systems be?

And all these uncertainties are magnified a dozen-fold when talking about sea-based nuclear systems. Pyongyang apparently also wants to develop an indigenous ballistic-missile submarine, which is one of the most technologically complex weapons systems in existence. While it remains years away from having such a capability, operating missile submarines would tax North Korea's untested command and control systems in even more acute ways, not least in the absolute confidence of the stability and reliability of the submarine's senior officers.

\* \* \*

North Korea may soon face the challenge of having to correctly identify perceived threats and decide how to respond. Because Kim will not have the multiple forms of early warning that the United States has, he may well be more likely to interpret bits of intelligence and raw analysis in the most negative light. In fact, it makes sense for him to do so, since the risk of missing the signals of an impending U.S. attack may be existential for him and his regime. Forward observers, North Korean spies, and possibly even hacks into foreign satellite systems all may give incomplete information that lead Kim's senior military officials to urge him to launch a preemptive attack of his own. Fear that the United States, along with its allies, may be able to target and destroy command and control nodes could be enough justification to start a preemptive attack, as any destruction of Kim's military capability might be seen by him and his inner circle as an existential threat.

This is as much a political question as a technical one, and what can be called "national warning" is where the human and technical elements come together closest to the decision-making process. Even after the Cold War, when the ideological passions of that struggle had



abated, Russia and the United States came perilously close to war. In 1995, then-Russian president Boris Yeltsin unlocked his nuclear football and gave orders to Russian ballistic missile submarines to prepare for a nuclear retaliatory strike. Just minutes earlier, he had been advised that Russian early warning radars had picked up what looked like an incoming submarine-launched U.S. ballistic missile.

Unlike in 1983, the radars were not malfunctioning. A real rocket was shooting through a narrow air corridor that could lead to Moscow. And even though it was only a single missile, the Russians thought it might be designed for an electromagnetic pulse attack. Detonated high in the atmosphere, the gamma rays of a thermonuclear explosion can cause a massive overload on a country's electrical networks, shutting down military and civilian systems alike, including radars vital to air defense. The Russians feared that such an attack would be a precursor to a larger U.S. attack crippling the nation's command and control capabilities.

Yeltsin's senior officers had 10 minutes to decide if the missile was real and was heading toward Moscow. If they couldn't determine the trajectory with confidence, they would have to make a recommendation and Yeltsin, whose nuclear briefcase was open and ready, would have had to make the ultimate decision. It took eight minutes before the air defense officials decided the missile was heading out to open sea, rather than to the Russian capital. Within hours, they discovered that the missile was a joint Norwegian-U.S. scientific mission—to study the aurora borealis.

In today's North Korea, nuance during a crisis is likely to be lost on Kim's senior officers. There is every reason to suspect that a combination of self-preservation, ideological fervor, and even true loyalty to Kim would predispose officers to nuclear aggressiveness. The fate of Asia may rest on whether North Korea has its own Stanislav Petrov.

But the U.S. would be wise to do what it can. Trump's trip to Asia is, strange as it sounds, an opportunity to help safeguard North Korean nukes—and, by extension, American interests.



# Can Kim Jong-un Control His Nukes?

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Any travelers waiting for the few flights out of Pyongyang International Airport early on August 29 were treated to the spectacle of a North Korean intermediate-range missile blasting off only a few miles beyond the runways. Just before six in the morning, a Hwasong-12 missile, also known as the KN-17, with a purported range of nearly four thousand miles, arced northeastward over North Korea and the Sea of Japan. Eight minutes later, it passed over Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four home islands. Roughly six minutes after that, and approximately 730 miles east of Hokkaido, it broke apart and fell into the Pacific Ocean.

If the trajectory of the KN-17 had been a little more northerly, and had it broken up a few minutes earlier, it could have rained rocket debris down on Sapporo, Japan's fifth-largest city, with a population of two million. Like many North Korean rocket tests, this one ended in structural failure, a reminder that Pyongyang has not yet perfected its missile technology. While that may give temporary solace to those worrying about North Korea's nuclear capability, it serves as a warning about perhaps the most serious threat posed by Kim Jong-un's nuclear and ballistic missile arsenal: its safety.

Perhaps the world should worry less about the threat of a North Korean-instigated nuclear war and more about the risk of a nuclear accident. The most frightening question raised by Kim Jong-un's pursuit of the ultimate weapon is also the simplest: Can he control his nukes?

Unlike a conventional military, where tanks, trucks, even planes are relatively simple instruments of war, owning nuclear weapons is a huge, expensive, and complex responsibility. Warheads must be maintained, as must the missiles that deliver them. Launch procedures are—or should be—complicated enough that no weapon can be fired on a whim, yet reliable enough that a national leader has confidence his nukes are ready when he is. Given the terrible responsibilities involved, nuclear personnel need to be carefully chosen and trained, since the most mundane procedures have the potential to turn into unimaginable catastrophes.

The warhead that detonates over a target is but one part of a complex system. The US government describes the warheads, missiles, launchers, communications networks, satellites, production and maintenance facilities, trucks, guards, bunkers, and the like as the “nuclear enterprise.” Having confidence in that enterprise—that the weapons are safe, are in place when needed, will work as desired, and (as important) will *not* work when *not* desired, and that crews are fully trained—is known as “nuclear surety.”

Even if Pyongyang's laboratories and factories are safe, weapons systems break down, age, and suffer untold problems. Even the nations that have been working with nuclear weapons the longest—the United States and Russia—still make mistakes, and struggle to ensure that their nuclear operators are competent and honest. The history of the cold war is littered with accidents involving nuclear weapons, known as “broken arrows,” and incidents that could have sparked a global

thermonuclear war. Despite multiple safety systems and rigorous training and maintenance, the US military alone suffered hundreds of accidents such as the 1980 Damascus incident, when an armed Titan II missile blew up in its Arkansas silo after a technician dropped a socket that punctured the missile's fuel tank. Three years later, Soviet radar posts mistakenly reported sunlight glinting off clouds as American ICBM launches; only the doubts of the duty officer at the time, Stanislav Petrov, prevented nuclear retaliation.

As detailed in Eric Schlosser's history, *Command and Control* (2013), there were thirty-two broken arrows between 1950 and 1980 alone, including no fewer than six hydrogen bombs dropped on American soil that have never been recovered, some sinking into the swamps or coastal shallows, lurking forever. In 1961, a dropped megaton bomb was one safety switch away from detonating in North Carolina.

North Korea does not have nuclear bombs or squadrons of bombers, but we cannot take for granted that the North will invest in the safest designs for its warheads or missiles. It is unlikely, but conceivable, that a warhead, jettisoned from a missile that explodes due to a fueling mistake, could detonate. A nuclear detonation on North Korean soil would be hard to cover up, and Kim Jong-un would undoubtedly deflect blame by accusing the Americans, South Koreans, or Japanese of sabotage or an attack, sparking a military crisis that could be uncontrollable.

All this raises the question of accountability. As retired Air Force Lieutenant General James Kowalski, a B-52 pilot and the former deputy commander of US Strategic Command, put it to me in an interview: "Who is going to be the guy who goes to Kim Jong-un and tells him he has a problem with his nukes?" Absolute trust is required between leaders and those charged with maintaining and operating nuclear weapons. It is hard to imagine that existing among Kim's circle of terrified sycophants.

During the cold war, the most harrowing specter of error hung over the command and control of nuclear weapons. The use of nuclear weapons, whether authorized or unauthorized, begins with arming a missile and making it ready for launch. Except for the small number of weapons on alert, US missiles are kept separate from their nuclear warheads, and an order must be given to move the warheads out of secured storage bunkers to be matched with the delivery systems. Given that a good part of Kim's arsenal comprises road-mobile missiles, the time required to move them to safe launching locations may push the North Koreans to keep more warheads outside secured storage, either mated to missiles or quickly accessible.

At the heart of the nuclear enterprise is the turning of the launch key. No one yet knows what North Korea's nuclear release procedures will be. While Kim Jong-un will likely keep all control over nuclear weapons in his hands, he won't physically fire the missile, and so he must delegate that authority in some way. Will Kim have the equivalent of the American president's nuclear "football," with its menu of launch options? Once Kim has decided what he wants to do, will the order go from him solely to the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, the military unit that presumably controls the North's nuclear ballistic missiles? Or will Kim want to give orders directly to the field units, which, in addition to the mobile launchers, comprises launch pads and possibly a silo complex, not unlike the US Minuteman III force?

Even more opaque is the question of who will have ultimate launch authority at individual sites. It is hard to imagine the dictator of one of the world's most ruthless and hierarchical states allowing subordinate officers the autonomy to launch nuclear missiles. Yet if Kim fears a "decapitation strike" by US or South Korean forces, he might issue orders that delegates launch authority to dispersed units. One can envision a scenario during a crisis in which a panicky junior officer loses communications with upper-level commanders and decides that he needs to launch before he is attacked, or because a first strike has taken out Kim.

If Pyongyang does not have reliable communications with its nuclear launch systems and personnel, then the uncertainty in nuclear operations increases dramatically. This, in turn, will put pressure on US commanders who are trying to decide how the North may respond to any American action. “If they did something and we responded,” Kowalski says, describing one of his greatest concerns, “we have to be careful to understand their C2 command and control system and not interfere. You don’t want to put into motion an automatic delegation system where a junior officer has launch authority.”

Living in this new environment will demand some new, perhaps radical thinking on the part of the United States government. This may sound bizarre, but it is in America’s interests to make North Korea’s nukes safer. While some US strategists must draw up plans to deter and, if necessary, defeat a nuclear-armed North Korea, others should consider how to ensure a safe North Korean nuclear arsenal.

Squaring that aim with credible deterrence will be difficult. For example, to make sure that

Kim has constant communications with his nuclear units, so that he does not fear losing contact with them, would Washington assure him that it will not sabotage North Korea’s command and control capabilities, whether through cyber warfare or other means? That might reduce pressure on Kim and his senior officers in a crisis. Could the United States ever propose nuclear stability steps like establishing a hotline between Washington and Pyongyang? Given the North’s closed and hostile system, such cooperation may seem impossible, but the alternative—constant suspicion and hair-trigger reactions—is more daunting.

If Donald Trump decides not to attack North Korea in the next few months, and if Kim Jong-un refrains from giving him cause to do so, the world will settle down to the long-term challenge of learning to live with Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons. Washington may decide never to acknowledge that North Korea is a nuclear weapons state, in a bid to keep nonproliferation aims alive, but the US will need to figure out how to ensure that the accidents and miscalculations of the cold war are not repeated in North Korea, with catastrophic consequences.



# Trump's Biggest North Korea Mistake Is Coming

Michael Auslin

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Originally published in *Politico* on August 29, 2017.

Just days after Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was demonstrating “some level of restraint” by refraining from firing his missiles, Pyongyang on Tuesday launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile over Japan, where it broke up before falling into the ocean. Despite multiple North Korean launches since the Trump administration came to power—18 already this year—Tillerson continues to argue that there remains a “pathway to sometime in the early future having some dialogue.”

President Donald Trump may be about to make his biggest mistake with North Korea. Contrary to popular opinion, the mistake is not threatening “fire and fury.” Rather it will be extending an open hand to Pyongyang and proposing a new set of diplomatic negotiations. Once Trump does that, he owns America’s failed North Korea policy, and he will almost certainly fail in turn. He thus has one last chance to disavow the mistakes of the past quarter-century and forge a new policy designed to deal realistically with a nuclear North Korea. The odds are he won’t take it.

The great trap the administration is barreling toward is the chimera of a nuclear-free North Korea. Writing jointly two weeks ago in the *Wall Street Journal*, Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis said that the administration’s goal is to “achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a dismantling of the regime’s ballistic missile programs.” To do so, “diplomacy is our preferred means,” wrote the two senior officials.

Pyongyang’s response was to send a missile shooting past Japan’s fifth-largest city, Sapporo.

After nearly 25 years of diplomatic failure to achieve just this very goal, it strains credulity to think that Kim would give up his family’s three-generation dream of obtaining nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them anywhere in the world. Indeed, Kim is within striking distance of achieving what his grandfather and father could only imagine: a credible, multi-layered arsenal of nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles, and, one day, possibly even a ballistic missile submarine.

To put it as bluntly as possible, North Korea will never surrender its nuclear arsenal willingly, under any conditions. For decades, the Kims have been offered everything possible to induce them to do so, and they have cheated on every agreement they have made while steadily building their capability. Now that Kim the younger sees the reality of putting the American homeland at nuclear risk, thereby almost ensuring the permanent safety of his regime, why would he give that up? It simply makes no sense to do so.

And if hopeful U.S. officials believe that they, for some reason, have a real chance at denuclearization, then listen to the North Koreans themselves, who state as clearly as can be that they will never give up their weapons. That’s not a negotiating tactic. It’s a statement of fact. Not to recognize that we are in a different world from eight or 16 years ago is an analytical error of momentous proportions.

Here is where Trump and his team are about to make their mistake. If they do propose a new round of negotiations, then they have, in effect, adopted the failed approach of three presidents before them: Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The North Korean crisis, which Trump inherited, will now be something that he owns. And short of an unexpected collapse of the Kim regime, Trump will leave office with no deal and a fully nuclear-capable North Korea, to boot.

What the president should do is simple, if radical. He should admit the failure of America's North Korea policy since the 1990s and abandon the fantasy of "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization." Instead, he should acknowledge that North Korea is a nuclear weapons-capable state, and that the United States will treat it as such. That means revamping U.S. policy toward explicit containment and deterrence of a nuclear North Korea. That is the only realistic policy toward a problem that has no good solution.

The truth is that the United States, along with its ally South Korea, has been deterring the North for the past 60 years. As such, Trump would only be stating the obvious. Deterrence against a nuclear North Korea, however, won't look like deterrence against the Soviet Union. North Korea does not have an empire to defend or proxies to support; it will not get involved in wars far from its borders, nor will it have a globe-girdling military that Washington will have to track and oppose at multiple points. This will be a cold war, but it is not a repeat of the Cold War. As such, U.S. policymakers and analysts will have to rethink deterrence from the ground up. How will concepts such as signaling work against a nuclear Pyongyang? Can there be clear "escalation ladders"—clear articulated responses to North Korean threats—and "off ramps"—exit strategies for cooling things down—in case a conflict does break out? Living with a nuclear North Korea will require a different set of skills than one committed to endless negotiations.

One danger is that the American public may begin to question the U.S. commitment to South

Korea that puts it in the nuclear bull's-eye of North Korea. Pyongyang poses no existential political threat to Western civilization, liberal capitalism—or even the United States. Yes, it can wreak havoc, but it is not seeking to expand its ideology past its borders or take over nations unconnected with its standoff with South Korea.

Containing North Korea, then, is not about preventing expansion. It is about reducing and crimping Pyongyang's freedom of action abroad. Washington will have to think carefully about what containment means, including how much we will try to end North Korea's manifest illicit activities that help provide the revenue for its nuclear program. We will have to begin thinking of sanctions strictly as punishments, not as inducements to come back to the negotiating table. And Trump and his successors will have to carefully draw very specific red lines for North Korean proliferation, and back up U.S. pronouncements with the willingness to use limited military force. In short, Trump will have to come up with a new declaratory policy for U.S. action against North Korea.

All of this will have to be done in close concert with our allies, mainly South Korea and Japan. Yet the impulse in Seoul, where a dovish president was just elected, is for more negotiations, and undoubtedly more compromises. This is exactly what North Korea wants. Going back to the table means more years of delay, obfuscation and not-so-stealthy progress toward nuclear prowess. China wants this, too, as it maintains the North as a buffer state on the peninsula, gives Beijing greater influence in guiding events, and diverts U.S. attention from coming up with a more realistic plan to deter and contain Pyongyang. Washington will have to resist calls for more meaningless negotiations, and instead focus on a realistic plan for protecting American interests as well as those of allies who understand that the old approach cannot work.

Trump sees himself as a master negotiator, capable of sitting down with any foe to hammer out a deal. When it comes to North Korea, there's no deal to be had. He should tighten the



screws on Kim instead of trying to reason with him—or he will come to regret it.



# How Trump Should Talk to North Korea

Suzanne DiMaggio

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Director of a Track II Dialogue with North Koreans

By Suzanne DiMaggio and Joel S. Wit. Originally published by *The New York Times*, November 7, 2017.

For the last several months, the United States and North Korea have been stuck in a mutually reinforcing cycle of escalation. The possibility of the confrontation spiraling into a horrific, full-scale war — either by design or by accident — has become increasingly likely.

President Trump has portrayed North Korea as uninterested in finding a peaceful way out of this standoff. On Tuesday, during a visit to South Korea, the president took a different tone, declining to reaffirm his previous statements that negotiations are “a waste of time.”

The approach he showed in Korea was certainly better than his past bluster, but it still falls far short of what is needed.

Over the last year, the two of us have been part of informal discussions with North Korean officials also attended by former American government officials, retired military officers and experts. While determined to pursue a nuclear arsenal to defend their country, the North Koreans say they are also open to discussing how to avoid a disastrous confrontation.

Even before Mr. Trump took office, North Korean government representatives sent signals that they were open to dialogue. In a meeting in Geneva shortly after the American presidential election, they expressed a willingness to consider resuming contacts that had been cut off the previous summer.

The North Koreans also raised the possibility of discussions to determine the agenda for formal talks that could tackle

American concerns about Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile programs and North Korea’s concerns about “hostile American policy” — the term they frequently use to refer to what they perceive as the political, military and economic threats posed by the United States.

That message was reinforced during meetings in Pyongyang after Mr. Trump’s inauguration. North Korean officials acknowledged that the new administration offered the opportunity for a fresh start, and raised the idea of beginning talks without preconditions. In a session in Oslo a few months later, the North Koreans recognized the need to defuse tensions while reiterating their interest in an unconditional dialogue.

On the sidelines of that meeting, the State Department official in charge of dealing with North Korea, Ambassador Joseph Yun, quietly met with Choe Son-hui, the head of the North Korean Foreign Ministry’s North America bureau — the first encounter between a Trump administration official and a North Korean official.

Throughout the unofficial talks, the North Koreans explained that the accelerated pace of their missile and nuclear programs over the last year reflected their belief that such weapons were the only way to forestall efforts by the United States to overthrow the government of Kim Jong-un.

For the North Koreans, who point to the fates of Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi and Iraq’s Saddam Hussein as cautionary tales, demonstrating that they can build a nuclear

missile able to reach the continental United States is the highest priority. This was confirmed in Moscow a few weeks ago, when Ms. Choe said that North Korea would continue to develop these weapons until it reached a “balance of power” with the United States.

This dark cloud may have a silver lining.

In our talks, the North Koreans have maintained that they are not striving to be a nuclear state with a big arsenal, but rather to have enough weapons to defend themselves. Since early last summer, North Korean officials have publicly said that they have entered the last stage in the development of their nuclear force, implying that they have an endpoint in mind. A senior North Korean official privately told us: “If we feel we have enough, the primary emphasis will be on economic growth.”

This potential opening for dialogue needs to be explored. We believe the best way to proceed would be to first hold bilateral “talks about talks” without preconditions. The objective of these talks would be to clarify the policies of each country, discuss where there might be potential compromises and what each side considers nonnegotiable, and prepare the groundwork to move on to negotiations.

Ideally, this would be done through under-the-radar meetings by diplomats, similar to the initial contacts between American and Iranian officials that took months and eventually led to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. In the current atmosphere of crisis, we should accelerate this process by appointing a senior presidential envoy to work with the State Department and with top-ranking North Koreans.

A nuclear-free Korean Peninsula should remain the United States’ main priority. The Trump administration wants this to happen immediately, while some experts argue this objective should be dropped since it will be impossible to achieve.

We don’t agree with either position. The United States has to be realistic. Denuclearization cannot happen overnight. It

must be framed as a long-term objective of any diplomacy, an approach the North Koreans have hinted they would accept.

In view of the mounting confrontation and the lack of mutual trust, the United States must pursue a step-by-step approach to reduce tensions and secure a path to formal negotiations.

An essential first step is an immediate moratorium on North Korea’s nuclear and missile testing, which aggravate tensions. In exchange, the United States and South Korea could meet North Korean concerns by adjusting the scale of their joint military exercises or perhaps offer some relief from economic sanctions. Other steps — such as assurances by North Korea that it will not transfer nuclear, chemical or biological weapons technology overseas — could follow.

But none of this can be achieved without the right political atmosphere. The North Koreans are bewildered by the lack of coherence in American policy. President Trump’s threatening tweets and personal attacks on Kim Jong-un have only added to the risks of misinterpretation. Even his recent statements in Tokyo and Seoul, hinting at a willingness to talk, are at risk of being drowned out by his bluster, which reinforces the North Koreans’ mind-set that they made the right decision by choosing a nuclear path.

Mr. Trump could begin reducing tensions by stating clearly that diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang is his administration’s first choice and that the United States is ready to proceed down this road, working with its allies and partners. Such a statement offers the best way to sway the Chinese to better enforce sanctions against Pyongyang and would serve him well in his coming meeting with President Xi Jinping of China.

The United States should understand that growing talk of military options will only strengthen Pyongyang’s resolve, not undermine it. Given the danger of a nuclear war, that would be a serious mistake.

# The Art of Diplomacy: Key Aspects of a Potential Agreement

David Straub

Sejong-LS Fellow, The Sejong Institute

The North Korean regime will not denuclearize unless it changes its strategic calculation and concludes that having nuclear weapons is less advantageous than abandoning them would be. It is very unlikely to do so, at least in the short- to mid-term. In the minds of the regime's leaders, nuclear weapons will play the central role not only in ensuring regime survival but also in achieving the intrinsically related goal of unifying the Korean Peninsula on their terms.

The North Korean regime has always seen itself as being in a zero-sum competition with South Korea for ultimate control of the Korean Peninsula. Its leaders are well aware that the South is far more successful in every way, including militarily, except for nuclear weapons and missile development. They regard the very existence of a prosperous Korean state to the south, with twice their population, as the primary long-term threat to their regime.

Having horribly abused their own people, Pyongyang's leaders fear that extensive, uncontrolled exchange with the South would result in a popular uprising against them. Pyongyang is thus prepared to engage in duplicitous "charm offensives" toward the South, allow limited, tightly controlled exchanges, and accept South Korean largesse, but it will not seek genuine reconciliation with Seoul, much less give up its ultimate goal of unification on its terms.

While agreeing that Pyongyang once sought unification on its own terms, some observers argue that its leaders must realize that such a goal is no longer feasible and that they now seek only to ensure regime survival by "detering" the

United States. This fundamentally underestimates the regime's desperate political, economic, and strategic situation as well its determination. Even though the regime's leaders understand that they cannot *currently* achieve unification, they believe they *must* do so eventually. They aim to use nuclear blackmail to decouple the United States strategically from the South and then manipulate and divide the South Korean public through propaganda, intimidation, and subversion. Although such a strategy is very unlikely to succeed, North Korea's leaders have no more realistic option available and it profoundly influences their ongoing behavior.

The United States has long recognized that, as a factual matter, North Korea has nuclear devices, but no U.S. administration has ever been willing to accept North Korea as a legitimate nuclear weapons state. Inevitably, doing so, even if only tacitly, would eventually result in the United States and the international community easing and ending sanctions against the regime. The regime would be even more emboldened to use nuclear blackmail to decouple the United States from the South and seek to achieve unification on its terms. South Korea and Japan would likely soon go nuclear, and other East Asian states as well. Those in Iran who want to go nuclear would be much encouraged. Meanwhile, there could be no credible or verifiable North Korea guarantee that it would not proliferate nuclear weapons technology to other states and entities, as it has already done with Libya and Syria. U.S. prestige and influence, not only in East Asia but also globally, would be undermined.

All U.S. administrations since that of Bill Clinton, including probably the Trump

administration, have taken fundamentally the same position: in exchange for North Korea completely giving up its nuclear weapons program, the United States would be willing to normalize relations with Pyongyang (i.e., exchange embassies and reduce sanctions), provide humanitarian aid and energy assistance, and replace the armistice with a permanent peace mechanism. U.S.-North Korea agreements and negotiations based on this policy, including the 1994 Agreed Framework, the Four Party Talks (1996-1998), the Six Party Talks (2003-2008), and the Leap Day deal (2012) all failed due to North Korea's cheating or refusing to engage seriously. North Korea's leaders were never willing to give up their nuclear weapons program because they regarded it as essential to reset the strategic chessboard on the Korean Peninsula in their favor. For nearly a decade now, North Korea has no longer even pretended to be willing to denuclearize.

The Trump administration's policy of maximizing pressure on the regime until it is willing to engage in good-faith negotiations to denuclearize is the only peaceful way of denuclearizing North Korea. The chances of its succeeding in the short- to mid-term are poor. If, however, enough attention and resources are devoted to the project over a sustained period, it could succeed by changing the leadership's strategic calculus. A variant outcome is that the pressure could become great enough to cause members of the elite to change their own leadership and then enter into good-faith denuclearization negotiations.

In the meantime, it is possible for the United States and its allies and partners to deter and contain North Korea indefinitely. The United States deterred an incomparably more threatening nuclear-capable Soviet Union for four decades and continues to deter Russia and other nuclear-capable states today. The argument that North Korea's leaders cannot be deterred because they are irrational is completely contradicted by their behavior historically. North Korea's leaders have never launched an all-out attack since the Korean War, precisely because they understood that doing so would result in their regime's destruction. As

long as the United States remains South Korea's ally, that calculation on their part will not change.

That said, a nuclear-armed North Korea will not be content with merely "detering" the United States. Having made enormous sacrifices and run great risk to develop nuclear weapons, and regarding them as its last card to deal with South Korea, the regime will engage in provocations to blackmail the United States into abandoning South Korea. This will increase the risk of accidents and miscalculation that could lead to all-out war. Thus, the United States and South Korea will need to increase defense spending and increase their defense in many ways.

The Trump administration's repeated threats about the existence of a "military option" against North Korea are counterproductive. North Korea will only believe such threats if the United States evacuates American citizens from South Korea. That is highly unrealistic, however, because it would cause panic in South Korea, a stock market collapse, and mass flight from the country. Moreover, the Trump administration's emphasis on a military option has only reinforced the prejudice of some South Korean progressives that the United States is a greater threat than North Korea, and resulted in President Moon repeatedly declaring that war on the peninsula is unacceptable. President Moon will not approve a U.S. attack on North Korea that is not in response to a North Korean attack, and if the United States attacks North Korea without South Korean approval, it could well mean the end of the alliance.

Until North Korea changes its strategic calculus, U.S. negotiations with the country will result in no progress on denuclearization and, indeed, will only encourage Pyongyang's leaders in their belief that eventually the United States will "cave" if only they remain firm long enough. In that regard, the Trump administration is correct in rejecting the concept of a nuclear "freeze." North Korea has violated all previous freeze deals (the Agreed Framework, the Six Party Talks statements, and the Leap Day deal all involved freezes), and there would be no way

to verify that Pyongyang was freezing its entire nuclear and long-range missile programs. Development work short of a test would continue, and when ready to test again, the North would simply invent a pretext blaming the United States to do so.

Instead, the United States must convince Pyongyang that it will continue to lead the international community in increasingly isolating it until it is willing to negotiate denuclearization. The United States and its allies and partners should also explain clearly and credibly the kind of negotiated settlement they are willing to make with Pyongyang. Meanwhile, the United States should declare that it will not be the first to launch an attack on the Korean Peninsula but that, together with its allies, it will respond forcefully to any North Korean attack.

When Pyongyang indicates credibly that it is willing to engage in good-faith negotiations including denuclearization, the United States should be willing to negotiate directly with it. Such talks should include the Republic of Korea as soon as possible. Only after at least a firm outline of a credible agreement including denuclearization is achieved should other powers be included in the negotiations. The Six Party Talks could then be convened to gain “buy-in” from those powers. The United Nations could be used for a similar purpose. Convening the Six Party Talks earlier would be unwise, because both the PRC and the Russia have come to share North Korea’s goal of seeing an end to the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula and would use the talks, even more so than they did earlier, less to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue than to manage its continuation in their interests. The Iran agreement offers no lessons for North Korea, because North Korea has already developed nuclear weapons and the two situations are otherwise as well very different.

The United States should not negotiate with North Korea about the presence of U.S. forces in South Korea. To repeat, North Korea aims to strategically decouple the United States from South Korea so as eventually to unify the peninsula on its own terms. That would be a disaster not only for the people of both Koreas but also to U.S. interests. Only after the United States is convinced that North Korea no longer regards South Korea’s existence as a threat that must be removed should the United States consider the advisability of retaining military personnel in the South.

Even if the United States and North Korea implemented a denuclearization agreement, the situation on the Korean Peninsula would remain fraught and would require much continued attention. North Korea could always renege again on the deal. Unless the regime in Pyongyang changes fundamentally, the issue of how it treats its own citizens will also remain a concern of the United States and the international community as a whole. Because of that and other differences, Washington and Pyongyang will never have much more than, at best, correct relations until the North Korean system changes.

As has often been said, North Korea is a “wicked problem” and there is no good way of dealing with it, only worse ways and much worse ways. The least bad policy is maximizing pressure on the regime to engage in good-faith denuclearization negotiations while deterring and containing it until it does so. While unsatisfying and politically difficult to defend in democracies, such a policy will continue to best serve the interests of the Republic of Korea, the United States and its other allies, the international community as a whole, and, ultimately, the long-suffering people of North Korea.





# Finding a Diplomatic Solution to the North Korean Crisis

## *Agenda*

March 2-4, 2018  
Stanford, California

### **FRIDAY, March 2:**

Participants travel to Stanford, California and arrive mid-day

*Pre-Dinner Speakers, followed by Dinner*

#### **SETTING THE STAGE: THE HIGH STAKES AT ISSUE IN RESOLVING THE NORTH KOREAN CRISIS**

Tensions have increased considerably during the last year as North Korea has tested both nuclear devices and intercontinental missiles, which now pose a threat to U.S. territory. There are questions as to whether China, which shares the longest border with North Korea, might also quickly be drawn into any North Korean engagement, ratcheting up the stakes considerably. Ambassador Eikenberry will highlight factors that have brought us to this crisis and set the stage for the discussions over the weekend.

*Karl Eikenberry, Director, U.S.-Asia Security Initiative, Stanford University;  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan*

#### **THE MERITS OF ACHIEVING PEACE THROUGH DIPLOMACY**

Secretary Shultz will highlight the merits of diplomacy as a tool for advancing U.S. interests, and he will give his perspective on how best to find a solution to this crisis.

*George P. Shultz, Former U.S. Secretary of State, Thomas W. & Susan B. Ford Distinguished Fellow,  
The Hoover Institution, Stanford University*

### **SATURDAY, March 3:**

#### **INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK**

The scholars for the conference will be briefly introduced. This segment will highlight the educational objective of the meeting and how the conference will be conducted, how those with questions will be recognized and how responses will be timed to allow for as many questions and answers as possible. This format is especially important to guarantee full participation with so many knowledgeable and experienced people around the table.

*Dan Glickman, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Congressional Program;  
Former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture*

*Roundtable Discussion*

## **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT THAT LEADS TO THE BRINK OF WAR**

The Korean War from June 1950 to July 1953 caused tremendous loss of life on the peninsula with massive devastation, ending in a truce—but never a formal armistice. The demilitarized zone (DMZ), a short strip of land between North and South Korea managed under the terms of the Armistice Agreement, was a unique creation to help manage this outcome. It is an area where armed forces face each other to this day. [A North Korean defector was recently shot in this zone while trying to flee.] North Korea continues to evoke the devastation of the Korean War in its anti-American rhetoric, indicating that this history is used as a basis for its policy that regards the U.S. as an enemy subject to threat by its nuclear program and missile capability. Ambassador Stephens will highlight this historical context that has contributed to the policy standoff we face today.

- How much does North Korea's view of the Korean War shape its current world view?
- To what degree does the lack of a formal peace agreement ending the Korean War exacerbate the current stalemate?
- Is there any re-examination of history that would lessen North Korea's anti-American attitude?
- Would cooperation on Americans still listed as MIA/POW from the Korean conflict contribute to improved relations?
- How deeply rooted is North Korea's identity as a country and as a nationality?
- Is reunification a realistic aspiration? If so, what governance model is likely to dominate a unified Korea?

*Kathleen Stephens, Fellow, Korea Program, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University; Former U.S. Ambassador to Korea*

### *Roundtable Discussion*

## **AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS OF NORTH KOREA AND OTHER PLAYERS**

A sober and realistic understanding of the capabilities and intentions of North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia, Japan and the United States is necessary in order to shape the most appropriate policy responses. North Korea has already conducted six nuclear tests and numerous missile launches with increasing range. Are the increasingly alarmist media reports a fair assessment or playing into hysteria?

- What is the distinction between plutonium based nuclear weapons and highly enriched uranium based nuclear weapons and what relevance is this difference for U.S. policy makers?
- What are the nuclear bomb capabilities of North Korea?
- Does North Korea have a viable hydrogen bomb program?
- What are the intercontinental missile capabilities of North Korea today?
- What are the limitations of merging these nuclear and missile capabilities?
- Is North Korea dependent on external suppliers to support these capabilities? If so, who is providing these supplies?
- What are North Korea's cyber capabilities?
- Does North Korea possess threatening biological or chemical weapons capabilities?
- What could be the impact of a high-altitude nuclear detonation; is fallout or electromagnetic pulse a significant concern?
- Would North Korea act alone if it embarked on nuclear aggression?
- What is the capability of South Korea, Japan, and China to counter any North Korean military aggression?
- Which neighbors might cooperate against any of these threats? To what degree do they rely on the U.S. for their security?
- What are the possibilities of an accident or a false warning that could trigger a nuclear conflict?
- What are the capabilities of the THAAD missile defense system? Is it adequate?

*Siegfried Hecker, Senior Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University; Former Director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory*  
*Sue Mi Terry, Senior Fellow for Korean Studies at CSIS; Former North Korea analyst for the CIA*

*Luncheon Remarks*

### **SCENARIOS FOR A SOLUTION**

Secretary Perry was deeply involved in negotiations with North Korea during his tenure as Secretary of Defense and afterwards. He will draw lessons from that experience as he shares his views for achieving a diplomatic solution.

*William Perry, Former U.S. Secretary of Defense;  
Senior Fellow, Center for International Security and Cooperation,  
Stanford University*

*Roundtable Discussion*

### **UNDERSTANDING THE FULL RANGE OF CONSEQUENCES OF WAR**

As military options are discussed with increasing frequency, it is important to fully understand the range of impact that could follow. Detonation of nuclear weapons is regarded as a last resort, but if it occurred, the devastation and impact could be wide ranging. Even a nonnuclear military engagement has high risk of significant casualties given that Seoul is less than 40 miles from the North Korean border and in range of traditional artillery. In addition to loss of life and destruction of property, there could be regional environmental impacts, as well as global economic impacts.

- A November Congressional Research Service report estimated the range of casualties of conflict could be from 30,000 to 300,000 within the first few days of conflict. Depending on the length of conflict, types of weapons used and depth of engagement, this report also says casualty figures could be in the millions. Is this overstated?
- Does the U.S. military have the capability to quickly evacuate over 100,000 U.S. civilians in South Korea in a conflict?
- What would be the potential differentiation between military and civilian loss of life?
- What are the distinctions between a pre-emptive nuclear strike and a reactive use of nuclear weapons?
- What would be the impact on neighbors Japan, China, and Russia—would they all face potential direct or collateral damage?
- What would be the long-term environmental consequences of a nuclear war, including radioactive contamination?
- Would conflict spark a mass outflow of refugees from North Korea and a humanitarian challenge?
- Would conflict have global economic consequences?
- What could be the range of post-conflict reconstruction costs?

*Marcus Noland, Executive Vice President, Peterson Institute for International Economics*  
*Barry Posen, Director, Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology*  
*Scott Sagan, Professor of Political Science, Stanford University;  
Former Consultant to the Secretary of Defense*

*Teleconference with Chinese participants via uplink to the Stanford Center at Peking University*

### **CHINA'S PERSPECTIVE**

China, as North Korea's neighbor and largest trading partner, is seen as having the most potential influence to change North Korea's current trajectory. Three Chinese experts will communicate China's perspectives on resolving this crisis. They will join us via live teleconference link using Stanford's

Beijing facilities. Participants in Stanford will be able to communicate with and see the Chinese in real time with the assistance of this technology.

- What is China's long-range vision for the Korean peninsula?
- How long can the status quo continue?
- What would cause China to militarily engage in the Korean peninsula?
- What incentives would China need to lessen North Korea's dependence on China?

*Fan Gaoyue, retired Senior Colonel with China's People's Liberation Army,  
Former Director of the Center for American Military Studies  
Academy of Military Sciences, currently with Sichuan University*  
*Wang Dong, Associate Professor and Deputy Executive Director,  
School of International Studies, Peking University*  
*Yang Xiyu, Senior Fellow, Chinese Institute of International Studies, Beijing*

*Dinner Speakers*

### **SCENARIOS OF POTENTIAL MILITARY CONFLICT**

American, Korean and Japanese current and former military officials are gathering in early February to simulate several scenarios of potential military conflict. Admiral Blair and a Japanese counterpart who are participating in this exercise will share their findings.

*Admiral Dennis Blair, Former Commander of the Pacific Fleet;  
Former Director of National Intelligence; CEO, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, USA*  
*Tsuneko Watanabe, Senior Research Fellow, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo*

### **SUNDAY, March 4:**

*Roundtable Discussion*

### **THE ROLE OF REGIONAL PLAYERS AND INCENTIVES NECESSARY TO LEVERAGE DIPLOMATIC ACTION**

This discussion is designed to explore the incentives that might be necessary to leverage actors to move toward a diplomatic solution. One example is the "freeze for a freeze" concept—freezing annual military exercises in exchange for a North Korean freeze on missile programs. Another example could be reducing shoreline surveillance flights off the coast of China in exchange for Chinese cooperation. Another possibility would end China's support of North Korea if the U.S. removed its military presence from South Korea.

- Does the U.S. have to take a leading or a supporting role in a solution?
- Must South Korea and Japan cooperate to address the concerns of a common threat from North Korea, and is such cooperation realistic?
- Is China content with the status quo? If not, what would motivate it to act?
- The U.S. has led the UN Security Council to pass eight sanctions resolutions. Will additional sanctions be effective?
- Is an eventual collapse of North Korea inevitable, and if so, what relevance does this have for policy makers?
- Should U.S. policy explicitly seek regime change?
- Is the cooperation between North and South on participation in the Winter Olympics indicative of a lasting positive trend?

*Chung-in Moon, Special Advisor to the South Korean President  
for Foreign and National Security Affairs, Seoul*

*Gi-Wook Shin, Director, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University*

*Roundtable Discussion*

**THE ART OF DIPLOMACY: KEY ASPECTS OF A POTENTIAL AGREEMENT**

This discussion will explore the key elements of a diplomatic settlement, and how these elements would be acceptable to the key players. Lessons would be drawn from two earlier diplomatic efforts—the Agreed Framework (1994-2002) and the Six-Party Talks (2005-2009).

- Is denuclearization of the peninsula realistic?
- Is U.S. recognition of North Korea a possibility? Would that motivate North Korea to step back its aggressive actions?
- Is there a multilateral role in reaching and enforcing an agreement? Or is this primarily a bilateral negotiation between the U.S. and North Korea, or South and North Korea?
- Are there lessons to be learned from the six-party talks?
- Would direct talks between the U.S. and North Korea be productive?
- Under what conditions could the U.S. consider normalizing relations with North Korea?
- Can the U.S. tolerate a nuclear-capable North Korea with containment and deterrence?
- Are there any applicable lessons to be drawn from the Iran agreement?
- Would a nuclear-armed South Korea be a logical outcome?
- Is removal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula a factor?

*Michael Auslin, Fellow in Contemporary Asia Studies, The Hoover Institute, Stanford University*

*Suzanne DiMaggio, Senior Fellow, New American Foundation*

*David Straub, Sejong-LS Fellow, The Sejong Institute, Seoul*

*Working Luncheon*

Discussion continues between Members of Congress and scholars on the policy challenges in finding a diplomatic solution to the North Korean crisis.

*Roundtable Discussion*

**POLICY REFLECTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ONLY**

Congress is one of the three co-equal branches of the U.S. government. Accordingly, Members of Congress will be encouraged to think creatively about how Congress can contribute toward reaching a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

- What potential legislative initiatives could be helpful?
- Is North Korea's authoritarian regime too toxic and too abusive of human rights for the U.S. to find areas of cooperation?
- Is the travel ban productive?
- Must Congress authorize any use of military force?

*Dinner Speaker*

**THE ROLE OF CONGRESS IN A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION**

Ambassador Hill will draw on his experience dealing with Korean policy to share his suggestions about the role of Congress.

*Christopher Hill, Chief Advisor to the Chancellor for Global Engagement,  
and Professor of the Practice in Diplomacy, University of Denver;  
Former Ambassador to South Korea*

**MONDAY, March 5:** All participants depart early to mid-morning



# Finding a Diplomatic Solution to the North Korean Crisis

## *Participants*

March 2-4, 2018  
Stanford, California

### **Congressional Participants**

Rep. Jim Cooper

Rep. Jim Costa

Rep. Susan Davis  
and Steve Davis

Rep. Charlie Dent

Rep. Anna Eshoo

Rep. Colleen Hanabusa

Rep. Jim Himes  
and Mary Himes

Rep. Ted Lieu  
and Betty Chim

Rep. Zoe Lofgren  
and John Collins

Rep. Billy Long

Rep. Nita Lowey  
and Steve Lowey

Rep. Steve Russell

Rep. Jackie Speier  
and Barry Dennis

### **Non-Congressional Participants**

David Arnold  
President  
The Asia Foundation  
San Francisco

Deana Arsenian  
Vice President  
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Michael Auslin  
Fellow in Contemporary Asia Studies  
The Hoover Institute, Stanford University

Emma Belcher  
Director, Nuclear Challenges Program  
The MacArthur Foundation  
Chicago

Admiral Dennis Blair  
Former Commander of the Pacific Fleet  
CEO, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, USA  
Washington, DC

Suzanne DiMaggio  
Senior Fellow, New American Foundation  
New York

Karl Eikenberry  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan  
Director, U.S.-Asia Security Initiative  
Stanford University  
and Ching Eikenberry

Morton Halperin  
Senior Advisor  
Open Society Policy Foundations  
Washington, DC

Siegfried Hecker  
Former Director, Los Alamos National  
Laboratory  
Senior Fellow  
Freeman Spogli Institute for International  
Studies, Stanford University

Christopher Hill  
Former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea  
Chief Advisor to the Chancellor for Global  
Engagement, Professor of the Practice in  
Diplomacy, Korbel School of International  
Studies, University of Denver  
and Julie Hill

Michael McFaul  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia  
Director, Spogli Institute for International  
Studies, Stanford University

Chung-in Moon  
Special Advisor to the South Korean President  
for Foreign and National Security Affairs  
Seoul

Marcus Noland  
Executive Vice President  
Peterson Institute for International Economics  
Washington, DC

William Perry  
Former U.S. Secretary of Defense  
Director, Preventive Defense Project Center for  
International Security and Cooperation  
Stanford University

Barry Posen  
Director, Security Studies Program  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

William Ruger  
Vice President for Research and Policy  
Charles Koch Institute  
Arlington, VA

Scott Sagan  
Former Consultant to the Secretary of Defense  
Professor of Political Science  
Stanford University

Gi-Wook Shin  
Founder, Korea Program  
Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research  
Center, Stanford University

George P. Shultz  
Former U.S. Secretary of State  
Distinguished Fellow  
The Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Kathleen Stephens  
Former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea  
William Perry Fellow, Walter H. Shorenstein  
Asia-Pacific Research Center  
Stanford University

David Straub  
Sejong-LS Fellow, The Sejong Institute  
Seoul

Sue Mi Terry  
Former North Korea analyst for the CIA  
Senior Fellow for Korean Studies  
Center for Strategic & International Studies  
Washington, DC

Tsuneo Watanabe  
Senior Research Fellow  
Sasakawa Peace Foundation  
Tokyo

Mark Yenter  
Retired Major General  
Former Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations  
U.S. Forces Korea  
Carson City, Nevada

### **Chinese Participants via Tele-Link**

Fan Gaoyue  
Sichuan University  
Retired Senior Colonel  
People's Liberation Army



Wang Dong  
Deputy Executive Director  
School of International Studies  
Peking University

Yang Xiyu  
Senior Fellow  
Chinese Institute of International Studies  
Beijing

### **Foundation Observers**

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### **Aspen Institute Staff**

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Vice President, Aspen Institute  
Executive Director, Congressional Program  
and Rhoda Glickman

Melissa Neal  
Congressional Associate  
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Bill Nell  
Deputy Director  
Aspen Institute Congressional Program

Carrie Rowell  
Conference Director  
Aspen Institute Congressional Program

