PACIFIC FORUM

RESOLVING THE KOREAN CONFLICT

SELECTED US, RUSSIAN, AND CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

Edited By
David Santoro
and Anton Khlopkov

ISSUES & INSIGHTS

WORKING PAPER

VOL. 19, WP1 | February 2019

Pacific Forum

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum (www.pacforum.org) is a foreign policy research institute focused on the Asia-Pacific Region. Founded in 1975, the Pacific Forum collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to global leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, and maritime policy issues, and works to help stimulate cooperative policies through rigorous research, analyses and dialogues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was made possible by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

INTRODUCTION

By David Santoro and Anton Khlopkov

Much ink has been spilled on the return to major-power competition in recent years, singling out three states: the United States, Russia, and China. For good reasons: the relationships between these three states have become increasingly complicated, notably between the United States and Russia and between the United States and China. What's more, there are few signs that the current trajectory could change for the better. If anything, we can expect these relationships to become more, not less, complicated.

Growing competition between Washington and Moscow and between Washington and Beijing does not mean that all forms of cooperation are out of reach, however. After all, during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union were bitter enemies but also cooperated in several areas, such as arms control and nonproliferation. Today, too, it is possible to identify areas where Washington, Moscow, and Beijing can and should cooperate. While there are many such areas, we believe that two are particularly important: strategic stability and nuclear-risk management.

Accordingly, in an effort to help maintain (and if possible, strengthen) strategic stability as well as reduce nuclear risks, our organizations, the Honolulu-based Pacific Forum and the Moscow-based Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS), in coordination with Chinese foreign-policy think tanks and with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, launched a Track-1.5 US-Russia-China strategic dialogue last year. The first round of the dialogue on "Regional Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk Reduction in Northeast Asia" took place in Vladivostok, Russia, on November 26-27, 2018 and included more than 25 US, Russian, and Chinese scholars and officials. The meeting focused on the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, especially the events that took place during the 2018 "Spring Summitry" and led to the first-ever summit between a US president—Donald Trump—and a North Korean leader—Kim Jong-un (Singapore, June 12, 2018).

The conflict on the Korean Peninsula is a perfect case study for our US-Russia-China trilateral effort because it touches not only on broad strategic-stability issues, but also on intricate nuclear-risk management questions. Moreover, and significantly, while Washington, Moscow, and Beijing do not always see eye to eye on how to solve this problem, they all agree that, at least in theory, North Korea's denuclearization, a nuclear-free Peninsula, and the establishment of a peaceful and stable regional-security architecture in Northeast Asia should be the goal, and they are convinced that they have a role to play in shaping ongoing developments.

With the second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korea's Chairman Kim Jong-un now just a few days away (Hanoi, Vietnam, February 27-28, 2019), and in all likelihood more high-level engagement in the not-too-distant future, we thought that it would be timely to take a step back and share US, Russian, and Chinese perspectives on 1) past diplomatic efforts to address the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula, 2) the main results of the 2018 Spring Summitry, and 3) lessons from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and their applicability to the North Korea problem.

The papers of this volume address these three topics. Dr. Fan Jishe and Dr. Georgy

Toloraya give a Chinese and a Russian perspective on past efforts. This is followed by papers from Alexander Ilitchev, Duyeon Kim, and Dr. Teng Jianqun, who respectively give a Russian, a US, and a Chinese perspective on the key takeaways and implications of the 2018 Spring Summitry. Finally, Richard Johnson's paper focuses on the lessons from the JCPOA experience with Iran and what they mean for the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula. Because this is an ongoing research effort on a fast-moving situation, the volume does not include a wrap-up; it limits itself to sharing perspectives from the three countries in focus.

DENUCLEARIZING THE KOREAN PENINSULA: IDENTIFYING LESSONS FROM THE PAST

By Fan Jishe

The momentum for diplomatic overture

The last two years witnessed dramatic changes on the Korean Peninsula. US President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un exchanged harsh rhetoric and thinly veiled military threats in 2017, and one year later, they had a summit meeting in Singapore and released a joint statement committing to establishing new US-North Korea relations, building a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and working toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Simultaneously, inter-Korean relations developed much faster than expected, and Kim visited China several times as well. North Korea destroyed a nuclear test site and dismantled a missile engine test site, and it cooperated with the United States to recover and repatriate Prisoner-Of-War/Missing-In-Action remains.

While the progress made in 2018 is mostly political, unilateral, and nonbinding (and therefore reversible), diplomatic engagement is clearly back to the forefront after six years of absence. Considering what has happened on the Korean Peninsula over the past twenty-five years, notably when it comes to joint efforts to try and denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, any analyst is faced with the following questions: Is Kim serious this time about denuclearization? Can the momentum for diplomatic overture last? And, will this time be different?

Things could be different this time, and there is a fair chance that diplomatic efforts will succeed. After Pyongyang conducted three flight tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles, the North Korea nuclear issue magnified and came to a crossroads. Both Trump and Kim are strongmen, and they enjoy more flexibility than past leaders to deal with each other. What's more important, Kim has been making a strategic shift over the past couple of years from a military-first approach to a strategy that also focuses on economic development. That could have significant implications for denuclearization because it would be extremely difficult for North Korea to improve its external environment (a requirement for economic development) without making concessions on denuclearization. In other words, the status quo will be difficult to maintain, and change is likely to take place, for better or for worse.

Denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula: Learning lessons from the past

The window to achieve denuclearization is narrowing and success will depend on both leaders' political will, cooperation and coordination between and among key stakeholders, and the diplomats' wisdom and skills. Since 1993, there have been quite a few rounds of diplomatic efforts over the North Korea nuclear issue, including bilateral negotiations and secret talks between the United States and North Korea, three-party talks among the United States, North Korea, and China, four-party talks among the United States, North Korea, South Korea, and China, and six-party talks among the aforementioned four parties, plus Russia and Japan. While North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests and many missile tests, and accumulated plutonium and highly enriched uranium enough for tens of nuclear warheads, it is inaccurate to conclude that past efforts have failed, even though the 1994 Agreed Framework froze North Korea's nuclear program for eight years. Therefore, it

is important to analyze past efforts thoroughly to find out what lessons should be learnt, and how to apply these lessons to future negotiations.

Six lessons can be identified.

Lesson one: The North Korea issue is both a nuclear and a regional-security challenge. The Cold War ended in Europe in the early 1990s, but it did not completely end in Asia, as North Korea became the orphaned country surrounded by a harsh regional-security environment. Relations between and among Northeast Asian countries adapted to the post-Cold War environment, but North Korea did not. Its pursuit of a nuclear capability was driven by concerns about its security, and the survival of the regime. This is the root cause of the North Korea nuclear challenge, and any efforts that do not address this cause are unlikely to succeed. Temporary measures may improve the situation, but they are unlikely to work decisively if the security of this country and the survival of the regime are not maintained. The Agreed Framework successfully froze North Korea's nuclear program for several years only because there was hope that North Korea-US relations would ultimately normalize. During the Six-Party Talks, North Korea's focus was always security assurances. While the nuclear challenge is important and needs to be addressed, the big picture also needs to be taken into consideration. In other words, any solution should address both the nuclear challenge and the Cold-War legacy in Northeast Asia in a political way; otherwise it is unlikely to succeed over the long term, as was the case of past endeavors.

Lesson two: North Korea's political will and technical capability to develop its nuclear deterrent should not be underestimated, otherwise some signals might be misread and the opportunity for diplomacy could be missed. Dr. Siegfried Hecker, a US nuclear scientist and former Director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, visited North Korea's nuclear facilities several times because the North Koreans wanted to convey a message to the United States. In his January 2004 visit, the North Koreans showed him plutonium metal, suggesting that Pyongyang had mastered plutonium-metal production and casting, and later, in February 2005, with no progress on the diplomatic front, North Korea declared that it had developed a nuclear-weapon capability. Another example is North Korea's suspected uranium-enrichment capability. The North Koreans indicated that they wanted to develop a nuclear-power plant for electricity purposes, but this message was largely ignored until Pyongyang declared that it would build a pilot light-water reactor on its own. The planned light-water reactor served as the justification of its uranium-enrichment program, which was disclosed to the outside world during Dr. Hecker's seventh visit to Yongbyon. If these messages had been well interpreted and diplomatic efforts had followed, the current situation could have been very different from what it is now.

Lesson three: Wishful thinking is harmful when assessing North Korea's domestic situation and its capacity to adapt. Some actions might have a negative impact on North Korea, its society, and its domestic situation, but no action has, in the past twenty years, challenged the stability of the country. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent dramatic changes that took place in Eastern European countries in the early 1990s, as well as the Color Revolutions in early 2000s, and the Arab Spring in 2010 did not spread to North Korea. Every time there was a power transition in North Korea, analysts assumed that the country's stability would suffer. Yet two power transitions have taken place in the past two decades, one from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il in 1994, the other from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un in 2011, and both took place relatively smoothly. There were natural disasters as well, but the

North Korean society demonstrated great resilience in absorbing these shocks. That suggests that the logic of economic sanctions is unlikely to work with North Korea. Sanctions may slow down North Korea's efforts to obtain credible nuclear deterrent, but not to prevent it from developing that capability. That's why, as William Perry has suggested, "We should deal with North Korea as it is, not as we wish it to be." In other words, North Korea has been around for seven decades, and it is here to stay, whether you like it or not.

Lesson four: North Korea should be treated as a normal country. There are many stereotyped images of Kim Jong-un, who is considered a madman, irrational, and untrustworthy in negotiations, and some may justify their rigid position vis-à-vis North Korea on that basis. North Korea might be isolated, but most of the diplomats dealing with nuclear issues and external affairs are seasoned, and they know what they are doing. The use of madman theory or brinkmanship might just be tricks and tactics that Pyongyang chooses to employ because it has limited leverage over the United States. Since North Korea-US negotiations began over the Agreed Framework in the early 1990s, it has been crystal clear that the North Koreans are good negotiators, and that they are rational and good at strategizing as well. Some may say that North Koreans cannot be trusted, and that they do not honor the deals they conclude. But let us be fair. North Korea implemented most of the obligations required by the Agreed Framework, whereas the United States, because of domestic reasons, did not perform as well. Also important to remember is that while North Korea's uranium-enrichment program may have violated the spirit of that deal, Pyongyang implemented its commitments seriously.

Lesson five: There is merit in using different negotiating platforms. Since the early 1990s, many platforms have been tried: bilateral talks, trilateral talks, and multilateral talks. If the daunting mission of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula is to be accomplished, many issues will need to be addressed individually and collectively, including North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, the relations between the United States and North Korea, Inter-Korean relations, the Armistice Agreement and how to transform it, the future peace regime and security architecture in Northeast Asia, and economic assistance, among others. These issues should be addressed by different parties. Some should be addressed bilaterally, others multilaterally. The use of different platforms should not be regarded as mutual exclusive, but, on the contrary, mutually-reinforcing given that it's likely to strengthen coordination and cooperation between and among the key stakeholders.

Lesson six: The United States should have a balanced assessment of China's role. China has a long and complicated history with North Korea, and it fought a war with the United States (indirectly) on the Korean Peninsula in early 1950s. China shares a border with North Korea, and there are Korean Chinese nationals in the bordering area as well. Beijing has legitimate political, economic, and geopolitical interests in maintaining a stable Korean Peninsula. Beijing opposes Pyongyang's nuclear activities, and Beijing has supported UN Security Council Sanctions Resolutions meant to prevent Pyongyang from advancing its activities. Beijing cares immensely about whether (and how) the North Korea nuclear issue can be solved since developments on the Peninsula will have a direct impact on China. For Beijing, both denuclearization and stability in the Korean Peninsula are important. China and the United States may have different approaches when dealing with the North Korea nuclear issue, but these approaches are not necessarily mutual exclusive. If well managed, the Chinese and US approaches could be complimentary.

Efforts to outsource the North Korea nuclear issue or to blame China when things go wrong are not well received in Beijing. China is willing to contribute more to solve this challenge once and for all. The reality is that coordination and cooperation between China and the United States is essential for any long-lasting solution on the Peninsula.

What's next?

Denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula is at a crossroads, and both the United States and North Korea can make it or break it. In 2018, North Korea sent many positive signs, including but not limited to the destruction of a nuclear test site, the dismantlement of a missile engine test facility, and of course the working-level exchanges that have taken place between the United States and North Korea. More importantly, Pyongyang has made clear that it wants to develop its economy and exercise restraint when it comes to nuclear and missile developments. That decision was officially made in the 3rd Session of the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, and a similar message was conveyed in Kim's New Year addresses in 2018 and 2019, as well as during his engagement efforts with South Korea and China. The good news, too, is that Trump is not (or does not feel) restricted by bureaucratic politics, and he and Kim developed a top-down approach in 2018, which could be conducive to real progress.

Now that Trump and Kim are scheduled to meet again in Hanoi at the end of February, they are expected to deliver some substantial progress on denuclearization. There is a rare historic opportunity to solve longstanding issues on the Korean Peninsula. If missed, North Korea could follow the example of India and Pakistan, or Washington and Pyongyang could get into a military conflict, which would neither benefit them nor regional countries. Other than learning from the past, both the United States and North Korea should be bold and creative when thinking of solutions. Since the end of Cold War, there have been many nonproliferation crises: some were solved successfully, others were not. For North Korea, the unconventional Trump-Kim model may be promising, especially given that Stephen Biegun, the US Special Representative for North Korea, said in his recent speech at Stanford University that both countries would pursue all the commitments made in the Singapore Summit simultaneously, and in parallel. Both sides have talked the talk, and now it is high time they walked the walk.

WHY PREVIOUS DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA HAVE FAILED

By Georgy Toloraya

Several myths have for too long prevented the resolution of the nuclear and security problem on the Korean Peninsula:

- Myth #1: The North Korean regime will soon collapse;
- Myth #2: Pressure will drive the North Korean leadership to change its behavior and act contrary to its long-term interests; and
- Myth #3: North Korea will remain a pariah state incapable of change and, therefore, it is unworthy of dialogue with the United States.

The situation changed in 2018, but past lessons should be identified and learnt from to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Results and lessons

Since the 1990s, on the heels of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States and its allies have formulated a policy vis-à-vis North Korea based on the assumption that the regime will have the same destiny (myth #1). To solve the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula, therefore, the strategy for Washington was to contain and pressure Pyongyang, and ensure the regime's "soft landing." That, in turn, would lead to a resolution of all problems, including of the nuclear issue. And then South Korea, a staunch US ally, would absorb the North.

This belief became the foundation of the Clinton administration's policy vis-à-vis North Korea. US officials even admitted that the 1994 "Agreed Framework" that froze the North Korean nuclear program was a means to buy time until the inevitable collapse of the regime in Pyongyang.

The Bush administration, at first, was guided by myths #2 and #3, arguing that "we do not negotiate with evil." Later, however, using the Six-Party Talks platform, the Administration tried to reach an agreement to dismantle North Korea's nuclear program in an effort to "buy time" (myth #1). Unfortunately, excessive demands and failure to implement the agreement's obligations resulted in the infamous end of the diplomatic process. Much had to do with South Korean President Lee Myong-bak's approach, which sought to push through an agenda based on myths #1 and #2.

During the administration of Barack Obama, the policy of "strategic patience" was based on myths #1, #2, and #3, which was strongly guided by South Korean Presidents Lee Myong-bak and Park Geun-hae. The strategy did not assume North Korea's continued existence, with or without nuclear weapons.

The rest is history. Despite isolation and pressure, North Korea did not collapse. On the contrary, under the guise of negotiations and concessions, it managed to create a full-fledged nuclear force and became the third country in the world (after China and Russia) capable of hitting the US homeland with nuclear-tipped missiles. This, along with structural reforms that helped improve its economy, contributed to solidifying the regime in Pyongyang.

US President Donald Trump immediately acknowledged the spectacular failure of the US strategy of isolation and containment. That's why he, at first, attempted to push for a more radical (military) solution. That solution, however, proved next to impossible to execute, as it would have resulted in

unacceptable losses not only for US allies (Japan and South Korea), but also for the United States. It quickly became clear to Trump that there was no alternative to negotiations. A deal had to be struck, one based on "peace-for-nukes," as envisaged by the 1994 Agreed Framework and Russia's 2003 "package solution" proposal.

The North Korean rationale

Pyongyang's quest to develop and deploy nuclear weapons was seemingly contradictory, given that its conventional force had been an effective deterrent against attacks from its adversaries.

During the 1960s and 1970s, North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's reasoning was to:

- Hedge against the possible deterioration of relations with Moscow and Beijing and a loss of their "nuclear umbrella" and military support;
- Respond to South Korea's President Park Jung-hee's quest for nuclear weapons, well known to Pyongyang;
- Create a balancer to the US nuclear arsenal, including the US deployment of nuclear weapons in the South; and
- Assume that nuclear weapons would become the best guarantee to prevent foreign interference if something happened in South Korea that would create an opportunity for the North to unify the Korean Peninsula on its terms (Kim Il-sung's dearest hope until his death).

At that time, however, the North Korean nuclear-weapon program was experimental, giving little room for Pyongyang to leverage it to achieve these goals.

From the second half of the 1980s, Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev's "perestroika," which Kim Il-sung feared might result in the loss of his ally, prompted him to accelerate the development of his nuclear-weapon program. He also may have chosen to press forward with his program because he realized that "playing the nuclear card" with the United States and others was useful to extract concessions. By the end of his life, Kim Il-sung might have been sincerely thinking about a possible "nukes-for-peace" deal. Yet this did not pan out because the West's policy was guided by myths #1 and #3. That's why the situation stagnated until the beginning of the 2000s.

Kim Jong-il, therefore, had no illusions about negotiations. After the collapse of the Agreed Framework in 2002, he decided to develop a powerful nuclear deterrent, not only to protect his country from its adversaries, but also for prestige purposes. The nuclear-weapon program was also a way for Kim Jong-il to legitimize his reign against a background of severe economic troubles. Later, he also used his program to get economic and political concessions from the international community.

Accordingly, over the years, the "price tag" of the North Korean nuclear-weapon program skyrocketed, and the compensation offered by the United States and its allies for its elimination was nowhere close to anything Kim Jong-il could accept.

After Kim Jong-un came to power in 2012, the program became the chief source of his legitimacy. Pyongyang also regarded it as the only card it could play given the rapid deterioration of North Korean conventional forces. North Korea's development of a thermonuclear weapon and an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) made Kim Jong-un feel on equal footing with the United States, given that, de facto, it had become capable of hitting the US homeland with nuclear-tipped missiles.

Diplomatic track

It is important to realize that North Korea does not solely resort to "nuclear pressure." It is also wrong to assume that it is not ready for a negotiated solution.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Pyongyang sought to promote negotiations to reduce pressure, gain concessions, and attempt to fixate the "status-quo." Pyongyang did try to honor its obligations under the Agreed Framework, tolerating only partial compliance from the United States. Pyongyang's efforts to enrich uranium, which later the Bush administration used as a pretext to abandon the Agreed Framework, were only experimental, and there was a good chance it could have been negotiated away.

If the North Korean leadership had been offered something tangible (the normalization of relations with the United States or some form of security guarantees or economic assistance), that might have led to a capping of its program or even the dismantlement of its nuclear-weapon production facilities (as was the case in 2006-2007). Up until Kim Jong-il's death, North Korea was ready to freeze its nuclear program and even abandon some of its elements. But the United States refused to make concessions.

When Kim Jong-un came to power, initially there was still momentum for a negotiated solution. The "Leap Day Deal" was signed but collapsed soon thereafter because the North Koreans proceeded with a satellite launch to celebrate Kim Il-sung's centenary, which the United States regarded as a violation.

That led the disillusioned Kim Jong-un to opt for an unprecedentedly aggressive approach. In 2013, "Pyongjin" was introduced mostly as an attempt to raise the stakes, making use of missile- and nuclear-technology reserves Kim Jong-il had accumulated (but had refrained from using not to irritate his adversaries). That approach worked. After conducting thermonuclear and ICBM tests in late 2017, North Korea's adversaries unexpectedly agreed to negotiate; the arrival in power of a liberal government in South Korea also meant that launching negotiations would be easier.

All in all, therefore, it was not pressure and sanctions that "brought the North Koreans to the negotiating table," but, instead, it was Kim Jong-un's show of strength.

In search of a strategy

What lessons should be identified and learnt from the past?

To avoid a return to confrontation, maintain stability, stop the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and eventually reduce and minimize North Korea's nuclear potential, a new strategy is needed. That strategy should, in the words of Xin Qiang, a professor at Fudan University, be based on the concept "CRID—conditional, reciprocal, incremental denuclearization." That approach will help limit and reduce arms numbers as well as eliminate certain categories of weapons, such as ICBMs. For now, this is more realistic than "full denuclearization."

Under such an approach, North Korea would reduce its arsenal incrementally, abstain from developing new WMD and commit to nonproliferation. As this process proceeds, North Korea will be left only with a small arsenal that it can use as a deterrent. That deterrent would threaten neither the nonproliferation regime, nor peace and stability. Russia and China could also join a multilateral initiative to provide security guarantees, and Pyongyang's "modus operandi" might change as a result.

WHY THE 2018 SUMMIT DIPLOMACY ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA SHOULD INSPIRE GUARDED OPTIMISM

By Alexander Ilitchev

Historians may well consider 2018 as the turning point that led to a nuclear-weapon-free and peaceful Korean Peninsula, and the eventual reunification of the Korean nation. The preceding year, the world was holding its breath in anticipation of another war. Today, that fear has dissipated, even though most issues, including threat perceptions and military deployments on the ground have yet to change.

The 2018 summit diplomacy: Milestones

2018 was a year of diplomacy, "summit diplomacy" in particular, or high-level engagement to try and resolve contentious issues through dialogue and negotiations. The leaders of both Koreas and the United States should be given considerable credit for creating today's unique opportunity to solve what appears to be the most challenging gamut of issues in the world. It is their leadership that keeps the current diplomatic process going. China and Russia have been actively supportive both of the inter-Korean and US-North Korea engagement, consistent with their longstanding approach that security issues on the Peninsula should be resolved through dialogue and negotiations.

In a span of a year, there were three inter-Korean summits (with the expected visit by North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un to Seoul later this year), three China-North Korea summits (with the fourth one held this January) and, of course, the US-North Korea summit in Singapore in June (to be followed by another one in Hanoi, Viet Nam on February 27-28, 2019). These meetings produced the inter-Korean Panmunjom (April) and Pyongyang (September) Declarations, as well as the Singapore Joint Statement. These documents and the commitments they contain stand as the foundation to advance the peace process on the Peninsula.

To date, South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un have agreed to "completely eliminate the fear of war and the risk of armed conflicts on the Korean Peninsula." In addition to strengthening inter-Korean relations as a whole, they have "firmly pledged to reconnect Korea's arteries and to hasten a future of common prosperity and reunification" on their terms.

US President Trump and Kim Jong-un have agreed to establish new US-North Korea relations, build a lasting and stable peace regime, with North Korea committing to working toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

What made summit diplomacy possible

The encouraging developments of 2018 followed, on the part of the United States and its allies, frustrating years of "strategic patience," "pressure and engagement," and/or "maximum pressure" vis-à-vis North Korea. At their core, these policies sought to strengthen sanctions on and isolation of North Korea to compel it to abandon its nuclear-weapon program. For too long, too many US and allied officials were also counting on North Korea's collapse or regime change as the best way to solving the nuclear issue.

Of course, since the early 1990s, there have been significant diplomatic engagements, including the Agreed Framework (1994-

2002), the bilateral missile negotiations (1996-2000), the multilateral Six-Party Talks (2003-2008), and the bilateral "Leap Day" Agreement (2012). While some were partially successful, all proved inconclusive. Moreover, the refusal to engage has in recent years driven and de-facto enabled North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Inter-Korean relations, which occasionally made significant headway—particularly under South Korean Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's Sunshine Policies—time and time again came to naught in the absence of strong US support. Previous South Korean Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye's refusal to engage gave no room for reconciliation with North Korea.

Last year's welcome developments took place after North Korea's dramatic acceleration of its nuclear-weapon and long-range missile programs. Since 2006, North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests, including three between January 2016 and September 2017. The last test was reportedly a thermonuclear device and the most powerful to date. Also in 2017, North Korea conducted multiple missile tests that some observers argue demonstrated a capability to reach the continental United States. Following the successful test of the Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile in November 2017, North Korea's official news outlets announced that the country now had "finally realized the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force." (The North Korean constitution was revised in April 2012 to describe the country as a "nuclear state.") North Korea has been consistent in arguing that it needs nuclear weapons as a result of US "hostile policy" and that its goal is to deter a military attack by Washington.

Experts disagree on the reasons that led to the dramatic turnaround towards engagement in 2018. Soon after his inauguration as South Korea's new president in May 2017, Moon Jae-in began quiet outreach to Pyongyang. He probably upped his efforts as a result of the dramatic rise in military tensions throughout 2017. Given what war would have meant for the entire Korean Peninsula, Seoul may have felt it had no choice but to pursue engagement of the North. That policy has been conducted in close coordination with the United States, while maintaining the US-South Korea alliance.

Pyongyang indicated its willingness to engage the South and Washington by emphasizing "a new strategic line of concentrating all efforts on the socialist economic construction," as Kim Jong-un put it in April 2018. As North Korea's Foreign Minister said in his address to the UN General Assembly last September, the policy line of "focusing on the economy requires peaceful environment above anything else." He also stressed that the new policy became the priority because Pyongyang had "sufficiently consolidated national defense capabilities and war deterrence to cope with the nuclear threats against the DPRK." Yet, according to John Bolton, Trump's National Security Adviser, "the combination of the potential use of military force against North Korea and the maximum pressure campaign that the president waged on the economic front is what has brought Kim Jong Un to the table."

The Trump Administration, meanwhile, stressed that the decision to engage with Pyongyang at the highest level was meant to achieve "the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea." US officials emphasized the role of Trump himself, noting that he is "deeply and personally committed to once and for all bringing an end to 70 years of war and hostility on the Korean Peninsula." The Administration also thought it had to adopt a fresh approach because pursuing the same old approach bore "no expectation of anything but the same failed outcome." Finally, given the growing North Korean

nuclear threat on the US homeland, the Administration thought that it was especially urgent to, in the words of Stephen Biegun, the US Special Representative for North Korea, "engage diplomatically with North Korea to see if it can change the trajectory of their policies by changing the trajectory of our own."

So far, diplomatic efforts have resulted in drastic de-escalation of tensions on the Peninsula. Significantly, Biegun has argued that the Summitry approach has "interrupted the trajectory toward possible conflict." Diplomatic efforts have also helped set up a peace process. That process, which includes engagement at its core, is proceeding on two parallel and mutually-related tracks: between North and South Korea and between North Korea and the United States. The speed and scope of engagement along those tracks has differed. In the United States, the primary concern seems to be that the inter-Korean process is moving too fast, whereas the US-North Korea track is advancing too slowly. True, the inter-Korean process has made considerably more headway. The North Korea-US process, however, has encountered difficulties to translate the general provisions of the Singapore Declaration into specific implementation measures. Yet the two tracks are mutually-reinforcing. If one track does not make progress, the other will likely suffer. The hope is that the two tracks can advance simultaneously.

One should not lose sight of the fact that the current process began between North and South Korea in PyeongChang in February 2018. It is that meeting that led to the Panmunjom summit two months later, in April 2018. In hindsight, one cannot but appreciate Moon and Kim's leadership. Both seemed to realize that trust should be strengthened through practical and visible actions undertaken by Seoul and Pyongyang. Both also made sure that their summit deepened the momentum toward inter-Korean reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

The Inter-Korean Track as a Driver

The results of the September summit in Pyongyang exceeded expectations even of those convinced that Koreans should be in charge of their own destiny. It is difficult to overestimate the effect of Moon Jae-in telling in person 150,000 North Koreans at the May Day Stadium in Pyongyang that he and Kim Jong-un had agreed "to completely eliminate the fear of war and the risk of armed conflicts on the Korean Peninsula." Upon his return from Pyongyang, he further noted that military agreements were the most significant results. If these agreements are implemented properly, he said, the two countries could discuss reducing military forces and weapons that currently threaten each side, including long-range artilleries that target Seoul and its surroundings. The hope is that the two sides can also agree on a special zone in the West Sea in the near future.

The agreement on economic cooperation was equally impressive. Given existing restrictions set out by UN Security Council Sanctions Resolutions, it is however conditional, in certain areas, on progress toward denuclearization, as well as improved relations between North Korea and the United States. Yet, clearly, without a "peace dividend," both politically and economically it will be difficult for Kim to move toward denuclearization and to "open up" his country.

In addition to benefiting economically from engagement, both Koreas seem to focus on continuing to build trust between themselves and indirectly between North Korea and the United States. That is why they attach considerable importance to declaring a formal end to the Korean War. To meet the concerns that such a declaration entails, Moon clarified that it would mark the

beginning of a process leading to a fully-fledged legal document replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement.

Learning from past mistakes, Moon and Kim realized that it was necessary to ensure direct and regular inter-Korean interactions between civilian and military representatives at all levels. That explains the opening of the Joint Liaison Office in Kaesong and the establishment of the joint military committee. The purpose of the joint military committee is to examine the implementation of the military agreement and ensure constant contact and discussion between the two sides to prevent accidental armed clashes. For the first time, the Demilitarized Zone is being demilitarized.

One of the striking features of the current inter-Korean engagement is the fact that North Korea has been discussing denuclearization with the South. In the past, it was always the other way around. This is an unimaginable situation under the two previous South Korean presidents. Understandably, the details about denuclearization will have to be hammered out by North Korea and the United States. But South Korea's role as a facilitator, if not an "interested contributor" or even a mediator, is noteworthy. Moreover, according to Moon, "coming to share the perception that progress in its talks with the United States is closely related to the development of inter-Korean relations, the North requested mediation from the South in its talks with the United States. It has also proposed that the two Koreas work closely together to realize complete denuclearization." This is a sign of a new era emerging on the Korean Peninsula and another welcome outcome of last year's diplomatic developments.

Even though Kim did not (as expected) visit Seoul last year, he expressed in a personal letter to Moon in December "strong determination to make a reciprocal visit to Seoul while closely monitoring the situation going forward." According to the Blue House, the North Korean leader also made clear that he intends to advance discussions about peace and prosperity on the Peninsula through frequent meetings with his South Korean counterpart in 2019 and to work together to resolve issues regarding the denuclearization of the Peninsula.

Reflecting on the results of 2018, Moon has recently stated that Seoul is an essential player to solve issues regarding the Korean Peninsula. Stressing that the current opportunity will probably never be around the corner again, the President insisted: "We cannot afford to let this opportunity slip by. In the process, we must address the North Korean nuclear issue in a peaceful manner. We have to build unwavering peace and strive to ensure that peace brings opportunities for our economy. There may be numerous ideas regarding the concrete measures to reach that goal, but I hope that the people will stand in unison on the overall direction and objective. I also hope that politicians will approach the issue in a nonpartisan manner from the perspective of the nation's great cause." As Moon has been actively working to build national consensus to support long-lasting engagement and eventual reunification with the North, his approach has to continue producing tangible results to convince the skeptics.

Kim Jong-un, who took it upon himself to engage the South and the United States, vowing to abandon hostility, also needs to demonstrate to the people of his country the practical benefits of this new approach.

The US-North Korea Track, Denuclearization, and Implications for the Hanoi summit

In all likelihood, the forthcoming US-North Korea Summit in Hanoi will give new

impetus to inter-Korean interactions, with the unprecedented visit by the North Korean leader to the South, if and when it takes place, breaking the psychological "sound barrier" between the two countries.

Although the inter-Korean track has its challenges, including the fact that South Korea remains a strong ally of the United States and that Seoul recently decided to increase its defense spending, it is the US-North Korea track that needs to be reinvigorated. The forthcoming US-North Korea summit promises to provide such a boost. Clearly, the United States and North Korea have different views on denuclearization, be it politically, militarily, or technically. For example, North Korea regularly mentions a nuclear-weapon-free zone on the Peninsula. The United States does not. Eventually, both sides will have to agree on a definition of denuclearization, as well as on a shared understanding of the steps that each needs to take to advance that process.

Recently, North Korean officials explained that "full and verifiable" dismantlement of its nuclear arsenal cannot happen "overnight." Throughout 2018, Pyongyang was rebuffing attempts by some to apply "the Libya model" of 2003-2004, i.e., attempts to force it to just dismantle the nuclear-weapon program (say, within a year) after submitting a complete inventory of its nuclear facilities, capabilities, and stockpiles. Besides, Pyongyang insisted that the process should begin with trust- and confidence-building, arguing that denuclearization would depend on the removal of the "US nuclear threat"—a formulation the North Korean leadership has not defined yet.

Unlike Washington, Pyongyang sees denuclearization first and foremost as a political process. By the end of 2018, Pyongyang seemed increasingly frustrated because Washington had not taken steps to establish new relations and work towards the establishment of a peace regime on the Peninsula. Pyongyang was also disappointed that, except for the suspension of large-scale US-South Korea military exercises, the United States did not respond with any "corresponding" steps after North Korea dismantled Tongchang-ri and Punggye-ri—its missile engines and nuclear test sites. Moreover, Pyongyang felt it did not get credit for halting nuclear tests or missile launches.

That "tug of war" has resulted in the two sides agreeing in the course of their preparations for the second US-North Korea summit in Hanoi to advance in parallel all of the elements of the Singapore Joint Statement. It seems that the United States and North Korea share the idea that there should be a comprehensive approach, where the goal of denuclearization would be framed as an outcome of political, security, military, and economic actions. Their respective negotiating teams have been working on the steps each country would have to take after the summit.

Given longstanding US resistance against North Korea's actions and policies, Pyongyang's image, and its human-rights record, the US-North Korea track is facing formidable challenges. Moreover, many US government and non-government experts do not expect North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. Common sense, however, suggests that tangible progress towards denuclearization of the Peninsula, coupled with continued strong inter-Korean engagement, can change the situation for the better. There is no alternative.

South Korean diplomacy has done an outstanding job in reaching out to the US government and the public to stress how essential engagement of North Korea is. The visit by the high-level bipartisan delegation

from the South Korean National Assembly to the United States this February is timely: it is critical to bring together a divided US Congress to support continued engagement of the North.

China, Russia, and the Importance of Multilateral Support

One should not underestimate the critical role of China and Russia in support of engagement, even though their respective agendas differ slightly. Both countries want a stable, non-nuclear, and prosperous Peninsula. Recall that both China and Russia expect North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. Both countries favor a multilateral format to address current problems on the Korean Peninsula. It is obvious that China and Russia, which have never been enthusiastic about sanctioning North Korea, are not going to join a "maximum-pressure" campaign so long as Pyongyang "does not launch or detonate." For that matter, at their first trilateral consultations in Moscow in October 2018, the vice-foreign ministers of China, North Korea, and Russia "reached consensus on the need for the UN Security Council to activate the process of adjusting sanctions against the DPRK in time, taking notice of the significant, practical steps for denuclearization taken by the DPRK." Notably, as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on December 24, 2018, their joint communique, issued after the meeting, "set forth joint approaches towards the Korean settlement."

In one of the most intriguing developments of the year, China-North Korea relations "opened a new historic chapter in 2018," as the Xinhua News Agency put it. As stated by China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, "seizing the opportunity of a major turnaround on the Korean Peninsula, China encouraged the North and the South to improve their relations." China also supported the resumption of dialogue between the United States and North Korea to build mutual trust.

During the fourth summit between Kim Jong-un and Chinese President Xi Jinping on January 8, 2019, both leaders agreed "on the joint study and coordination of the management of the situation of the Korean Peninsula." Kim said that "the DPRK remains unchanged in its main stand to keep the goal of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, sincerely implement the joint statement adopted at the Singapore DPRK-US summit talks and seek negotiated peaceful solution, referring to the difficulties and concern arising in the course of the improvement of the DPRK-US relations and the negotiations for the denuclearization and the prospects of resolving them." Xi, meanwhile, "fully agreed that the principled issues suggested by the DPRK side are deserved requirements and its reasonable points of concern should be resolved properly," pledging that "the Chinese side would as ever play a positive and constructive role for the defense of the fundamental interests of both sides and the stability of the situation on the peninsula as the reliable rear, resolute comrades and friends of the Korean comrades."

China expects 2019 to be a critical year for bringing about a substantive breakthrough on the Korean Peninsula. As China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi has also stressed, China hopes to see the outcomes of the second US-North Korea Summit leading to parallel progress in achieving not only complete denuclearization, but also in establishing a peace regime on the Peninsula.

Referring to the positive developments of 2018, Sergey Lavrov observed that, "as an inalienable participant in the overall process of resolving the situation around the Korean Peninsula, Russia helped achieve these results, and it will continue to do this".

Observers anticipate a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un at some point later this year. In addition to its continued active contacts with all the parties concerned, Russia has also proposed several trilateral economic projects on the Peninsula involving both Koreas, including the railway connection and electric grid. Seoul, for its part, launched its "nine bridges" initiative to jump-start economic cooperation at the regional and provincial level in an attempt to spur up practical interest in Russia's Far East towards economic cooperation with South Korea.

In Panmunjom, Moon and Kim decided to elicit support and cooperation from the international community for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. While the Korean Peninsula is one of the few areas where the United States, China, and Russia actively cooperate and consult each other, it is not a sufficient substitute for an institutionalized multilateral framework for a sustained dialogue and negotiations.

The experience of the Six-Party Talks, while not ideal, demonstrated the importance of multilateral action for shared goals. The fact that the Talks have stalled since 2009 is one of the reasons that led to the doom-and-gloom situation unfolding in 2017. It also explains the current inability of the six stakeholders to coordinate their work.

The situation remains dire for the rest of the international community, however. Consider the UN Secretary-General's recent statement that he does not think "the UN at the present moment can have much added value." Of course, the incumbent Secretary-General inherited a virtually decimated UN presence on the ground in North Korea with just nominal program activities. It is difficult to argue with the incumbent Secretary-General that now is not the time for new "parallel initiatives." Current engagement efforts on the Peninsula, however, need stronger support from the international community. Hopefully, the UN Security Council, whose members have adopted ten sanctions resolutions against North Korea, would revert to its primary role of promoting the pacific settlement of conflicts, especially if the second US-North Korea summit breaks new ground.

Japan is the only major regional state standing on the sidelines of current engagement efforts, even though there were reports of non-conclusive contacts between Tokyo and Pyongyang in 2018. The time will come for the two countries to resolve their mutual grievances. Clearly, resolving the so-called abductees' issue—an absolute priority for Japan—will have to be matched with resolving issues related to the occupation of Korea by Japan—an absolute priority for North Korea.

All in all, current efforts should inspire guarded optimism, despite the enormous complexity of the issues at hand. 2019 promises to be the year of dramatic and, hopefully, positive developments, provided the countries concerned continue to pay heed to the imperative of engagement.

THE 2018 SPRING SUMMITRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY

By Duyeon Kim

After a year of rapid North Korean nuclear and missile advancements, provocations, and an exchange of threats with US President Donald Trump, the inter-Korean summit in April 2018 gave rise to a dramatic schedule of spring summitry: US-South Korea, China-North Korea, US-Japan, and even a US-South Korea-Japan trilateral summit. The key engines of this approach centered on the leaders of the United States and the two Koreas. The main outcomes of the summitry were an image makeover for North Korea, aversion of military conflict, and the establishment of a diplomatic process between the United States and North Korea to address their respective security concerns. The parties that have so far gained the most from this approach in 2018 are Pyongyang, Seoul, and Beijing. Spring Summitry has placed an important pause on nuclear and missile testing, for now, but much uncertainty lies ahead, and Washington has yet to reap the true benefits from this diplomatic experiment.

Driving forces

The unprecedented Spring Summitry of 2018 was made possible due to the convergence of unconventional styles of US, North Korean, and South Korean leaders and their respective desires to make history. North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un's 2018 New Year's Day address led to his country's participation in the PyeongChang Winter Olympics, which yielded the first two summits between himself and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, and eventually, the first-ever meeting between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader.

For Moon, his immediate goal was to prevent an accidental crisis or military conflict on the Korean Peninsula by brokering US-North Korea nuclear talks and bring Trump and Kim together for a summit of their own. The "fire and fury" of 2017 provided the catalyst for Moon to embark on conflict-prevention efforts, which, in turn, enabled him to begin working toward his overarching goal of leaving a legacy as the first South Korean president to finally bring reconciliation and peace to the Korean Peninsula. The first step of this process was hosting a sizable and high-level North Korean delegation, led by Kim's sister and closest confidant Kim Yo-jong, at the Winter Olympics and meeting Kim Jong-un before a Trump-Kim summit. Kim's 2018 New Year's Day address, the Winter Olympics, and the first inter-Korean summit combined created the space and opportunity to lay the foundation for resuming inter-Korean cooperation projects and facilitating Washington-Pyongyang engagement.

The rationale for focusing on summits—a top-down approach instead of a bottom-up approach, as is customary in most democracies—was due to the North Korean regime's unique authoritarian characteristics. Moon, who had served as chief of staff to President Roh Moo-hyun, had also been frustrated that the previous two inter-Korean summits were each held at the end of a single presidential term, which did not provide enough time to implement their agreements. His goal was to hold regular summits with Kim. Sure enough, Moon and Kim ended up meeting three times. But the only way to remove Seoul's biggest impediment to cross-border reconciliation is for Pyongyang to make progress on denuclearization in order to lift sanctions and resume inter-Korean projects. This led to the Moon administration's push for high-level shuttle

diplomacy in the spring of 2018 to engage North Korea multilaterally.

Kim Jong-un's immediate goal in 2018, through a peace and charm offensive, was to weaken the international sanctions regime (America's maximum-pressure campaign), gain international standing, and end US-South Korean joint military exercises to achieve his broader objective of becoming a strong and prosperous nation through his *byungjin* strategic line (parallel nuclear and economic development). The first step was to send a delegation to the Winter Olympics, as Kim declared in his New Year's speech (while also ordering the mass production of nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles) and resetting relations with Seoul. If the "fire and fury" of 2017 cleared Kim's nuclear-weapon milestones, and at an unprecedented rate, then his peace offensive of 2018 was geared toward achieving economic prosperity. A willing partner in South Korea—a progressive Moon administration more sympathetic and lenient toward its Northern brethren than its conservative counterpart—presented an opportunity for Kim to begin weakening sanctions, postpone US-South Korean joint military exercises during the Winter Olympics, and make it more difficult for Washington to take military measures. Pyongyang's technological achievements on its nuclear arsenal armed the regime with confidence and leverage ahead of talks with Washington. Kim's broader objectives, gleaned from his 2018 New Year's Day address, appeared to be weakening the US-South Korea alliance, further dividing South Koreans across ideological lines, and gaining international standing. The Winter Games also presented an opportunity for Pyongyang to test sanctions enforcement and begin its image makeover as a peace-loving, normal state, which possesses nuclear weapons solely for defensive purposes. Kim scored yet again when Trump announced after their June Singapore summit—to the surprise of his staff and Seoul—that US-South Korean drills would be halted.

Trump, meanwhile, came into office determined to be the first American head of state to solve the North Korean nuclear problem. His administration built its policy on two pillars: maximum pressure and diplomacy. Maximum pressure, however, took center stage due to Pyongyang's rapid nuclear and missile advancements and provocations in 2017, which clouded Washington's ability to engage Pyongyang with any sense of flexibility. Coercion and compellence became the tactic of choice for the Trump administration in 2018 and the United States employed the most comprehensive and stringent sanctions on the regime for the first time in over two decades, while also applying pressure on Beijing to enforce these sanctions. Numerous reports revealed that sanctions were beginning to take some effect in the North. Trump's public threats might even have had some psychological impact on the regime, but at the time, it appeared that the South Korean government and public were more fearful that Trump might instigate conflict because of his blustery threats and reports of a "bloody nose" strike being considered as a possible option. After the first inter-Korean summit in April 2018, however, it became increasingly difficult for Washington to continue its hardline position and refrain from engaging in dialogue and summitry with Pyongyang.

Main results and implications for US policy

The Spring Summitry of 2018 led to an unprecedented process: summitry between the United States and North Korea. It certainly kept diplomacy alive and prevented, for the time being, both sides from reverting back to the dangerous situation of 2017. The winner of the first round of bilateral negotiations in Singapore last June was

undisputedly Kim Jong-un, and by extension, Chinese President Xi Jinping because Trump revealed his ultimate bargaining chip too soon: his desire to withdraw US troops from the Korean Peninsula. Kim was also awarded his wish of halting US-South Korean joint military drills—another valuable American negotiating card—without having to produce concrete denuclearization measures while retaining its nuclear weapons. Another score for the regime was the failure to produce a concrete agreement with Washington that prevents it from continuing its nuclear-weapon development.

Soon after the Singapore summit, Pyongyang's frustration with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo—referring to him as "headwinds"—and its snubbing of newly-appointed Special Representative for North Korea Policy Steve Biegun stalled negotiations for several months, delaying the Trump administration's initial aims for the rapid and complete elimination of all nuclear weapons and other weapons-of-mass-destruction programs in the country. Washington has recently recognized publicly that denuclearization will take time and will need to be conducted in phases. But the administration is still racing against the clock to deliver bold results with only two years left until the next US presidential elections and very complicated negotiations ahead that take a significant amount of time.

Another significant result of the spring summitry for the regime was Kim Jong-un's diplomatic debut on the international stage and a platform to change the world's perception of what used to be known as a hostile and backward hermit kingdom. From North Korean singer and political emissary Hyon Song-wol's preparatory trip to Seoul before the Winter Olympics to the three inter-Korean summits and to Kim Jong-un's attempt at a statesman-like delivery of his 2019 New Year's Address, North Korea has been waging a fierce public relations campaign to paint itself as a modern, normal and peace-loving nation. In his January 1 speech, Kim also stressed he will "continue to bolster up unity and cooperation with the socialist countries and develop relations with all countries that are friendly to us under the ideals of independence, peace, and friendship." Just days later, Kim visited Beijing in what appeared to be another effort to level out the geopolitical playing field before walking into another meeting with Trump as he did before the Singapore summit. Beijing-Pyongyang relations have been at one of their lowest points in recent years, but they appear to be banding together because of their shared strategic interests: eventually removing US presence and influence in the region. North Korea's state-run media reported that the two leaders discussed a "joint study and coordination of the management of the Korean peninsula and the denuclearization negotiations," which appears to be the "multi-party negotiations" towards a peace regime Kim stressed in his New Year's Day address. Signing a peace treaty to replace the armistice would be a savvy way of addressing the validity and legitimacy of US troop presence in Korea.

Trump and Kim are set to meet again on February 27 in Vietnam in a bid to advance their Singapore statement. The two sides have yet to narrow their differences on fundamental issues like the end-state for denuclearization and peace. It will be extremely difficult for Washington to convince a regime with now sophisticated nuclear weapons to surrender the only means of survival it has ever known. As challenging as the nuclear game may be, a negotiated settlement is still the best option, but the stakes are higher this time. The upcoming summit in Hanoi will determine the trajectory of a diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear problem and stability in Northeast Asia.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND NORTH KOREA: EVOLUTION AND MAIN RESULTS OF THE 2018 SUMMIT DIPLOMACY

By Teng Jianqun

North and South Korea began to reinitiate talks at the Winter Olympics Games in Pyeongchang in February 2018. Then, on April 27, their two leaders, North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, held a summit and released a declaration and, on June 12, another summit was held in Singapore between US President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un. These meetings have eased mounting tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

This paper reviews the Trump Administration's policy towards North Korea and argues that the sudden change from confrontation to diplomacy is the result of policy changes by both the United States and North Korea. President Trump, in particular, has adopted a new approach to deal with North Korea in an effort to make a breakthrough. So far, however, the United States has not completely changed its traditional North Korea policy because of domestic politics. Because failure is not an option, the two sides will try their best to sustain the current momentum.

Evolution of the Trump administration's policy toward North Korea

Since the 2016 US presidential elections, Donald Trump's approach to North Korea has gone through four stages.

Stage one. As a presidential candidate, Trump indicated that he was willing to find a solution to the North Korea nuclear issue by letting go of traditional US policy. He said he would be prepared to eat a hamburger with, or give a phone call to, Kim Jong-un. Trump also said there was a possibility that Kim could give up his nuclear weapons, stating that he could invite him to the United States to engage in negotiations.

Stage two. In early February 2017, less than a month after Trump's inauguration, then Secretary of Defense James Mattis visited South Korea and stressed that the United States would respond militarily to any attack by North Korea against US allies. On the same day, the US government approved $140 million in arms sales to the South. Military deterrence and sanctions on North Korea were clearly the Secretary's main talking points in Seoul. Subsequently, the United States and South Korea initiated large-scale military drills, and the United States enhanced nuclear deterrence by routinely deploying strategic weapons on the Korean Peninsula. Secretary Mattis' visit to South Korea was intended to deter any provocative action by North Korea.

Meanwhile, Kim was waiting for Trump's hamburger offer and phone call. Before the Secretary's visit, Pyongyang had not conducted nuclear and missile tests for at least three months. Yet after the Secretary's visit Pyongyang lost patience with the Trump Administration. That's why on February 12, 2017, Pyongyang fired missiles in the Sea of Japan. That increased tensions and led the Administration to adopt a "maximum-pressure" policy towards the North. Yet that did not stop Pyongyang, which tested more missiles. The United States and South Korea also initiated large-scale military drills and, in a show of strength, Washington dispatched strategic bombers and aircraft carrier to Northeast Asia. Trump and Kim also exchanged insults: Kim called Trump an "old

man" and Trump nicknamed Kim "rocket man." Significantly, in September, North Korea conducted its sixth and largest nuclear test.

Stage three. South Korea chose to become an important bridge between the United States and North Korea. During the Winter Olympics Games in Pyeongchang, no one believed that North-South interactions would go anywhere. US Vice-President Mike Pence and National Security Advisor John Bolton also expressed skepticism. However, engagement continued and led to a summit between Moon and Kim in Panmunjom, on April 27, 2018. That helped lay the foundations for the Summit between Kim and Trump, which took place in Singapore on June 12 and committed both sides to safeguard peace and security, as well as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Stage four. After the United States and North Korea reached the Singapore Joint Statement on building peace on and denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, Washington and Seoul agreed to suspend their joint military drill, and North Korea dismantled its nuclear test site in Punggye-ri. Subsequent interactions between Washington and Pyongyang did not produce results, however. While Pyongyang pushed for a declaration ending the Korean War, Washington tried to get Pyongyang to do more toward denuclearization. At present, the United States cannot agree to an end-of-war declaration because that would require Washington to change its military posture and to agree to sanctions relief, requirements that are off-limits for the current US domestic scene. Trump and Kim, therefore, will try their best to maintain some form of status quo on the Korean Peninsula. Remember that Trump is invested personally in this effort and that, for him, failure is not an option. Similarly, Kim and his Party have already adopted a new approach, which prioritizes economic development and requires a stable regional environment.

Drivers of the Trump approach to North Korea

There are several drivers behind the Trump approach to North Korea. One is Trump himself. Trump used to be a businessman in New York and he became US President in 2017. His approach to North Korea, especially the sudden change from pressure to diplomacy, has to do with his unconventional background and the fact that he does not have a good understanding of the North Korea issue.

North Korea has been an important pillar of US strategy in Northeast Asia since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Because, since then, it has considered North Korea a threat, Washington has justified the deployment of troops in South Korea and Japan and, more recently, of THAAD batteries in South Korea. What's more, considering North Korea a threat has enabled Washington to act as the dominant player in Northeast Asia. On several occasions since the end of the Cold War, Washington and Pyongyang failed to establish stable relations as a result.

Trump is not familiar with these issues and, significantly, he has low regard for US alliances, which is why he has asked South Korea and Japan to spend more on defense; he thinks that they have been taking advantage of the United States for decades.

Another driver of the current approach to North Korea has to do with the changed and changing US assessment of the threat. With six nuclear tests under its belt, Pyongyang now has the capability to make nuclear weapons. Pyongyang also has functioning long-range missiles. During a test conducted on November 29, 2017, the missile reached a height of 4,475 kilometers with the range of 950 kilometers, meaning that North Korea can now reach the US homeland. That threat

has forced US decision-makers to become more cautious and to double down on efforts to solve the problem. That's why during his first trip to Asia in November 2017, Trump's primary focus was North Korea.

The current approach towards Pyongyang can also be explained by the realization from the US government that a military strike is not an effective way to eliminate the North Korean nuclear arsenal. Since 1953, the US and South Korean militaries have been preparing for the defense of the South, from OPLAN 5027 to OPLAN 5015. However, there are several factors that are preventing the United States from waging war on North Korea. For starters, the UN Security Council will not give a resolution allowing war. Moreover, North Korea's retaliatory capabilities cannot be eliminated by a US first strike, or by an invasion; mountains and forests on the Peninsula give North Korea good protection for its retaliatory capabilities. Finally, diplomatic engagement by regional countries make war unlikely.

China has insisted that solving the North Korea issue requires a focus on denuclearization, stability on the Peninsula, and dialogue. These three principles promote peace and, in effect, they protect North Korea from the risk of war. While Pyongyang likes to claim that it has won all its diplomatic fights with the United States since the end of the Korean War, let's not forget that it has had two big brothers, Russia and China, standing behind.

The role of China in shaping recent developments is important. After Kim took power in North Korea in 2012, North Korea-China relations weren't good. On several occasions, the official North Korean media even publicly criticized China for supporting United Nations Security Council Sanctions Resolutions against Pyongyang. Relations improved, however, when Kim visited China in March 2018, and then again in May and June 2018, and in January 2019. Significantly, every time Kim went to China, it was before meeting with either the South Korean president or the US president.

During each visit, Kim had a specific purpose and specific requests. During his first visit, Kim, of course, sought Beijing's endorsement to have a bargaining stick with Moon and Trump. During his second visit, Kim wanted logistic support from Beijing, including transportation from North Korea to Singapore. Subsequently, Kim tried to get support of all sorts from China.

Significantly, because since the Singapore Summit diplomatic engagement between North Korea and the United States has been at a standstill (as a result of Trump refusing to make concessions in response to actions taken by North Korea), Kim mentioned during his New Year address that he would like to find "another way" to make progress.

It is important to keep in mind that China has been an essential pillar for peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Without China's involvement in finding a solution to the current standoff, failure is guaranteed. Kim's visit to China has improved North Korea-China relations, and that could give him room to improve his country's regional security environment. Remember, however, that China will insist that the North Korea nuclear issue must be resolved: there can be no compromise to the commitment of denuclearization and peace on the Peninsula.

The effort made by South Korea contributed greatly to changing US policy towards the North. The diplomatic engagement after the Winter Olympics Games in Pyeongchang laid a solid foundation for South Korea to act as a bridge between the United States and North Korea. Inter-Korean interactions have forced Washington to rethink its approach towards Pyongyang. The good news is that this coincided with Mike Pompeo's nomination as

Secretary of State, who has shown willingness to promote diplomacy: he paid secret visits to Pyongyang to prepare the summit between Trump and Kim, for instance.

Looking to the future: Trump's options vis-à-vis North Korea

After over 60 years of standoff between the United States and North Korea, it would be unwise to expect that bilateral relations will change overnight. Patience and wisdom are necessary to reach a stable situation on the Korean Peninsula. Looking ahead, there are three possible options:

1. Maintain the current momentum and level of engagement. This is within the realm of the possible because even if both sides cannot reach an agreement on next steps, they both have strong incentives to keep the negotiating process going.

2. Reach an agreement that will satisfy both sides. Presumably, that agreement would have to include the suspension by North Korea of all nuclear and missile activities and the suspension by the United States of its military drills on and around the Peninsula.

3. Return to the traditional policy of confrontation between North Korea and the United States. This, unfortunately, remains a possibility, too.

APPLYING LESSONS FROM THE JCPOA WITH IRAN TO THE NORTH KOREA PROBLEM

By Richard Johnson

2018 saw dramatic shifts in US foreign policy toward two enduring nuclear threats: Iran and North Korea. Building on the inter-Korean rapprochement forged by South Korean President Moon Jae-in during the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, US President Donald Trump's decision to engage directly with North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un represented a bold but risky attempt to break the cycle of previous US-North Korea diplomatic failures. In contrast, the Trump Administration's decision to withdraw the United States from participation in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) had the effect of severing burgeoning contacts between Washington and Tehran. US actions cast doubt on whether Iran would continue to abide by the deal that had helped to assure the international community, and especially JCPOA's "P5+1" participants, that Iran was not in a position to build a nuclear weapon. (The P5+1 are China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, along with the European Union; they are also referred to as the "E3+3.")

Mindful of the current US Administration's criticism of the JCPOA, it might seem odd to point to it as a potential model for a North Korea accord. In fact, lessons learned from previous failed North Korea negotiations helped inform US diplomats and technical experts negotiating the JCPOA. They intentionally sought to avoid the kind of sparsely drafted texts from past deals with Pyongyang, including the 1994 Agreed Framework, the 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement, and the 2012 "Leap Day Deal." Indeed, the JCPOA drew praise from many for its specificity and comprehensiveness.

Just as the JCPOA process reflected lessons learnt from North Korea, many of its innovative features, including the intrusive and layered verification regime, the calibrated trade-offs of targeted sanctions relief for nuclear-related actions, and the oversight mechanisms for an implementation process, could be adapted to the North Korea case.

Moreover, while the Trump Administration has made clear it did not think the JCPOA sufficiently addressed the Iranian threat, its main critique has been that the deal lacked provisions on non-nuclear issues, such as Tehran's support for terrorism and regional proxies, or its ballistic missile program. at the same time, Washington has signaled that it expects Iran to uphold its JCPOA commitments, indicating that the Administration sees merits in elements of the deal, even as it finds fault in the limited duration of certain provisions. It is thus worth examining elements of the JCPOA that the Administration could modify and incorporate into a new North Korea agreement.

Lesson: Defined Verification Regime

Unlike in the Six-Party Talks process, where key verification details were left undefined until later stages (which were never reached), or the 2018 Singapore summit's US-North Korea joint statement, which does not include any references to verification, the JCPOA placed verification at the heart of the text.

First, it established that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would be requested to monitor and verify the deal's nuclear-related measures. The verification regime would be firmly grounded in an

internationally accepted system with its foundations in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and carried out by an independent and technically-focused institution. Iran also committed to provisionally implement the Additional Protocol, which provides the IAEA with additional tools and authorities—including the right to seek access to locations outside of declared facilities—to determine that all nuclear activities in a state remain peaceful. In contrast, the IAEA had limited scope to monitor the "shut down and sealing" of North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear facility during the Six-Party Talks. The Agency only negotiated an "ad hoc arrangement" with Pyongyang, which lacked authorities to monitor disablement activities or access undeclared locations.

The JCPOA did not confine its verification provisions to existing IAEA safeguards. It also added bespoke elements designed to address unique characteristics of Iran's nuclear program that had given the international community cause for concern:

- A time-limited process (Section Q) for providing access to undeclared locations;
- Prohibition of the design, development, acquisition, or use of certain activities relevant to weaponization (Section T);
- Additional constraints on Iran for production of centrifuge components;
- Permission for the IAEA to use advanced technology in its monitoring activities; and
- Committed Iran to receive pre-approval for all dual-use equipment imports (the so-called Procurement Channel).

Each of these JCPOA-specific measures could be modified for the North Korea context to address US concerns about undeclared locations, enrichment, illicit procurement, and weaponization.

Lesson: Specific timelines and linked actions

Past North Korea deals were much more ambiguous on timelines for implementation. The September 2005 Joint Statement included no guidance on the specific nuclear steps North Korea needed to take, and follow-on texts in 2007 (the "Initial Actions" and "Second-Phase Actions" agreements) omitted technical requirements for achieving disablement, such as defueling the Yongbyon reactor and removing reprocessing equipment. These details were negotiated separately but not released publicly.

Although the Six-Party texts involved phasing, they did not attempt to set firm deadlines for actions taken by Pyongyang, Washington, or other parties. When timeframes where mentioned, they were rarely linked explicitly to reciprocal actions by the other party. For example, the Second-Phase Actions agreement states that North Korea would complete disablement activities at three key Yongbyon facilities by December 31, 2007. A separate section says that "economic, energy, and humanitarian assistance up to the equivalent of one million tons of HFO (heavy fuel oil)" will be provided to North Korea. Although US and other participants saw HFO deliveries as contingent upon North Korean disablement actions, there was no explicit linkage spelled out between these two activities in the text, much less any schedule to ensure the two lines of effort proceeded in parallel.

The JCPOA's detailed focus on timelines stands in stark contrast to the Six-Party agreements, with P5+1 negotiators laying out a long-term set of milestones for various

implementation measures, both on sanctions relief and changes to Iran's nuclear infrastructure and material stockpiles. Both the P5+1 and Iran had vested interests in seeing early deliverables from the deal: for the P5+1, it was the monitored cessation or limitation of Iranian nuclear activities and for Iran, it was sanctions relief. This motivation required a far more robust approach to crafting a phased plan, with clear linkages between actions taken by both sides. Even before the JCPOA, in November 2013, the P5+1 and Iran announced the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), often known as the interim or Geneva deal. The JPOA spelled out a set of specific, time-bound nuclear limitations that froze or rolled back parts of Iran's nuclear program, coupled with specific P5+1 commitments to suspend certain sanctions and cease the imposition of new sanctions in delineated areas. This interim deal envisioned a comprehensive arrangement (the JCPOA) to be negotiated in the next phase, thereby buying time and space for diplomats to tackle remaining complexities.

Once the JCPOA itself was announced, the document revealed the level of specificity required to satisfy both sides, in terms of both actions and the schedule for achieving those steps. Annex I of the JCPOA delves into minutiae such as uranium enrichment cascade piping and production of nuclear fuel pellets, Annex II reads like a laundry list of exact provisions in US and European Union law—including a lengthy and painstakingly negotiated list of individuals and entities—where sanctions enforcement would be lifted. And Annex V, or the "Implementation Plan," provided a calendar of milestones that set out clear expectations about when certain actions would occur, tied either to the completion (and verification by the IAEA) of Iranian nuclear actions ("Implementation Day") or by a certain date (ten years from Implementation Day).

Lesson: Implementation oversight and dispute resolution

Previous diplomatic efforts on North Korean denuclearization failed in part because they proved unsustainable. Differences in interpretations of commitments, the role of various diplomatic partners, the schedule of certain actions, and the lack of a dispute resolution mechanism were all factors that undermined the Agreed Framework, the Six-Party Talks process, and (to a lesser extent) the Leap Day Deal, leading to their collapse. The lack of clarity on the timing of heavy fuel oil shipment deliveries to North Korea, their sequencing with the pace of Yongbyon disablement actions, and whether Japan was to provide a shipment of heavy fuel oil all wreaked havoc on the Six-Party process. The debate over whether a North Korean space launch was considered a prohibited missile launch proved to be the death knell for the Leap Day deal. In both cases, the finger pointing that ensued offered each side an excuse to blame the other for not upholding commitments and ultimately an out for abandoning the deal.

The JCPOA instituted several measures to avoid a North Korea-style breakdown. Unlike in the Six-Party Talks case, the P5+1 were remarkable in being able to "negotiate with one voice," resolving differences quietly within the group and delivering a unified message to Iran. These informal P5+1 consultations continued into the implementation phase. The JCPOA also created a formal oversight body known as the Joint Commission to conduct an ongoing review of the deal's effectiveness. Finally, the deal contained an explicit dispute resolution mechanism involving the Joint Commission, escalating as needed to a panel of the ministers of foreign affairs of each state, then to an independent "Advisory Board," and ultimately to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The role of the UNSC itself is also an important element of the Iran nuclear deal, in that the Security Council formally endorsed the JCPOA through UNSC Resolution 2231. Although this endorsement did not make the JCPOA legally binding, UNSCR 2231 did provide the United Nations with a greater role in oversight and implementation, particularly in certain elements, such as the Procurement Channel and the innovative "snap back" process for re-imposing sanctions in cases of noncompliance.

Participants in the JCPOA had clear expectations as to their commitments. The text spelled out when Iran or the P5+1 were responsible for certain actions, and if the JCPOA was not clear enough, supplementary documents in the form of memoranda of understanding or Joint Commission decisions were negotiated and published to provide clarity on issues such as nuclear waste, heavy water, centrifuge designs, and fuel for the Tehran research reactor. Other documents and contracts established China and Russia as the leads for the Arak reactor and Fordow stable isotope conversion projects, respectively.

Adapting JCPOA strengths into a North Korea deal

In learning from the JCPOA experience, a new North Korea deal should not only lay out specific steps and defined timelines for denuclearization (and any corresponding measures), but it should also set up mechanisms for monitoring implementation, addressing compliance disputes, and re-imposing sanctions if needed, including a potential role for the UNSC. US negotiators should seek as much specificity as possible when defining key actions and terms. While it is often true that ambiguity can often be a diplomat's best friend in bridging negotiating gaps, it should be used sparingly when it comes to technical matters such as missile technology and the nuclear fuel cycle.

Pyongyang will no doubt seek to maximize its room to maneuver, opt for generalities over details, and resist intrusive monitoring and verification measures. North Korea might be convinced to accept a more detailed agreement if it sees a clearly defined pathway to receiving corresponding measures from the United States and others, which could include sanctions relief, steps toward normalization, or economic and energy assistance. US negotiators should seek to incorporate internationally recognized verification measures (with the IAEA in a central role), define technical steps as specifically as possible, and establish implementation and oversight procedures, including a dispute resolution mechanism. The success generated from the multilateral character of the JCPOA also argues for the United States to identify ways to bring other regional partners and international institutions into the North Korea denuclearization process, not in place of the current bilateral track, but as a supplement to the bolster the stability of the process and reassure North Korea of the sustainability of any deal.

The history of US-North Korea diplomacy is littered with false starts, dashed hopes, and lasting mistrust. Yet the lessons learned from this experience encouraged P5+1 negotiators to explore new thinking and adopt innovative approaches in negotiating with Tehran. Despite the US decision to withdraw, the JCPOA has been successful in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and has increased international confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. The United States would be wise to adapt the best parts of the JCPOA to achieve a durable denuclearization deal with North Korea.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fan Jishe, PhD is senior fellow and deputy director of the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation Studies at the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, China. He is also the executive editor-in-chief of the journal *Contemporary American Review*.

Georgy Toloraya, PhD, a former diplomat, is chair of regional programs at "Russkiy Mir" Foundation and director of the Asian Strategy Center at the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is also a visiting professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Alexander Ilitchev, a former diplomat, is senior fellow at the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation and the former principal adviser to the personal envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Korean Peninsula.

Duyeon Kim is adjunct senior fellow at the Washington-based Center for a New American Security. She is also a columnist for *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Seoul-based Korean Peninsula Future Forum. Her expertise includes the two Koreas, nuclear nonproliferation, arms control, East Asian relations, US nuclear policy, and security.

Teng Jianqun, PhD is director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, a foreign-policy think tank affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing, China.

Richard Johnson is senior director for fuel cycle and verification at the Washington-based Nuclear Threat Initiative. He has been involved deeply in Iran and North Korea nuclear issues, including as a member of the US delegations to the JCPOA Joint Commission and the Six-Party Talks.

Track-1.5 US-Russia-China Dialogue Co-Chairs

David Santoro, PhD, is director and senior fellow for nuclear policy at the Pacific Forum, where he specializes in strategic deterrence and competition, as well as nonproliferation and nuclear security, with regional focuses on the Indo-Pacific and Europe. Before joining the Pacific Forum, he worked on nuclear policy in France, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Anton Khlopkov is director of the Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS) in Moscow, Russia. He is also a member of the Advisory Board under the Security Council of the Russian Federation, and the editor-in-chief of Nuclear Club Journal. In January 2019 he joined the U.N. Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.

Tong Zhao, PhD is a fellow in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, based at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in Beijing, China.