



Session Sketch

Denuclearizing North Korea Session One

Introduction

The session on the denuclearization of North Korea began with the moderator raising a number of questions to lead the discussion. Highlighting the timeliness of the discussion following Secretary Pompeo's recent visit to Pyongyang and the upcoming second US-DPRK summit, the moderator posed three major questions to be discussed both during the summit as well as throughout the process of denuclearization.

The first question was how to define "complete denuclearization". While the US believes this is a very simple definition- CVID, or complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization- the North Korean definition is more complex. When the two sides are forced to confront the differences between their definitions, the potential for conflict will be high.

The second question was how to coordinate policy regarding the peace process on the Peninsula, particularly between the US and the ROK. There are three key issues over which the two must coordinate: declaring the end of the war, prioritizing verification issues, and the timing of lifting economic sanctions. Coordination must be ongoing and a concerted effort to get on the same page must be made prior to the second summit between the DPRK and the US.

The final question raised was regarding to what extent the US and China might be able to cooperate in order to more efficiently achieve denuclearization and build a peace regime both within Korea and throughout the Asia-Pacific. The relationship between China and the US will be one of the strongest determining factors as to whether a peace regime can be achieved.

Presentations

1) Presentation 1

The question of whether Kim Jong-un is truly willing to denuclearize remains. Even so, nations may be able to effectively shape North Korea's choices by properly combining incentives and disincentives.

The North Korean nuclear issue is not just a matter of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or of military balance between the two Koreas. North Korea has endeavored to achieve various goals through nuclear weapons, but its core ambition is to guarantee its future political status in the context of a divided Korean

Peninsula. The North Korean nuclear challenge stems from North Korea's will to resolve the political challenges it faces; it is crucial that the world understands this point. South Korea and other nations have often focused exclusively on denuclearization; at other times, they have taken a comprehensive approach by dealing with the North Korean challenge as a whole. As North Korea's nuclear weapons become highly advanced, the nuclear challenge develops into an urgent issue for North Korea's neighbors and other countries, an issue with global implications. Efforts to formally end the Korean War and establish a permanent peace regime with steps to denuclearize North Korea is currently established as the agreeable framework.

More Strategic and Long-Term Plan

The commonalities among South Korea's gradual, comprehensive approach; China's double suspension and two-track approach; North Korea's gradual and simultaneous approach; and the United States' approach of maximum pressure and engagement has provided momentum for the generally agreeable path. Although differences between North Korea's gradual approach and the United States' all-at-once approach and disagreement among U.S. foreign policymakers on the speed of North Korea's denuclearization are known, these issues have since been overcome. The process is expected to finish by January 2021, and all countries seem to agree on the gradual give-and-take type of negotiation.

The stalemate following the June 12 Singapore summit originates from many problems, notably the imbalance between North Korea's detailed negotiating tactics and U.S.-South Korea plans of engagement. North Korea, through its previous efforts to sell nuclear weapons at high prices, is well prepared to make various demands by giving out sliced cards of denuclearization. By contrast, South Korea and the United States have been preparing effective measures for pressure and sanctions without well-devised plans to reward North Korea. Following President Donald J. Trump's decision to suspend joint military trainings, North Korea made a demand to formally declare an end to the Korean War. However, this required addressing too many issues because of the unpredictable consequences and implications of the declaration, such as the dismantlement of the UN command. Lacking trust, North Korea will demand more as it takes detailed steps toward denuclearization, and both South Korea and the United States should be prepared to ensure balance and irreversibility.

The Final Stage of Denuclearization

Having faced strong economic sanctions, North Korea recognizes that economic revival is inevitable, and seemingly contingent on denuclearization. North Korea will try to gain maximum compensation by halting its current nuclear activities, such as the production of nuclear materials and the production of nuclear weapons, and future nuclear weapons development. However, for reasons of minimal deterrence, it is doubtful that North Korea will abandon its existing nuclear weapons, especially as it continues to refer to the so-called hostile U.S. policy. By possessing a minimum of nuclear weapons, North Korea will think it maintains a military advantage over South Korea and can likely deter a preemptive U.S. attack. If U.S.-North Korea relations do not improve significantly, the issue of relinquishing the existing nuclear weapons will face another setback.

North Korea's fear is directly related to the problem of its survival in the context of the national division rather than U.S. policy or nonexistent South Korean absorption unification strategy. Although North Korea and the world refer to cases of Libya and Iraq as being comparable to the North Korean nuclear challenge, North Korea is

fundamentally different from those countries in that it is in a state of division and fragile, incomplete sovereignty.

North Korea will likely hesitate at the final stage of denuclearization unless the institutional base, political atmosphere, and a deep relationship with South Korea exists. In this respect, the various institutional efforts surrounding the peace regime are important but not sufficient. In order to improve relations and establish trust, it is necessary to promote the relationship between top leaders, consensus among strategists in each country, and economic efforts through social and cultural exchanges. In particular, a new perspective should be established within South Korean society because the peace regime and inter-Korean coexistence will invite sharp questions about the sovereignty of both Koreas.

The North Korean nuclear challenge can be resolved, and the practical problem in achieving the resolution can be overcome by enhancing mutual trust. In this respect, it is important to reach a consensus on the nature of the problem and resolve the North Korean nuclear challenge without being influenced by the domestic politics of each country. South Korean President Moon Jae-in's diplomacy of mediation is reducing the misunderstandings between North Korea and the United States and relieving the domestic political burdens in both.

A Denuclearized North Korea, Future South Korean Diplomatic Strategy, and U.S.-China Relations

A resolution to the North Korean nuclear challenge and the coexistence of North and South Korea will not entirely resolve the future South Korean diplomatic dilemmas. Even with North Korean denuclearization, causes for concern between North and South Korea will remain. After denuclearization, North Korea's military threats to neighboring countries will decrease, but it could still pursue competition with South Korea at various levels. North Korea will also likely pursue strong government-led economic reforms and continue its social control to maintain its dictatorship. It could also try to increase its geopolitical value in the midst of U.S.-China rivalry. If relations between the two Koreas in the future deteriorate despite a peace regime, a conventional arms race could ensue.

To prevent these problems, a comprehensive and long-term coordination between North Korea and the rest of the world, especially China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea, is critical. Cooperation between the United States and China is particularly crucial for the geopolitical future of North Korea. In this regard, rather than a simple resolution of the North Korean nuclear challenge, a more extensive effort is needed to create a more cooperative framework between the United States and China. If cooperation among the top leaders of Northeast Asia can be established in the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, it would mark a turning point for not only the Korean Peninsula but also the entire region. It could also provide a basis for resolving South Korea's future diplomatic dilemmas.

2) Presentation 2

More than three months after the Singapore summit at which U.S. President Donald J. Trump and the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un agreed to work toward "complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," the negotiations appear to have stalled. As the first meeting ever between a sitting U.S. president and a North Korean leader, the summit was no doubt a landmark event. It was also widely hailed as a critical development to avert the risk of a nuclear confrontation. Trump went even further, declaring that there was "no longer a nuclear threat" from North Korea.

Since November 2017, Pyongyang has abstained from conducting any nuclear or missile test. At the Singapore summit, Kim also formally announced a moratorium on nuclear and long-range ballistic missile tests. Previously, Kim had clarified that North Korea no longer needed to conduct tests as it had completed the acquisition of nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles. As confirmed by satellite images, in July 2018 North Korea also began dismantling a missile engine test site and a satellite launch facility in Tongchang that it had used to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States. Kim made other concessions during a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in on September 18. Kim promised to permanently close the Tongchang complex, allow international inspectors to verify the dismantlement activity, and shut down a nuclear material in Yongbyon if the United States made unspecified reciprocal concessions.

Pyongyang has described its post-Singapore measures as “practical denuclearization steps.” Some analysts believe that they can actually help set in motion a badly needed confidence-building process (apparently sharing this view, Trump called Kim’s last moves “exciting”). In particular, Kim’s first-ever open commitment to submit a dismantled site to international inspection seems a promising diplomatic move.

However, the measures announced so far by Kim are of a fairly limited scope. They are also easily reversible. As such, they fall short of the Trump administration’s demands and of what North Korea is bound to do under relevant UN Security Council resolutions. More important, according to U.S. intelligence sources, North Korea has continued to produce nuclear material and build nuclear weapons at the same pace as before. In a recent report, the secretary-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) denounced the continued development of the North Korea’s nuclear program as “a cause of grave concern.”

The White House has had different assessments of North Korea’s post-Singapore behavior. While Trump has repeatedly expressed optimism about the diplomatic process and praised Kim’s moves, high-level administration officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, and National Security Advisor John Bolton have criticized the North Korean leadership on several occasions for failing to take concrete action toward denuclearization. These baffling discrepancies have contributed to creating an atmosphere of uncertainty about what the United States plans to do next and more broadly about the future of negotiations.

Constructive Ambiguity?

The four points agreed to by Trump and Kim in Singapore are far from new, including the pledge concerning the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, which was first introduced in a 1992 joint declaration between the North and the South and has remained unfulfilled. The Trump-Kim statement does not mention the U.S. basic request for North Korea’s “complete, verifiable, and irreversible” denuclearization.

Also, it does not provide any timeline or roadmap to achieve the stated goal of denuclearization. Arguably, this fundamental ambiguity was critical to the success of the summit, but it could spell trouble for the future. In fact, the divergent expectations of the two countries, which are likely to become increasingly obvious, have the potential to be highly disruptive. Trump has declared his trust in Kim, but there remains a deep-rooted distrust between the two countries—due to the memory of the 1950–1953 war and past failed attempts at negotiating disarmament agreements—which will be extraordinarily difficult to dispel. Indeed, while Washington is seeking a complete dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear arsenal, Pyongyang seems ready to make only gradual and limited concessions, and only in exchange for a reduced U.S. military presence on the peninsula.

Kim's Strategic Calculations

The prospect of North Korea completely giving up its recently acquired nuclear capabilities seems quite remote. Kim is pursuing a goal of a gradual reduction of tensions that would lead to the lifting of sanctions and a stable coexistence on the peninsula so he can concentrate on his domestic priorities. He has enacted a set of measures aimed at a partial liberalization of some economic sectors. Unlike his predecessors who seemed obsessed only with regime survival, he craves to be recognized as a modern leader capable of delivering economic prosperity to his people. At the same time, he has acknowledged that international sanctions against North Korean rearmament programs, including in particular those introduced last year, have severely harmed his country's economy, preventing the reform measures that he has enacted from producing expected results.

However, North Korean leadership has consistently presented the acquisition of a powerful nuclear arsenal and economic modernization as strategic objectives to be pursued in parallel. Implementation of these objectives is critical to allowing North Korea to obtain the long-sought international recognition as a major power. Since declaring his rearmament objective in January 2018, Kim has signaled his intention to concentrate on North Korea's domestic economic problems. This does not mean, however, that he is ready to renounce his nuclear ambitions for the well-being of North Korean citizens. It should be recalled that possession of nuclear weapons is now enshrined in the North Korean constitution. Moreover, North Korea remains a strongly militarized society. Kim has tightened his hold on the country's armed forces, but his relationship with the North Korean military elites will remain crucial for his survival in power. He will therefore be reluctant to accept any disarmament deal that he could have difficulty selling to the military.

Kim's objective is threefold. First, for the reasons mentioned above, he seeks a loosening of international sanctions, which North Korea has denounced as illegal after its decision to suspend the nuclear tests and missile launches. Second, he has urged the United States and South Korea to sign a common declaration ending the Korean War to pave the way for a formal peace treaty. Third, he wants the United States to reduce or withdraw its twenty-eight thousand troops stationed in South Korea. The United States is unlikely to accept the first two requests until North Korea takes substantial and verifiable steps toward nuclear disarmament. Some U.S. officials warn, in particular, that Kim could exploit a peace declaration to mount a campaign for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the South. In fact, Trump has openly doubted the cost-effectiveness of the U.S. military presence in the region, including in South Korea; reportedly, he has also ordered the Department of Defense to study possible force reductions or withdrawal options. However, the prospect of a diminished U.S. military presence continues to be a major source of anxiety for U.S. allies in the region, notably South Korea and Japan, not least because they see it as the main bulwark against Chinese expansionism. This view is widely shared in the United States. Washington is therefore unlikely, at least in the near future, to embark on major plans to reduce its regional military presence. U.S. military activities on the Korean Peninsula have been a primary focus of North Korean propaganda, but how important it is for Kim to extract concessions on this front remains unknown. It seems clear that sanctions are Kim's higher priority as they are more directly—indeed inextricably—linked to his chances to modernize North Korea and make it a fully recognized regional power.

U.S. Priorities

The Trump administration's declared objective is the "complete, verifiable, and irreversible" denuclearization of

North Korea. However, it has not indicated a precise timeline to achieve that goal. In a visit to Pyongyang in July 2018, Pompeo reportedly urged North Korea to dispose of 60 to 70 percent of its nuclear arsenal within six to eight months, a scenario judged to be unrealistic by all security analysts. Subsequently, Pompeo proposed that North Korea carry out “major” nuclear disarmament in two and half years, that is, by the end of Trump’s first term in office. The Trump administration has not specified if it aims at a total or partial dismantlement of North Korean facilities for nuclear production and what type of restrictions it wants to impose on North Korean missile capabilities. Arguably, those issues could be addressed at a later stage of the negotiations. Pompeo has recently taken a softer stance, openly accepting the idea of a gradual, step-by-step disarmament process, which Washington had previously rejected.

Another U.S. priority is obtaining a written declaration from North Korea that provided information about its nuclear assets, activities, and missile capabilities (U.S. defense and intelligence agencies have provided considerably different estimates of the number of the North Korean nuclear warheads and sites). Such a disclosure is a prerequisite, in the U.S. view, for any meaningful negotiation. Extracting such concessions from North Korea will be a major challenge, not least because Pyongyang may fear that, by revealing the details of its nuclear program, it can make it easier for the United States to conduct successful preventive strikes, an option that will no doubt remain on the Trump administration’s table.

Verifying a North Korean declaration about its nuclear capabilities would also be extremely challenging due to the size of its nuclear program, the number of sites involved, and their wide geographical distribution. Moreover, Pyongyang has a decade-long record of concealing important components of its nuclear activities. Since 2008, North Korea has forbidden international inspectors from entering the country. Any future inspection team would be unlikely to operate in a benign environment. Also, neither Western countries nor the IAEA have the present capacities and expertise needed to conduct intrusive and effective inspections of the vast North Korean nuclear program. Experts estimate that the required number of personnel would be higher than the three hundred inspectors IAEA has at its disposal. Additional expertise currently not available within the IAEA would also be needed. The Trump administration could accept a control regime providing a more limited degree of reassurance, that is, based on less extensive and demanding inspection activities. However, by denouncing the Iran deal for, among other things, its inadequate control mechanisms, the Trump administration has set quite a high standard against which to judge the effectiveness of future nuclear deals. No doubt, the Trump administration would be strongly pressed by the U.S. Congress to secure credible control and verification assurances for any partial or final agreements with North Korea. This will considerably complicate the negotiations.

South Korea’s Role

Moon has played a crucial diplomatic role in the U.S.-North Korea rapprochement. On several occasions, he has been instrumental in defusing mounting tensions between the two countries that could escalate. The unexpectedly quick pace at which inter-Korean dialogue has deepened in the course of 2018 has been one of the most solid arguments in favor of U.S. engagement with North Korea. Moon has repeatedly sustained that progress in inter-Korean relations will pave the way for denuclearization. Giving credit to Kim’s official declarations, he went as far as to say that he considers North Korea’s decision to give up its nuclear program irreversible.

As a matter of fact, the inter-Korean reconciliation seems to be driven by a dynamics of its own which could

increasingly develop independently of the disarmament negotiations. Moon and Kim have agreed on ambitious plans for bilateral economic cooperation. These include creating special joint economic zones along the border and restoring rail and road links between the two countries. In order to implement such plans, South Korea needs to obtain waivers on some sanctions imposed on North Korea. The United States has however made any easing of sanctions strictly conditional on North Korea's nuclear disarmament.

Moreover, both Moon and Kim want an end-of-war declaration and have pledged to sign it by the end of 2018. According to the South Korean president, this concession would induce Kim to take concrete steps along the denuclearization path. However, the United States opposes such a move at this stage of the negotiations, as it wants to see North Korean disarmament start in earnest first.

It appears therefore that, while U.S. and South Korean moves looked for some time to be mutually reinforcing, the countries are now pursuing quite different goals and timelines. This divergence has opened a gap between their diplomatic strategies that Pyongyang could exploit. Preventing such a gap from widening is one of the main challenges for Washington and Seoul. However, a major split between the United States and South Korea is unlikely. Given its strong dependence on U.S. deterrent forces, South Korea can hardly afford an unsettling dispute with the United States over sanctions or other crucial aspects related to the management of the North Korean nuclear issue. Despite Trump's reservations over U.S. military engagement in the Korean Peninsula, the military alliance between Washington and Seoul remains solid. It has, in fact, been strengthened by the threat of North Korean nuclear capabilities as demonstrated, among others, by Moon's decision to accept, after some hesitation, the deployment of U.S. Army's Terminal High Altitude Defense (THAAD) missile defense system on South Korean soil despite domestic resistance and China's strong protests and retaliatory measures.

The China Factor

Beijing has seen the tensions between the United States and North Korea, which reached their peak in 2017, as highly damaging for its gradually expansionist strategy in East Asia. It wants to avoid a U.S. military buildup and a deepening of U.S. military ties with Japan and South Korea. It has therefore pressed North Korea to stop its nuclear rearmament and repeatedly condemned its provocative actions.

Relations between China and North Korea had strongly deteriorated as a result of the latter's nuclear plans and Kim's efforts to give his country a greater autonomy from its giant neighbor. More recently, however, there has been a significant rapprochement between the two countries—this year Kim has already met Chinese President Xi Jinping three times—thanks to the easing of tensions in and around the Korean Peninsula as well as the higher degree of self-confidence North Korea has acquired on the heels of its diplomatic successes.

The Chinese leadership is vitally interested in the stability of North Korea. A collapse of the North Korean regime could deprive China of a crucial buffer against U.S. troops in the South and result in massive destabilizing inflows of North Korean migrants, hence, its continued reluctance to step up pressure on North Korea and to punish it for failing to respect the UN resolutions. In fact, China supported the UN Security Council Resolution 2375 of September 2017, which has imposed unprecedentedly tough sanctions on North Korea. This move has been welcome by the United States, which has presented the imposition of sanctions as a diplomatic success of its own, and by other major international actors. However, given China's past record, doubts remain over its commitment to apply sanctions in full. Indeed, following North Korea's suspension of nuclear and missile tests and the diplomatic openings, China has suggested that the sanctions be lifted.

As North Korea's largest trading partner by far and main provider of economic aid, China has a considerable leverage on the country. The economic ties between the two countries have even deepened in the last few years. At the same time, China's endorsement of sanctions has put in sharp relief North Korea's economic vulnerability resulting from its strong dependence on China. Pursuant to the 1961 bilateral treaty, China is bound to defend North Korea in case of an unprovoked attack. It is indeed likely to take some military action, should the United States make a preventive or punitive strike, which would risk provoking a catastrophic confrontation. However, due to the highly volatile security situation in the Korean Peninsula and the unpredictability of North Korea, China has repeatedly indicated that it feels ill at ease with its defense commitment toward North Korea. The fact remains that both countries are interested in a diplomatic process that could result in a reduced U.S. military presence on the peninsula.

Conclusion

Despite Trump's upbeat assessment of the recent developments in U.S.-North Korea relations and the remarkable progress in the inter-Korean reconciliation, breaking the post-Singapore deadlock over the North Korean nuclear program appears to be a daunting challenge. North Korea's actual willingness meaningfully disarm is dubious even if it is offered substantial incentives. Its leadership has long presented the possession of a nuclear arsenal as a top strategic priority to defend the country from external foes and promote its international standing. Even assuming North Korea's good will, dispelling the long-standing mistrust between the United States and North Korea will require much time and patience. These two countries seem to have different expectations about the outcome of the negotiations. This discrepancy is likely to come increasingly to the fore, giving rise to renewed tensions, and make complicate the diplomatic process. The risk of a reversal of the ongoing *détente* should not be underestimated.

The negotiations are unlikely to make much progress unless more precise goals and timelines of the North Korean denuclearization process are defined and the other actors spell out the corresponding incentives they are ready to offer. The diplomatic process should necessarily proceed in stages. The Trump administration should clarify its conditions for sanctions relief at any given stage. A first give and- take package could include a North Korean declaration disclosing its nuclear assets and activities coupled with a credible commitment to submit such declaration to international control. In exchange for that, the United States could accept the end-of-war declaration sought by both Pyongyang and Seoul and a first limited easing of sanctions. Further loosening of sanctions should be graduated according to the verifiable steps made by North Korea along the denuclearization path. This requires that the United States show a substantial degree of flexibility, formally accepting the prospect that the denuclearization process will last several years. To ensure credible verification of North Korea's commitments, a number of political and technical obstacles will have to be overcome. Establishing effective control mechanisms will take much time. In the first stages of the process, the United States, the United Nations, and other international actors will have to rely on less-than-perfect confidence-building and monitoring measures.

This step-by-step process should develop in sync with the inter-Korean reconciliation. It is essential that the United States and South Korea coordinate as much as possible their diplomatic moves to maximize their impact on North Korea's behavior. Equally important, in order to be able to exert effective pressure on North Korea, the United States and its regional allies should also maintain a credible containment and deterrence posture. The U.S. military presence in the Korean Peninsula plays a crucial stabilizing role, and there seems to be no compelling reason to put it into question as North Korea is focusing on other objectives, in particular the easing of the

sanction regime, more directly linked to its immediate interests.

3) Presentation 3

China has mixed feelings regarding the potential outcomes of a denuclearization process on the Peninsula. Their primary concern is to have a stable periphery so that their own domestic development can proceed in a stable environment. However, they are also deeply interested in reducing the role of the US military on the Korean Peninsula. From China's perspective, continuing tensions on the Peninsula are in the interest of the US to justify its continued military presence, but they are not in the interest of China.

In light of the recent US backpedal on the JCPOA, its trustworthiness as an international partner becomes questionable. However, China realizes that proceeding with denuclearization is inevitable. At the same time, in order to ensure full Chinese cooperation, China must be deeply involved in the process and feel respected.

4) Presentation 4

To begin discussing how to denuclearize North Korea—the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)—it is important to understand how the current situation evolved. The 2005 joint statement released after the fourth round of the Six Party Talks revealed the goals on all sides to be “the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner”; the commitment of North Korea to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty; the U.S. affirmation to no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and to having no intention to invade or attack North Korea; and South Korea's recommitment not to receive or deploy nuclear weapons in accordance with the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

After many twists and turns in the discussions, the Six Party Talks ended in failure. The statement is still meaningful today, however. Even though the DPRK succeeded in developing and eventually fielding nuclear weapons, the original agreement holds weight.

Kim Jong-un's Strategy

The DPRK may think that the successful development of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) gives it a large advantage in continued negotiations. Further, it appears doubtful that the current sanctions are enough to shake up Kim Jong-un's regime. Although Kim has been promoting the policy of simultaneous economic and nuclear development—the Byungjin line—the strategy shifted in April 2018 to focus on economic expansion as nuclear deterrence was realized. Did the strategy change because Kim had achieved his goal of having both a nuclear weapon and a delivery system? Or did the strategy shift because the economic sanctions had such a devastating effect on DPRK's economy that Kim's regime was threatened? Or was it part of Kim's strategy to leverage good will as a pretext to start negotiations with the United States?

In any case, within only six months, two inter-Korean summits, a summit with U.S. President Donald J. Trump, and three summits with Chinese President Xi Jinping have all been held. The rapid pace of these meetings is a great achievement for Kim. It seems as though he has succeeded in gaining international fame and creating hope for denuclearization even as he has strengthened his domestic power base. All leaders on the world stage would like to

expand on this success. Kim's actual goal is to relax the sanctions in order to revitalize DPRK's economy, preserve his nuclear weapons, and secretly continue nuclear development while avoiding military aggression. But how much time is left for Kim to protract negotiations with the United States?

The China Factor

China says the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is in China's interest. While that is the case, the denuclearization of both the United States and South Korea is the greater goal. However, if the DPRK not only keeps its nuclear weapons but also confronts the United States, South Korea, and Japan, how will China respond? Even if China considers the DPRK an ally, it probably does not view a nuclearized DPRK with increased international freedom of action as a positive because that would reduce China's influence vis-à-vis the DPRK. The direction of this relationship was likely a topic of discussion during the three visits between Kim and Xi.

China emphasizes patience and tolerance for negotiations between the United States and the DPRK. It believes that the two countries should issue a declaration to end the Korean War, as North Korea demands. Once the declaration is issued, the DPRK could proceed with negotiations on denuclearization. In light of the importance of the denuclearization talks, all parties should promote negotiations to officially conclude the Korean War.

As during the Six Party Talks a decade ago, China's basic stance appears to push for the denuclearization of the DPRK and the Korean Peninsula. This is in line with DPRK's position, seeks to avoid a decisive confrontation between the United States and the DPRK, and tries to prevent the DPRK from being exposed to violence or regime change. For this reason, it may be wise to fundamentally adhere to the UN sanctions but permit some loopholes in other economic sanctions.

Achieving the Goals

It is extremely challenging if not impossible to denuclearize the DPRK. The conventional military power of South Korea and the presence of U.S. forces in South Korea is an overwhelming advantage. This gap has expanded significantly since the Korean War cease-fire. Kim's nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems are therefore a last resort for North Korea's national security. If Kim gives up his nuclear weapons, the only deterrence against the United States would be a huge but poorly equipped army, thousands of long-range artillery pieces aimed at Seoul, and asymmetric capabilities such as the North Korean special operation force and biological and chemical weapons. The DPRK, which prioritizes maintaining the Kim regime over the welfare of its citizens, might think that the United States and South Korea would use military power to overthrow the Kim regime in order to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles systems without considering the sacrifice of its citizens and infrastructure. The most formidable challenge to denuclearization today is mutual distrust—the United States and its regional allies need to figure out how to convince North Korea of their commitment to no regime change if North Korea agrees to denuclearize.

One option is to continue dialogues that lead to cooperative action that will in turn eventually restore mutual trust. Neighboring countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea could complement the lack of trust between the United States and DPRK. Another option is to coerce the DPRK with stricter sanctions under which the only way to survive is to trust the United States and other parties. The last and most decisive option is the use of force. Eighty years ago, Japan was subjected to strict sanctions by the United States and others. Japanese leaders saw no

option other than war against the United States. They considered war necessary to maintain dignity and national survival, but the ultimate outcome was the immense sacrifice of human lives and the economy, not just in Japan but also in neighboring countries. The same thing will happen on the peninsula if war is pursued. This is unacceptable to every country in the region, including the DPRK and China. It is therefore essential for all regional powers to pursue strict sanctions to coerce the DPRK to accept negotiations for denuclearization. It is also important not to permit protracting the process without any progress, as has happened before.

Success in establishing mutual trust and a security institution in the region could be a touchstone. If denuclearization and normalized relations are realized, a regional security framework will have been established. If they are not, the struggle will be to achieve a balance of power in which fear and doubt are embedded with nuclear weapons in the region.

Q&A Session

Comment 1:

What makes this particular process different from past denuclearization efforts is that instead of this time following a denuclearization process in which peace is embedded, what Moon has proposed is a peace process in which denuclearization is embedded. This makes Americans a little nervous because it risks back loading the nuclear concessions and frontloading the tension easing concessions.

The second issue is related to whether or not the peace and denuclearization process as it unfolds in tandem is going to be a trust based process as mentioned in the UN speech or an action-based verification process. Americans would like to see a kind of European arms model applied to what happens to North Korea, but North Korea has a different process in mind.

Thirdly, how the Moon administration is approaching this process. Last April, he indicated that the inter-Korean process should move in tandem with the US and NK process. That is a lesson from the past that South Korea has learned and it wants to avoid repeating past mistakes. And yet, we think in the summer, we saw a slight revision in that, where Moon claimed in the August speech, that the inter-Korean relationship can be a driver to achieve denuclearization. So the issue of South Korea-US coordination, as we pursue peace and denuclearization in parallel with each other, is going to be absolutely critical and it's something that I think, the results at present are mixed and we might need to do a better job.

Comment 2:

If Japan believes, as it should, that there is substantial risk of this peace or reconciliation process in not succeeding in denuclearizing Korea, and if Japan can no longer reliably depend on the US to provide the nuclear umbrella that it once relied on, why shouldn't Japan undertake a program of developing defensive weapons for deterrence that would be sufficient to retaliate against a North Korean attack on Tokyo or Osaka?

Comment 3:

The provision of nuclear weapons to the Middle East by North Korea is a serious threat to stability there and to Europe. Even the implicit recognition of North Korea as a nuclear power may change the incentive of other countries to go nuclear or not. North Korea, as we all know is the only country in the world which has used IAEA and IAE

membership to acquire nuclear knowledge. Why are IAEA experts not participating in the verification part of the process with North Korea? NK is inviting their chosen experts, but the question is the closure of the nuclear test site; why is there no involvement from the CTBTO?

Second, we all know when it comes to human rights violations; NK is the worst offender in the contemporary world. Why should political negotiations for denuclearization make it impossible to criticize NK on human rights violations?

Comment 4:

Compared to Iran, do you think that there would be a more international solidarity in sanctioning; continuing the sanctions on North Korea, and this includes of course the Chinese position within the international community? Secondly, am I right in confirming that there is no real interest in transactions or trade or international investments in North Korea if at a certain stage in the negotiations sanctions are alleviated?

Comment 5:

I think that trust in the US is a much wider problem than in the Korean peninsula issue. Is the trust issue the US or Trump? In other words, the distrust with Trump, will it go beyond Trump? The first and last question with this trust issue is the JCPOA, the very fact that US has erased its signature. if I were Kim Jong Un, at some point, when we would come close to a signature, who could prove to me that the US will be respected in the future?

Comment 6:

On one hand, it seems that China is crucial in enforcing sanctions and in making the pressure valid. On the other hand, China and the US are heading into front of confrontation. How do you fit this in the dialogue? How do you fit the fact that the Chinese are feeling isolated of this process, they're not feeling that they have been involved and they have also been confronted by Trump and the administration?

Comment 7:

It seems as though the US plan is currently driven by the election cycle. However, for China it will be very important for the working level, experts in this area, to sit together and coordinate for the long-term as to how to make this a multilateral plan that involves international organizations. Does the Trump administration have that kind of long-term plan on how to resolve these issues or whether the U.S. society can help the administration to have working level engagement with other parties to work out a plan?

Comment 8:

A lot of times, distrust has been mentioned whether it's distrust on US or Trump or on North Korea and Kim Jong Un and North Korea on China, so how do we generate cooperation in the region, perhaps between the ASEAN +10 community, what are your thoughts about that?

Response 1:

If we look at the problem of North Korea, in comprehensive way, engagement means to define the future sovereign status of North Korea. It's more than just giving a reward. So as a middle power, South Korea needs to have a norm-based approach to solve the problem of North Korea and to observe all the norms and signals from the NPT. We have to understand, not simplify the position of North Korea. South Korea's role is to understand North Korea's position

from its own perspective, even if we don't agree with it, and act as a mediator.

As we develop inter-Korean relations, we will observe the international standard of economic sanctions against North Korea, but by developing some peace mechanisms and some plans- only plans- for economic engagement for North Korea we can show South Korea's genuine intention to understand North Korea's position. Maybe it will seem too much assistance to NK, or possible breaking of the sanction principles, but I don't think it is. In the long run, if we define the NK nuclear problem in a comprehensive way, I think there are some areas of agreement in the future.

As far as trust building, if we look at it from a game theory perspective, it's good to be a sucker the first round in a three-round game. Being a sucker will be rewarded in the next stage of the prisoner's dilemma. Moon said that a formal declaration to end the war is revocable, it's reversible. So let's just try that, let's be a sucker first and then see what will happen. If North Korea defects in the second or third rounds, then we will trigger the next round of more hard-liner kind of economic sanctions, diplomatic sanctions against North Korea.

Regarding the question of what is different this time, the answer is that the situation is worse. North Korea has capabilities to attack the continental US, and the US and international community are threatening Kim Jong Un's physical and political life. To solve the problem, we have to see the real worst case scenario so that the important actors can respond. And, the China question, China suggested two ideas- double suspension and dual track negotiation between denuclearization and a peace regime. Those two ideas are now on the table. China is not isolated, they chaired the six party talks so far, they gave us very creative ideas, and how to involve China in the next round of negotiation is more important.

Lastly, human rights, right now North Korea is responding to critics of international society regarding their human rights and that's good. We can make full use of changing situation inside North Korea and combine that situation with our strategy of engagement or pressure. We can protect North Korea human rights on a normative level and then use that to put pressure on NK at a strategic level.

Response 2:

Sanctions have been effective, especially the last round of sanctions. Of course this is openly recognized by Kim himself. Kim Jong Un most probably sees relieving sanctions as necessary for his modernization plans to be successful. What kind of benefits can he draw from the lifting of sanctions? First, some sanctions apply to the import and export of raw materials, which are quite important. Second, without sanctions, an inter-Korean cooperation plan that was announced could be implemented, and it seems that the North Korean leadership is betting on that implementation, and then Pyongyang can seek international assistance. China has a key role in approving the last round of sanctions, and everyone knows it has a key role in the implementation of sanctions. But, now we are now facing a different situation with this inter-Korean reconciliation making substantial progress and Kim making progress on what China could consider substantial concessions.

Regarding the need for policy coordination between South Korea and US, both Moon and Trump have committed themselves very much to implementing this process. But one should also say that particularly, the volatility and the unpredictability of Trump can be damaging, especially if new problems emerge in the process despite this interpretation of the process. This could have a serious backlash effect.

Finally, one can see as rather contradictory about what we are saying, on the one hand the prospects for this process are rather limited but we should continue with the dialogues. This implies that we should accept the idea of a step-by-step process whereby at this stage, we should be able to test North Korea's behavior, and also set some intermediate goals.

Response 3:

About sanctions, China is a responsible member of the UN, and will continue to implement sanctions as directed by the resolution of the UN Security Council. Second, China sees the North Korea question as not just a nuclear one, but also a peace one.

Response 4:

Japan does not think that having nuclear weapons contributes to its security or stability. Rationally, it will not contribute to any peace around the region. Japan worries about great power confrontations in the region, and is trying to build up strong relationships to mitigate this possibility.

Final Comments:

It's very clear that the decision to denuclearize will be one that North Korea must make for itself. In that sense the crucial question is how can we help North Korea leadership to initiate another new step forward toward a new survival strategy? There are two contradictory understandings of new North Korean policies on denuclearization. One is that Kim Jong Un is different from his father and grandfather, and open to change. The other less optimistic view is that he will turn out to be the same in the end. In that sense, we should consider how we can move NK from the current mixture of the old and new language toward the new language for their new survival strategy comprised of non-nuclear and prosperity strategies. ■

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