Chapter 22

Options for Addressing the DPRK Nuclear Program

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North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Capability—Nuclear Capability:

- The DPRK conducted six times of nuclear test, including a thermonuclear weapon (hydrogen bomb) in September 2017.
- As of June 2019, it is estimated that North Korea has up to 30 nuclear warheads¹ (SIPRI) and sufficient fissile material² for an additional 30–60 nuclear weapons (Arms Control Association).
- It declared itself a globe-spanning nuclear weapons power on November 29, 2017 and insisted that the United States deal with it on those terms.

Missile Capability:

- The DPRK successfully launched an ICBM (Hwasong-15) from the vicinity of Pyongsong on November 28, 2017.
- U.S. Forces Korea acknowledges that North Korea's Hwasong-15 (ICBM) can hit targets anywhere in the United States, with an estimated range of nearly 13,000 km (8000 miles) (2019 *Strategic Digest*, USFK).
- North Korea carried out around 25 tests of ballistic missiles, including SLBM, IRBM, ICBM, since February 2017. Under Kim Jong-un,³ more than 90 tests have been undertaken. Under water-platform launched ballistic missile—SLBM—aims to have a second strike capability.

¹<http://www.recna.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/recna/en-topics/22534>.

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fissile_material.

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Jong-un.

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Implications of North Korea as a 'Nuclear Weapons State'—North Korea as a nuclear weapons state challenges international order in three respects.

- First, it is a significant challenge to the NPT regime centered on five nuclear-weapon powers (P5). If North Korea's development of nuclear weapons program cannot be controlled, stopped and finally eliminated, those states with the capacity to develop nuclear weapons, such as Japan and South Korea, may be tempted to become next nuclear aspirants.
- Second, it can bring about a structural change to the international security order in Northeast Asia. With US-China strategic collusion underway, this may lead to a reprise of the confrontation between naval and land-based powers that played out around the Korean peninsula during the Cold War. While no country in Northeast Asia accepts North Korea as a nuclear weapons state, strategic calculations are different from one another.
- Third, in terms of inter-Korean relations, under the UN and international sanction regime, South Korea's policy toward the North, putting priority on economic cooperation and exchanges, can hardly be implemented without North Korea's concrete actions toward complete denuclearization. While the Trump administration reiterates maintaining sanctions until risk from North Korea "substantially reduced", the Moon administration wants the US to ease sanctions.

As a nuclear state, the North Korean leadership began to display increased confidence in various areas.

- First, North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has confidence in the strength of grip on power and regime security. A powerful nuclear deterrent is Kim's most important tool for guaranteeing regime security as well as personal political survival.
- Second, the North Korean leadership believes they have secured a safety valve in terms of military and security strategy. North Korea can pursue self-reliant security strategy, tactics, and diplomacy against not only the U.S. but also China and Russia.
- Third, for North Korean dictator, nuclear weapons give him the means and the excuse to strengthen his basis of internal rule and exercise absolute control over the North Korean society.
- Fourth, North Korea can raise its voice that peace talks should be held to replace Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty between North Korea and the United States. Toward the U.S. it will grow bolder in its demand for security assurances as well as the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the breakup of the ROK-U.S. alliance.
- Finally, nuclear weapons enable North Korea to essentially use South Korea as a hostage in its foreign and inter-Korean policies. Since before the nuclear test, North Korea had argued that its "nuclear deterrent" would "protect peace and stability" not only for itself but for South Korea as well.

Kim Jong-un's goal: (1) secure his rule against internal challengers, (2) achieve and demonstrate a reliable nuclear deterrent, (3) improve his people's quality of life, and (4) elevate North Korea's international standing as a nuclear state.

Contending Issues—The Trump-Kim joint statement, on June 12, 2018, states that the two countries (1) commit to establish new US-DPRK relations, (2) will join the efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and (3) the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Since June 2018 summit, there have been one more summit (Feb 2019, Hanoi) and one meeting (June 2019, Panmunjom DMZ) between Trump and Kim and several high- and working-level talks between the US and North Korea, but no specific agreement on denuclearization is achieved.

At the moment, there are fundamental differences between the US and North Korea in terms of definition, approach, and roadmap concerning ‘complete denuclearization.’

Meaning of denuclearization—The US’s definition (goal) is Final, Fully Verifiable Denuclearization (FFVD). It is denuclearization of North Korea. It means: North Korea is

- To halt the testing of nuclear weapons and launches of ballistic missiles.
- To permit U.S. and international technical experts’ access to key WMD-related sites throughout the process.
- To declare and shut down all nuclear facilities.
- To completely dismantle and remove its nuclear weapons, delivery systems, facilities, and associated material with an agreed timeline.
- To provide a comprehensive declaration of its nuclear and ballistic missiles, as well as chemical and biological programs.
- To rejoin the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula of 1992:

- “shall not test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy or use nuclear weapons.”
- “shall not possess nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities.”

9.19 Joint Statement of 2005:

- “Abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning to NPT and to IAEA safeguards.”

North Korea has yet to provide its version of ‘complete denuclearization’ at the negotiation table. But DPRK government spokesman’s statement on July 6, 2016, shows what it means by ‘denuclearization,’ that North Korea has long used. The statement says:

“The denuclearization being called for by the DPRK is the denuclearization of the whole Korean peninsula and this includes the dismantlement of nukes in South Korea and its vicinity.” North Korea’s specific conditions:

- First, all nuclear weapons of the United States must be publicly disclosed.
- Second, all the nuclear weapons and their bases should be dismantled and verified in the eyes of the world.

- Third, the U.S. should ensure that it would never bring again the nuclear strike means to South Korea and its vicinity.
- Fourth, it should commit itself to neither intimidating the DPRK with nuclear weapons nor using nuclear weapons against the DPRK in any case.
- Fifth, the withdrawal of the U.S. troops holding the right to use nuclear weapons from South Korea should be declared.

Approach and Roadmap—The US:

- US objective is ultimately the denuclearization of North Korea.
- US position: “Nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to.”
- The US doubts if North Korea has made a strategic choice to denuclearize. But the US believes there’s a possibility that North Korea can make the choice to completely denuclearize.
- Before the completion of denuclearization process, the US wants to get the full extent of the North Korean WMD. In the process, North Korea is required to provide a comprehensive declaration at some point. The DPRK should allow expert access and monitoring mechanisms of key sites to international standards. And ultimately, the removal and destruction of stockpiles of fissile material, weapons, missiles, launchers, and other WMD.
- All of this must be addressed in a roadmap at the working-level negotiations. The roadmap also includes the transformation process of the US-North Korean relations and the establishment of a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.
- Once the definition and the roadmap are agreed, the implementation can be simultaneously and in parallel.

The DPRK:

- The DPRK regards powerful self-defense capacity as a cornerstone of the existence of a state/ regime/ one-man rule dictatorship and a guarantee for safeguarding peace.
- It demands that the ROK-US joint military exercises be stopped and the introduction of war equipment including strategic assets from outside completely be suspended.
- North Korea holds a step-by-step process. It does not offer its version of a roadmap to the final stage of denuclearization.
- North Korea is very reluctant to provide a full declaration that is necessary for the completion of the process of denuclearization. But the US wants that the full declaration will become well before the end.

It seems that while the US is prepared to negotiate concrete steps toward the final denuclearization along with those of the normalization of bilateral relationship and the signing of a peace treaty, the DPRK (Kim Jong-un) is not ready to make a strategic decision to give up nuclear weapons program.

Options for Addressing the DPRK Nuclear Program—Option 1—Negotiated Denuclearization, most desirable:

- The US and the DPRK agree on the definition of denuclearization and the end state and a roadmap to get to that end state.
- Denuclearization process goes along with steps toward normalization of relations and building of a permanent peace regime through a peace treaty.
- The completion of denuclearization comes along with the normalization of the US-DPRK relations and the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

To get the negotiations to move on, the US and North Korea should take a step back from their respective ‘excessive’ demands and seek a stage-by-stage package deal to be followed by simultaneous actions.

There needs to be total agreement on what the end objective is, that is definition of denuclearization, and a roadmap to get to that end objective and working level meetings to unpack each of those elements.

Option 2—Forced Denuclearization:

While diplomatic approach, including negotiations, continues, UN and the US’s sanctions and coercive diplomacy remain until Kim Jong-un makes a strategic decision to denuclearize.

- To put in place a punishing set of sanctions that can create every incentive for the North Korean leadership themselves to make right choices.
- But, military option is not preferable; seeking of regime change in the DPRK is not an option.
- The effect of economic sanctions and diplomatic coercion.
- Internal political change, including a new leadership.
- Policy changes, including the top decision-maker’s thinking, to re-engage with the international community and the US in particular.

Option 3—Living with nuclear North Korea, undesirable:

- Negotiations are protracted.
- A nuclear North Korea is tacitly and implicitly accepted.
- Coexist with a nuclear North Korea while South Korea fall under North Korea’s nuclear blackmail.
- It is highly likely that growing emerge to go nuclear in Japan and South Korea.

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