



## A New Roadmap for the Denuclearization of North Korea

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THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR PROBLEM HAS PRESENTED A NEW challenge following North Korea's sixth nuclear test in an attempt to develop a hydrogen bomb and intercontinental ballistic missile tests of missiles that can strike U.S. territory. U.S. President Donald Trump's speech to the United Nations General Assembly and the subsequent statement from Kim Jong-un further exacerbated the tensions surrounding the Korean Peninsula. In this current situation, the relevant stakeholders have not been at all successful in their efforts to resolve the North Korean problem. In order to resolve this issue, it is crucial to evaluate the limitations of the previous solutions and draw a new roadmap.

### Two Major Obstacles in Trump's North Korea Policy

Upon his inauguration, U.S. President Trump strongly criticized the Obama administration's North Korea policy of 'strategic patience' and announced his own strategy of 'maximum pressure and engagement.' This policy entails the following: first, it heavily emphasizes the role of China in the denuclearization of North Korea, and second, it considers the military option as a policy alternative for the purpose of maximum pressure. As expected, Trump's UN speech did not deviate from this newly adopted strategy. After labeling North Korea a 'rogue regime,' Trump emphasized the importance of the military option,

stating "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea."

However, efforts by the U.S. to denuclearize the North are currently up against two major obstacles. To begin with, China will not willingly impose sanctions or pressure on Kim Jong-un to the degree anticipated by the U.S. China opposes North Korea's nuclear weapon development, which is why it is participating in the international sanctions regime imposed by the UN. But China is not primarily concerned about the Kim Jong-un regime itself with nuclear weapons. Rather, the unpredictable future of the post-Kim Jong-un regime, whether or not it is nuclear, will be the bigger worry. If market democracy is introduced to a post-Kim Jong-un North Korea and negatively influences Northeast China's security and economy, this has the potential to cause

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greater damage to China's core interests than North Korea's hydrogen bombs. Therefore, although it is dissatisfied with the status quo, China is likely to continue to search for an alternative resolution to the North's nuclear threats and the Kim Jong-un regime other than denuclearization as the lesser of two evils.

Next, even if the United States aggressively puts a military option on the table, North Korea is unlikely to back down. In his response statement, Kim Jong-un predictably said "His remarks which described the U.S. option through the straightforward expression of his will have convinced me, rather than frightening or stopping me, that the path I chose is correct and that it is the one I have to follow to the last." Kim Jong-un, who has thus far rather successfully endured the sanctions that have been imposed over the last quarter of a century, demonstrated that he anticipated Trump's thought sequence well in advance, and therefore he clearly has no intention of being provoked by Trump's remarks.

Moreover, because North Korean nuclear problem involves the Korean Peninsula where the United States and China are competing for strategic advantage in building the regional architecture, the United States must find a joint solution in close cooperation with South Korea while also taking into account China's core interests.

It is necessary for Trump to continue to make ongoing efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem. However, his current approach will prove inadequate in overcoming the dual obstacles outlined above. It is time to look for a new roadmap.

### Weaknesses of China's North Korea Policy

Since March 2017, China has been putting forward the 'dual freeze' and 'dual track' approach as a solution to the North Korean nuclear problem. This entails the temporary suspension of North Korea's nuclear and missile tests in exchange for a halt to South Korea-U.S.

joint military exercises and the simultaneous pursuit of peace treaty talks and denuclearization negotiations by reopening the Six-party talks.

However, China's proposal has several shortcomings. First, it is not sufficient to close the gap between South Korea and the United States and North Korea and China. The 'dual freeze' option has its own limitations in terms of commitment and symmetry. When looking back on the history of negotiations, South Korea and the United States have always been wary of the fact that the North Korean nuclear freeze for the sake of simply "freezing" ended up bringing the negotiations back to the starting point following the South's discovery of the North's lack of intention to follow through. Because of this, the first step of the new roadmap must include a display by North Korea of their sincere intention to achieve the goal of denuclearization. Additionally, in order to overcome the limitation of asymmetry, a temporary suspension of South Korea-U.S. large-scale joint military exercises needs to include not only a simple nuclear freeze, but also a tangible reduction in the military threats between South and North Korea.

Second, the 'dual track' approach has its own two problems. North Korea's major position on the peace treaty talks has not changed since it was publicly made official in 2000 during the visit of the Envoy to U.S. from North Korea, Jo Myong-rok, to Washington DC. North Korea has remained steadfast in its position that in order to shift North Korea-U.S. relations from hostile to peaceful, three things must occur: the withdrawal of the United States Forces Korea, the dissolution of the military alliance between South Korea and the U.S., and the eradication of nuclear threats from the U.S. Because South Korea and the United States cannot accept these terms, a 'dual track' approach is virtually impossible.

At the same time, North Korea is adamantly against the idea of demanding Pyongyang's denuclearization before peace talks or simultaneously discussing denuclearization and peace talks. North



Korea wants peace treaty talks on their terms as a precondition for denuclearization. Therefore, China's suggestion of a 'dual freeze' and a 'dual track' approach continually fails to garner a consensus from the relevant stakeholders, making it a difficult starting point for negotiation.

### Hidden Hurdles in South Korea's North Korea Policy

During his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2017, South Korean President Moon Jae-in highlighted the necessity of sanctions, stating "it [the international community] has to strongly and sternly respond until North Korea gives up its nuclear program of its own accord. All nations must thoroughly implement the U.N. Security Council sanctions resolutions and seek new measures in case of any further provocations by the North." Furthermore, he emphasized resolution through peaceful measures by arguing that "Despite North Korea's flagrant violation of its obligations and commitments under the U.N. Charter, the Korean Government and the international community are making every possible effort with great determination to peacefully solve the North Korean nuclear issue."

Moon went on to clarify that neither the collapse of North Korea nor unification by absorption is desirable in the path toward a peaceful resolution. As long as North Korea is ready to make the right decision, Moon reiterated South Korea's utmost willingness to assist the North in partnership with the international community by pursuing multilateral security cooperation and creating a Northeast Asian economic community.

Over the past 20 years, South Korea's North Korea policy has been entangled in the complex, exhausting web of sanctions and engagement, a web which it is now trying to escape. President Moon Jae-in emphasized the necessity of both economic sanctions

and peaceful resolution in his UN General Assembly address. However, in order to peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, several hurdles must be overcome, such as North Korea's nuclear weapons program and the *Byungjin* line, a strategy focused on the simultaneous development of the North's economy and nuclear weapons. As long as the Kim Jong-un regime maintains the current *Byungjin* line as its 21<sup>st</sup> century survival strategy, bilateral and multilateral negotiations for North Korea's denuclearization will inexorably circle back to the starting point instead of progressing forward. Thus, the key to a successful negotiation is finding a way to jointly promote potential options for a different regime survival strategy, rather than simply reaching a consensus on preconditions for a future negotiation.

### Finding a New Roadmap to Resolve the North Korean Nuclear Threat

The first step in finding a new roadmap for the denuclearization of North Korea is the clear setting of goals. As North Korea's nuclear weapons development continues, this important task is becoming more convoluted. Some have even offered the opinion that because North Korea now possesses nuclear weapons, it would be more realistic to make a nuclear freeze, rather than full denuclearization, the ultimate end goal of a negotiation process. However, this confusion is due to a lack of understanding of the dual nature of the political and military role of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons have been used as the most important tool in coercive diplomacy on the political stage, and have brought about similarly revolutionary changes in terms of destructive power on the military stage. As expected, North Korea is using its nuclear weapons not only as a military, but also as a political tool. Therefore, as asymmetry in both political and military relations between South and North Korea cannot be accepted, a new roadmap for resolving the North Korean nuclear issues should set its goal as



complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization, using a nuclear freeze as a bridge.

An examination of the historical efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear threat reveals that the limitations of the dichotomous approach between sanctions and engagement has been reached, and there is a consensus that a simultaneous pursuit of sanctions and engagement is necessary. However, creating a new roadmap is not that simple. First, the further North Korea develops its nuclear weapons program, the more necessary it becomes to prepare a way to deter the regime's nuclear ambitions. Second, a new peace structure that can absolutely and pragmatically guarantee the well-being and prosperity of a non-nuclear North Korean regime must be built. Third, the creation of a new roadmap towards the denuclearization of North Korea cannot be completed without efforts on the part of the current North Korean regime to evolve from the current *Byungjin* line of nuclear and economic development to a new *Byungjin* line of non-nuclear security and prosperity. Therefore, we must explore a new roadmap that encompasses four aspects—sanctions, deterrence, engagement, and internally driven change in North Korea—as a potential response to the North Korean nuclear issue as soon as possible.

## 1. Sanctions

Since the first round of sanctions were imposed on North Korea in 1993 in response to the country's withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and refusal to allow inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has imposed ten rounds of sanctions over the span of ten years. These range from UNSCR 1695 in 2006 to UNSCR 2375, which specifically outlines a full ban on the sale of natural gas condensates and liquids to North Korea, a reduction of the quota for oil sales to North Korea, a full ban on the purchase of North Korean textiles, and limits on visa issuance to North

Korean overseas laborers. However, because of China's limited cooperation and North Korea's efforts to bypass sanctions, the sanctions have not had the full predicted impact.

As long as North Korea adheres to the *Byungjin* line of nuclear and economic development, the vicious cycle of continuing missile tests and subsequent strengthening of sanctions will continue. It is unrealistic to expect that the simple imposition of sanctions on North Korea will completely eradicate the North Korean nuclear threat. This is not to say that strengthening sanctions is a completely fruitless action. The imposition of sanctions is undeniably necessary to ultimately induce North Korea to reconsider the costs and benefits of nuclear weapons development.

## 2. Deterrence

In the era of nuclear weapons, deterrence, rather than defense, is prioritized. This is due to the unthinkable degree of human casualties and material losses that result from the use of nuclear weapons. In order to deter the rapid development of the North Korean nuclear program and strip the North's ability to use their nuclear weapons as a political and military tool, a balance of terror must be reached. Methods of establishing this balance, including South Korean nuclear development, the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons, extended deterrence through deployment of U.S. strategic military assets around the Korean Peninsula, and the strengthening of conventional weapons, are currently the subject of debate both at home and abroad.

However, South Korean nuclear weapons development would not only threaten North Korea, but also risk the economy, technology, and security of the South under the current global regime of nuclear non-proliferation. Furthermore, this has the potential to spur Japan to develop nuclear weapons as well, which could lead to regional nuclearization around the Korean Peninsula and intensify regional tensions and instability.



Even though redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons is part of extended deterrence in essence, it would face an even harsher backlash than the deployment of THAAD did. As of right now, strengthening extended deterrence through the deployment of U.S. strategic military assets is even more important in terms of effectiveness and practicality. But it is crucial to remember that the key to the extended deterrence is the enhancement of mutual trust.

Lastly, the Kill Chain, Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR) systems need to be established in advance to counter North Korea. South Korea and the U.S. must use their joint capacity to the fullest to deter North Korea from using its nuclear weapons militarily and politically.

### 3. Engagement

Proactive engagement that not only increases the costs of nuclearization through strengthened sanctions and deterrence, but also expands the benefits of denuclearization is crucial to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. North Korea needs to believe that survival and nuclearization bring about death and poverty, while denuclearization will lead to and ensure the well-being and prosperity of its people.

Currently, it is more important to pursue a South Korean-style peace mechanism, which is more sincere in tone and approach, than it is to pursue a North Korean-style peace mechanism, which lacks persuasive power. North Korea has always argued that its development of nuclear weapons was a survival strategy in response to the hostile policy of the United States towards Pyongyang. Therefore, it is important to provide North Korea with an alternative that can adequately ensure the survival of its regime without nuclear weapons. In order to do so, it is necessary to construct a complex peace mechanism that can guarantee the survival of a denuclearized North

Korean regime. There must be a quadruple assurance system consisting of bilateral security, such as North Korea-U.S., North Korea-China, and South Korea-North Korea; multilateral security such as the Six-party talks; global security such as the UN; and unilateral security such as a non-nuclear defense system. In order for North Korea to thrive on the 21st century global stage under the new survival strategy of a *Byungjin* line of non-nuclear security and prosperity, complex economic support from South Korea, Asia-Pacific countries, and global organizations must be pursued.

### 4. Internally Driven Change within North Korea

Even if the relevant stakeholders successfully employ sanctions, deterrence, and engagement to bring about bilateral or multilateral talks for the denuclearization of North Korea, the process will involve multiple steps, just as the Geneva Agreed Framework of 1994 and the Joint Statement made at the conclusion of the fourth round of the Six-party talks in 2005 did. This is unavoidable as long as the Kim Jong-un regime fails to commit to a new survival strategy that goes beyond the *Byungjin* line of simultaneous development of the economy and nuclear weapons. Thus, without internally driven change in North Korea, a solution to the North Korean nuclear issue will not be possible.

Three aspects are critical to evolving North Korea's current *Byungjin* line of simultaneous development of nuclear weapons and economy into a new *Byungjin* line of non-nuclear security and prosperity. First, marketization is of utmost importance. However, under the current regime in North Korea, the political effects of marketization in the country will gradually increase. Second, informatization is crucial. In the current closed society of North Korea, its impact is restricted, but with the introduction of modern information technology, the political effects of informatization will increase rapidly. Lastly, in order to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they must



organize their political system in such a way to make it suitable for the current era.

In parallel with these efforts, the co-evolution of South Korean and other relevant country policies on North Korea must be simultaneously pursued as the new path toward the denuclearization of North Korea. It is urgent to engage in strengthening these “Three Evolutionary Capabilities” for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Therefore, what is pressing is for the Moon Jae-in administration to have a good understanding of the limitations behind the simple solutions currently being pursued by relevant stakeholders. Next, South Korea should play a guiding role in preparing a complex solution consisting of sanctions, deterrence, engagement, and an emphasis on the potential of a new *Byungjin* line, and implementing that solution as soon as possible. Unfortunately, time is running out. ■

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