



A missile that analysts believe could be the North Korean Hwasong-12 is paraded across Kim Il Sung Square 15 April 2017 in Pyongyang, North Korea. The country's official Korean Central News Agency said a missile fired 14 May 2017 was a Hwasong-12 "capable of carrying a large-size heavy nuclear warhead." North Korea said that it was examining operational plans for attacking Guam, an angry reaction to UN punishment for North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile tests and a U.S. suggestion about preparations for possible preventive attacks to stop the North's nuclear weapons program. (File photo by Wong Maye-E, Associated Press)

Denuclearization through Peace

A Policy Approach to Change North Korea from Foe to Friend

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The denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereinafter DPRK, or North Korea) is a shared global security interest. As the United States bears a large share of this common interest, U.S. policy has a disproportional impact on whether and how North Korea denuclearizes. To avert a near future where Pyongyang presents an existential threat to the United States as a nuclearized enemy state, Washington should work to change North Korea from foe to friend, which would necessitate a different policy approach than what has been pursued by Washington to the present day. This postulation is developed here through a review of thirty years of denuclearization policy approaches and an identification of Pyongyang's persistent aspiration to normalize political and economic relations and end hostile relations with Washington. Informed by previous agreements between the United States and North Korea, a policy of *denuclearization through peace* is recommended to establish conditions that could turn Pyongyang from Washington's foe to friend, a transformation that could reshape and shore up Washington's strategic interests in Northeast Asia.

Same Bed, Different Dreams

The U.S.-DPRK Singapore Summit of June 2018 produced a four-point agreement that if earnestly implemented would have ended nearly seven decades of armistice and ushered in an era of new relations that could have seen North Korea and the United States as friends and perhaps even security partners. However, while the agreement produced a respite from the 2017 rancorous days of fire and fury, this stasis would soon end absent forward diplomatic progress.¹ Peace and denuclearization are the two essential elements of the Singapore Summit as agreed by both parties, which euphemistically placed Washington and Pyongyang in the same bed. The U.S.-DPRK Hanoi Summit of February 2019, however, revealed that while in the same bed, Washington and Pyongyang had different dreams. Washington pursued *peace through denuclearization* as Pyongyang sought *denuclearization through peace*. A peace through denuclearization approach shifts the burden of trust to Pyongyang, requiring it to eliminate its nuclear weapons program first with a promise to establish peaceful relations later. While this tact may be apt for a victor directing the actions of the vanquished, there is no pattern in Washington's previous interactions with Pyongyang to suggest that

North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un would reduce his country's national security to an uncertainty and then wait and see how Washington responds.

Denuclearization through peace is a different policy that advances parties along a path of parallel confidence-building measures. Denuclearization through peace is not a quick fix to end Pyongyang's nuclear weapons capabilities (for if such a panacea existed, it is unlikely that thirty years of deliberative efforts would have transpired only to fail to realize this elusive aspiration). Hasten matters in implementing a policy of denuclearization. Accordingly, half step and mark time are wrong cadences to realize this vital national security interest, which necessitates a rapid pace of quick time interspersed with double time. The transitory nature of government administrations should draw credence to this admonition of purposefully advancing a policy of denuclearization through peace. Testament of the need for quick and decisive policy execution are the fifteen heads of state in Washington (five presidents), Pyongyang (three leaders), and Seoul (seven presidents) who unsuccessfully pursued policies to denuclearize North Korea since 1991.² Consistent among these leaders are their failed policy attempts to approach peace building while adhering to feelings of enmity and anticipation of failure. In essence, failed policies of peace through denuclearization were the approaches of the five agreements that circumscribed the last thirty years of efforts to end Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs. A cursory review of those policy efforts will elucidate obstacles to avoid in a proposed policy of denuclearization through peace.

Inter-Korean Agreements

In the lead-up to the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, newly elected South Korean President Roh Tae-woo launched *Nordpolitik* (German for Northern Policy), a foreign policy to induce normalization of relations with Seoul's Cold War foes in Pyongyang, Moscow, Beijing, and the Eastern European capitals.³ Roh's *Nordpolitik* speech in July 1988 was surprisingly magnanimous toward Pyongyang given North Korea's attempt to destabilize the Seoul Olympics with the bombing of Korean Air Flight 858 that killed 115 people just seven months prior. Perhaps belying an army career where he fought communists for three decades in Korea and Vietnam, Roh leveraged his conservative

credentials to determinedly upturn forty years of national policy. He drove a progressive path that normalized robust relations with the communist bulwark states of Hungary in February 1989; Poland in November 1989; Yugoslavia in December 1989; Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania each in March 1990; the Soviet Union in September 1990; and China in August 1992.⁴ Roh understood that South Korea's economic development and national security necessitated forward-leaning progressive policies versus backward-looking conservative principles.

The 1988 Olympics epitomized sports diplomacy. It originated as rapprochement with Hungary in the lead-up to the opening ceremony, and it progressed with Moscow just five weeks after the closing ceremony when former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev decided to normalize relations with Seoul and to notify Pyongyang.⁵ Responding to Moscow's perceived betrayal, Pyongyang assented to distinct offers from Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo to meet.⁶ Washington had extended Pyongyang a "positive, constructive" approach "to pursue an improvement of relations," leading to the first U.S.-North Korea diplomatic talks in December 1988, which produced a direct dialogue channel that met in thirty-four sessions over fifty-eight months.⁷ Straddling the military demarcation line in Panmunjom, North and South Korean diplomats convened the first of eight preparatory discussions for high-level inter-Korean talks in February 1989.⁸ Preparatory discussions, which had dragged on for eighteen months, were immediately elevated to high-level talks at Pyongyang's behest in September 1990 in response to Moscow and Seoul normalizing relations that same month. September also produced a triparty declaration signed by the North Korean Workers' Party, Japan Socialist Party, and Japan's Liberal Democratic Party that "strongly urged" their respective governments to normalize diplomatic relations.⁹

In late September 1991, as the Soviet Union devolved, President George H. W. Bush directed all U.S. tactical nuclear munitions returned home.¹⁰ Undertaken as an inducement for Soviet reciprocal action, the U.S. denuclearization of its weapons from South Korea, coupled with the announced cancellation of the 1992 U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) Team Spirit military exercise, led to the historic signing of the Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between the South and the North, wherein both parties "pledg[ed] to exert joint efforts to achieve peaceful unification."¹¹ Peaceful unification is a political end state that will first be contingent on signing a peace treaty to establish a peace regime or a comprehensive process toward creating conditions for peaceful coexistence as neighbor states.¹² In a parallel process, the two Koreas negotiated a Joint Declaration of Denuclearization (JDD) of the Korean Peninsula that entered into force on 20 January 1992. The JDD was preceded a decade earlier by Seoul's dismantlement of its own nuclear weapons program at Washington's behest.¹³ Unique to the inter-Korean JDD was Pyongyang and Seoul's cooperative agreement to work toward the denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula. All subsequent inter-Korean assurances toward denuclearization have included recommitments toward implementing the JDD.

While early 1992 promised cooperation, late 1992 presaged crisis. Under the conservative leadership of Roh and Bush in early 1992, Pyongyang met in distinct senior diplomatic meetings with Washington and Seoul, signed agreements with Seoul on denuclearization and with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on safeguards of its nuclear facilities, and hosted IAEA inspectors to its nuclear facilities. Later in the year, Seoul's internal politics factionalized as the country prepared

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South Korean President Roh Tae-woo (center) views a static display of vehicle equipment 13 March 1989 while visiting the soldiers of 5th Battalion, 14th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division (Light), during the joint South Korean and U.S. exercise Team Spirit '89 in the Republic of Korea. (Photo by Al Chang via National Archives)

for a presidential election. Roh would be the country's first president to peacefully step down after serving a single five-year elected term. Roh succumbed to lame duck paralysis as government anticommunist hawks hustled. Lead ROK diplomats working the inter-Korean implementation agreement intentionally delayed its enactment while obstructing prospects of South-North family reunions in mid-September.¹⁴ Senior national intelligence agents illegally impeded the election process and arrested scores of people on fabricated espionage charges on 6 October.¹⁵ Defense officials meeting in Washington on 7–8 October for the annual U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting, surreptitious of Seoul, pushed for the resumption of Team Spirit in March 1993 and then publicly announced the joint decision at the meeting's conclusion.¹⁶ On 9 March 1993, only days after the presidential inaugurations of Bill Clinton in Washington on 20 January and Kim Young-sam in Seoul on 25 February, 170,000 ROK and U.S. combat troops began the Team Spirit exercise.¹⁷ In response, Pyongyang tendered on March 12 its ninety-day notice to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which it became party to in 1985 when it operationalized its five

megawatt nuclear reactor. In the end, distrust fostered over decades of bitter enmity stoked relentlessly by Pyongyang proved formidable to Roh's ability to paper over the chasm of distrust with Pyongyang and normalize relations despite successfully establishing permanent relations with eight other communist capitals including Moscow and Beijing. While Roh's inter-Korean Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is unfulfilled, it has been foundational to successive denuclearization agreements.¹⁸

U.S.-DPRK Agreements

Normalized relations and an established peace regime on the Korean Peninsula have been Pyongyang's repeated aspirations of Washington since Moscow and Beijing normalized relations with Seoul, respectively

in 1991 and 1992. Pyongyang's overtures toward Washington have been amply evidenced in Washington and Pyongyang's joint statements, agreed statements, and public statements. DPRK founder and former Chairman Kim Il-sung introduced Pyongyang to the probability of ending animus relations with Washington through the U.S.-DPRK Joint Statement

State Madeleine Albright met with Chairman Kim, he reaffirmed his desire to establish peace with Washington, offering that it would allow him to transition domestic priorities from defense to the economy.²² However, détente ended when U.S. President George W. Bush took office in January 2001. Bush was determined to end the Agreed Framework, believing it a flawed agreement

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of 11 June 1993, which agreed to a principle of “peace and security in a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.”¹⁹ However, thirteen months from the issuance of that joint statement, Kim Il-sung was dead. Chairman Kim Jong-il assumed the mantle of leadership and renewed the prospect of peace and security with Washington through the 12 August 1994 Agreed Statement between the U.S. and DPRK, and the 21 October 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea to “move toward full normalization of political and economic relations,” while agreeing to “work together for peace and security on a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.”²⁰ Agreement implementation seemed promising in the first few weeks as IAEA monitored the shutdown of Pyongyang's nuclear reactor and reprocessing facility. However, U.S.-led consortium provisions of heavy fuel oil and construction of light water nuclear reactors were chronically delayed, and efforts toward full normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations were elusive. Euphoria soon subsided and mutual distrust intensified. Parallel to Roh's challenges, Clinton confronted hardliners who derided engagement with Pyongyang as appeasement and political weakness.

In June 2000, Seoul's recently elected President Kim Dae-jung met without public notice in Pyongyang with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. In the jubilation of the historic first inter-Korean summit, democratic states including the United States took actions toward normalizing relations with Pyongyang. Washington and Pyongyang exchanged envoys in October to prepare for a U.S.-DPRK summit in Pyongyang.²¹ When Secretary of

wherein Pyongyang clandestinely developed nuclear weapons.²³ History now seemed to rhyme. Like Seoul hardliners who discarded Roh's inter-Korean Joint Denuclearization Declaration of the previous decade at the presidential transition, U.S. neoconservatives of the Bush administration now expressed disdain for Clinton's Agreed Framework. This pattern of discarding a previous administration's joint statements and agreements with Pyongyang was cyclically repeated in Seoul and Washington without exception each time opposition parties transitioned executive power.

In August 2003, Bush replaced the Agreed Framework as a bilateral security agreement to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula with Six Party Talks between Washington, Pyongyang, Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, and Moscow as a multilateral security architecture to achieve the same. While two years and four sessions of Six Party Talks eventually produced the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, its pledge toward the denuclearization of North Korea in exchange for normalized diplomatic and economic relations and a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula was substantively similar to the Agreed Framework.²⁴ Six Party Talks collapsed after the seventh session in December 2008 when Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington terminated heavy fuel oil shipments to Pyongyang for its refusal to accept stringent written verification protocols advanced by Seoul and Tokyo. As with termination of the Agreed Framework that coincided with an administration change between opposition parties in Washington, cessation of Six Party Talks was concurrent with administration changes

between opposition parties in Seoul and Washington and between pragmatic and nationalist leaders in Tokyo.

In August 2009 during U.S. President Barack Obama's administration, former President Clinton met with Chairman Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang where Kim expressed an alternate reality wherein all U.S.-DPRK agreements had been implemented and an

and implementation of an enduring peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. These policy objectives are not partisan (liberal or conservative) issues but national security interests. Each agreement and statement has failed. The failures have not been with the policy objectives but with the policy approach. Peace through denuclearization has consistently been the failed policy



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environment was created where Washington had in Pyongyang a “new friend in Northeast Asia.”²⁵ That alternate reality was never realized for Kim Jong-il, who unexpectedly died two years later in December 2011. Chairman Kim Jong-un, groomed for succession in the last years of his father's life, immediately sought improved relations with Washington through a series of bilateral discussions that culminated in the coordinated release of statements from Pyongyang and Washington on 29 February 2012 that has colloquially been termed the Leap Day Deal to suspend North Korea's “long-range missile launches, nuclear tests, and nuclear activities at Yongbyon” for improved bilateral relations, peaceful coexistence, and nutritional assistance.²⁶ Pyongyang's April 2012 satellite launch in contravention to United Nations Security Council resolutions ended all prospects of rapprochement with the Obama administration. Six years after the Leap Day Deal failed, Pyongyang's aspiration to “establish new U.S.-DPRK relations” and “build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula” became prominent terms of the June 2018 Joint Statement between President Donald J. Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un at the Singapore Summit.²⁷

Four politically alternating U.S. administrations between the Democratic (D) and Republican (R) parties of Clinton (D), Bush (R), Obama (D), and Trump (R) have issued joint agreements or statements with Pyongyang since the early 1990s to achieve three policy objectives: denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations,

approach of each administration, which consistently has been unable to generate the mutual trust necessary to evolve Washington and Pyongyang from foes to friends. While Pyongyang shares this thirty-year desire to normalize U.S.-DPRK relations and build a lasting peace regime on the Korean Peninsula as successively manifested by each of its leaders, its first interest is Kim dynastic (national) security.²⁸ Therefore, if Washington wants to successfully implement a denuclearization policy with Pyongyang, the policy approach will have to buttress the Kim dynasty. Stated simply, Pyongyang will not negotiate away its national security.

Washington and Pyongyang do not need another agreement to achieve a policy of denuclearization through peace; they merely need to implement the terms of the 2018 Singapore Summit Joint Statement in the order that the top three articles appear: (1) “establish new U.S.-DPRK relations,” (2) “build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula,” and (3) “work toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”²⁹

Washington's chronic view of Pyongyang as a distant, regional threat led to decades-long containment-policy approaches that sought to contain or ameliorate a North Korean security threat. Pyongyang now possesses strategic nuclear capabilities in an era when Washington's alliance relations are stressed. Foresight girded in hindsight and insight portends two possible futures: the one wherein North Korea is a nuclearized enemy state and the other where it is an interim-nuclearized friendly state. This next section

elucidates risks and interests in both futures.

Much to Gain, More to Lose

A policy of denuclearization through peace could establish robust friendly U.S.-DPRK relations during a single U.S. administration and eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons and associated programs in a generation. National security is a state's foremost vital interest, which is equally germane to Kim Jong-un, who perceives that threats abound. Neither economic sanctions, international isolation, nor military force have dissuaded Pyongyang from safeguarding its interests with its hard-purchased nuclear capabilities. Therefore, sustainable peace, security, and stability must first be realized for Pyongyang to willingly eliminate its nuclear capabilities. Capabilities do not constitute a threat, which is why Washington does not posture against the nuclear forces of France and the United Kingdom and why Pyongyang does not perceive military

threats from China and Russia. Threat is the combination of capability plus intent. This is why Washington will more easily eliminate Pyongyang's intent (or willingness) to use nuclear weapons before it gains Pyongyang's willful elimination of its nuclear weapons.

Agreement implementation has proven enormously difficult. Enmity forged in warfare and hardened over seven decades of animus has fostered deep distrust of



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un shakes hands with President Donald J. Trump after taking part in a signing ceremony 12 June 2018 at the end of their historic U.S.-North Korea summit at the Capella Hotel on Sentosa Island, Singapore. (Photo by Shealah Craighead, Official White House)

Pyongyang by many of Washington's legislators, diplomats, and military leaders who perceive rapprochement with Pyongyang as anathema to national security, which has complicated implementation of previous agreements on denuclearization. Therefore, many in Washington prefer status quo adversarial relations that manifest strength and conserve resources requisite to resolve what would be a major political undertaking. Achieving



a policy of denuclearization through peace will require the Washington establishment to objectively consider the nation's interest in establishing an amicable relation with Pyongyang and what could be lost by failing to do so. Three of the last five South Korean administrations have sought and failed to normalize relations with Pyongyang. Seoul's progressives see Washington as obstructing inter-Korean endeavors for peace, and they wrestle politically with how to reconcile the dichotomy of valuing Seoul's military alliance with Washington and advancing inter-Korean peace with Pyongyang.³⁰ As all parties hedge that diplomatic inter-Korean peace initiatives will fail, each successive discordant statement, sanction enforcement, weapon test, or military exercise imperils overtures of peace as they reinforce suspicions of malign intent. Staunch nationalists in Seoul and Washington who postured against a North Korean enemy during the four decades that spanned the 1950s Korean War and the Cold War that ended in 1989 are a rapidly fading group. In another generation, no one will possess a living memory of the Korean War and there will be few remaining Cold War warriors. Consequently, for the U.S.-ROK alliance to endure, it will need more to bind it than a shared history of the forgotten war. Washington and Seoul

A truck transporting North Korean soldiers 5 September 2010. With little fuel and no cars for the soldiers, the army often uses this style of transportation. (Photo courtesy of Roman Harak, Flickr)

should not wait for the coming demographic change; they should take actions now to realize their national interests on a peaceful and secure nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

Understanding what obstacles strew the policy path toward denuclearization through peace is essential if Washington is to avoid duplicating earlier missteps. Framed by hindsight of previous denuclearization efforts and insight of overlapping national security interests, foresight is gained by considering two likely divergent security futures where Pyongyang is either a nuclearized enemy state or an interim-nuclearized friendly state.

Nuclearized Enemy State

Pyongyang's most probable future, absent active intervention, is a credible nuclearized enemy state that militarily threatens Washington and its allies while propagating malignant mayhem globally. Conservative estimates peg Pyongyang's strategic arsenal at thirty nuclear devices with fissile material for thirty-to-sixty

additional warheads and hundreds of nuclear capable ballistic missiles and large caliber rockets.³¹ As one of just nine countries with nuclear weapons, the U.S. Northern Command has suggested that Pyongyang's modest stockpile of nuclear weapons is on course to challenge the U.S. homeland's antiballistic missile defenses by 2025.³² Nuclear yield, missile capability, and sanction severity are three factors of a security threat posed by Pyongyang as a nuclear enemy state.

Nuclear yields. Between October 2006 and September 2017, Pyongyang conducted six nuclear detonations. The last test, Pyongyang claimed, was a thermonuclear device that had a measured yield of upward of 250 kilotons, or nearly seventeen times more powerful than the fifteen-kiloton bomb dropped by the United States on Hiroshima in August 1945.³³ In September 2017, executive leaders of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack testified before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Homeland Security that the "nation faces a potentially imminent and existential threat of nuclear EMP attack from North Korea."³⁴ The commission postulated that a high-altitude EMP detonated over the U.S. mainland would bring down the U.S. electrical grid for years, producing cascading calamities that could result in the death of upward of 90 percent of all Americans within one year. An extreme position, perhaps, but if such a scenario killed just 10 percent, or thirty million Americans, a retaliatory U.S. response would seem a pyrrhic victory.

Missile capabilities. Before 2016, North Korea's proven missile capabilities were limited to short-range ballistic missiles. Pyongyang has since conducted some seventy missile tests of much of its known inventory of ballistic missiles and long-range rockets, advancing both its technical and operational capabilities.³⁵ To that end, the Korean People's Army has demonstrated significant nuclear-capable weapon systems, including more than six hundred short-range ballistic missiles that range throughout the Korean Peninsula, over two hundred medium-range ballistic missiles that range Japan, about fifty intermediate-range ballistic missiles that range Guam, and a limited number of intercontinental ballistic missiles that range the U.S. Eastern Seaboard (see figure, page 23).³⁶

Sanctions severity. Since 2006, when Pyongyang first tested a nuclear device, there have been eleven United Nations Security Council resolutions (S/RES) to

sanction North Korea in response to six nuclear tests (S/RES 1718, 1874, 2094, 2270, 2321, 2375), three missile tests (S/RES 1695, 2371, 2397), one satellite launch (S/RES 2087), and nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development (S/RES 2356).³⁷ While seven resolutions target the military and the elites with trade prohibitions on defense articles and luxury items, the later resolutions are broadly leveled at Pyongyang's economic sectors, making illegitimate 99 percent of export revenues, or the near totality of all international trade opportunities, including bans on coal, iron, lead, oil, petroleum, seafood, textiles, and labor.³⁸ The severity of the sanctions is well characterized by the UN Panel of Expert's noninclusive list of restricted trade items under S/RES 2397 that, among many other items, includes agricultural tools (e.g., greenhouses, handheld tools, irrigation, harvesting and threshing equipment); medical apparatuses (e.g., neonatal equipment, X-ray machines, surgical equipment, wheelchairs, and crutches); food, water, and sanitation security implements (e.g., veterinarian kits, milk pasteurizers, refrigerants, generators, water tanks, and drilling parts); and all metallic items (e.g., screws, bolts, nails, and staples).³⁹ Onerous exemption request procedures have resulted in but few instances of applicants seeking approval for humanitarian exceptions.⁴⁰ The effects of these sanctions transcend the application of maximum pressure upon the Kim regime as the whole of DPRK society absorbs severe humanitarian consequences.⁴¹ Excised by sanctions from conventional trade, Pyongyang increasingly exploits illicit activities such as cybercrime, arms trade, counterfeiting, and human trafficking.⁴² Malicious cyber activities have proven very lucrative for Pyongyang, which reportedly netted more than US\$2 billion in recent years in cyber-enabled theft across ten countries.⁴³ Trafficking in sanctioned licit trade is also profitable and increasingly less controlled as evidenced by US\$47.9 million of bilateral trade between Russia and North Korea in 2019—a 40.6 percent increase from 2018—of which petroleum accounted for US\$27.2 million.⁴⁴ North Korea's bilateral trade also expanded with China in 2019 to 95 percent of Pyongyang's US\$2.47 billion trade, which further fetters Pyongyang to Beijing.⁴⁵ This grossly slanted trade partnership with China is a direct response to economic sanctions upon North Korea. Before Pyongyang was sanctioned for its first nuclear test in 2006, its total trade was US\$6 billion (US\$7.8 billion in today's dollars) and was diversified

among ten Indo-Pacific economies of which bilateral trade with China was 38 percent.⁴⁶ After years of additive UN sanctions, Pyongyang's bilateral trade with Beijing rose to 59.3 percent by 2015 and then by more than 90 percent following the UN's series of enhanced sanctions that began in 2016.⁴⁷

While Pyongyang's most plausible future is as a nuclearized enemy state, such a future is neither preferable nor preordained. Consequently, Washington would do well to induce Pyongyang into its security circle, understanding that this approach would establish Pyongyang as an interim-nuclearized friendly state but definitively not a recognized nuclear state.

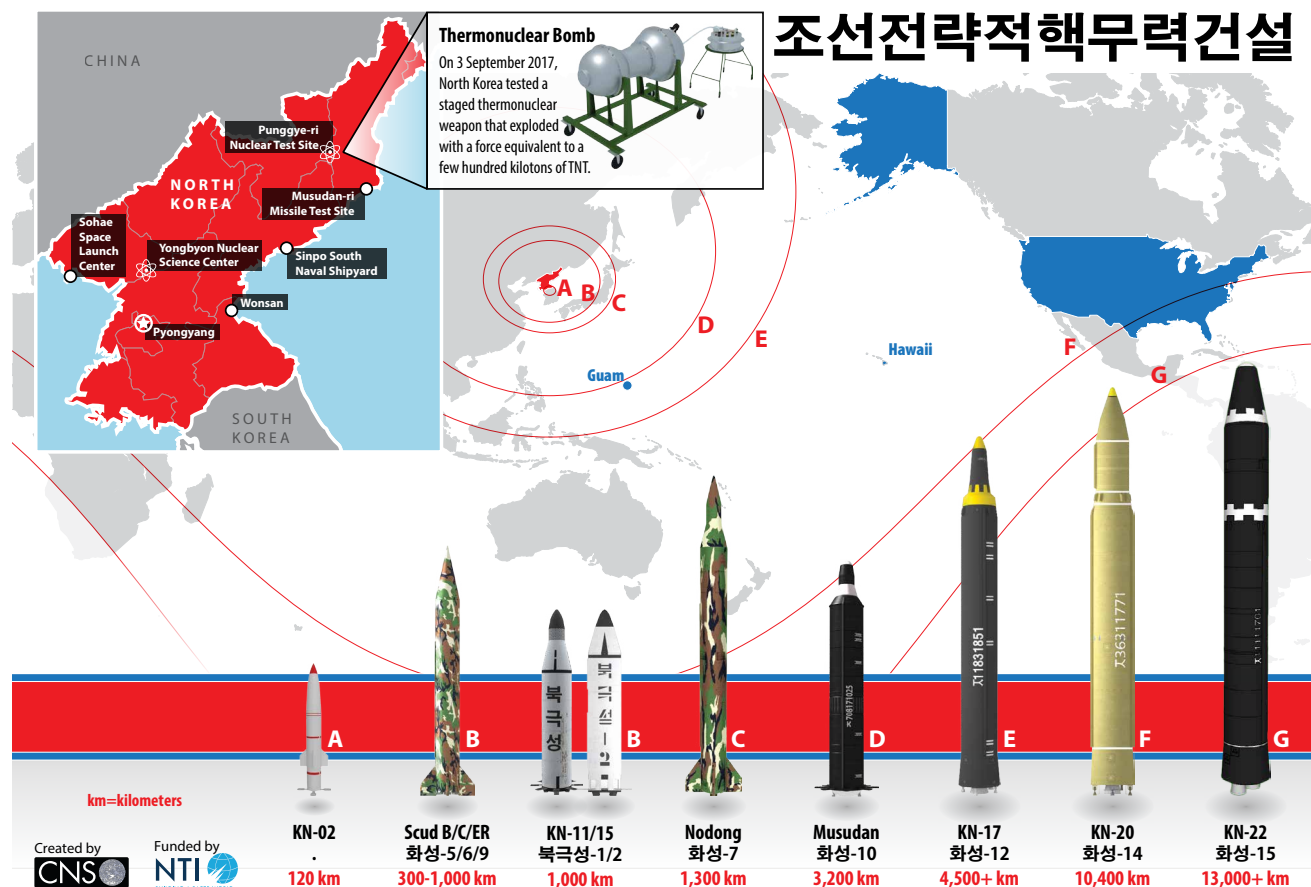
Interim-Nuclearized Friendly State

As China and Russia actively contest U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific, Washington should seize the opportunity to draw Pyongyang into its security architecture with Seoul and Tokyo.⁴⁸ This act could reshape Northeast Asia for the next century as Washington shores up its military alliances and shifts a unified security focus from a North Korean threat to strategic security challenges that emanate from Beijing and Moscow. Past diplomatic efforts presage that Seoul and Tokyo will each reciprocate Washington's lead in normalizing political and economic relations with Pyongyang.⁴⁹ In consultation with Seoul and Tokyo, Washington should approach Pyongyang purposefully with an expressed willingness to pursue a policy of denuclearization through peace to implement the 2018 Singapore Summit Joint Statement. Such a policy would be purposely phased by immediate and persistent efforts to implement parallel pursuits that (1) establish new U.S.-DPRK relations, (2) build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and (3) work toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Multisectoral engagements that garner maximum benefits would be characteristics of an immediate phase to establish an era of new relations.

Establish new relations. Nations unite through robust political and economic relations. In establishing new relations between the United States and North Korea, it is necessary to immediately exchange capital city liaison offices staffed with representatives from governmental departments and agencies to build confidence by propelling the work that will implement some future agreement to operationalize the 2018 Singapore Summit Joint Statement. Economic sanctions imposed

by the United Nations and United States must be relaxed early for substantive measures toward relations normalization to occur as evidenced by Seoul's fruitless efforts toward maximum engagement with Pyongyang in the face of stiff UN sanctions and U.S. secondary sanctions. Washington's support would significantly improve the prospect of lifting or relaxing UN sanctions on Pyongyang as Beijing and Moscow formally sought in December 2019.⁵⁰ To be effective, however, Washington must also relax the 2016 North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act and the 2019 Otto Warmbier North Korea Nuclear Sanctions and Enforcement Act, which impose secondary sanctions on countries engaging with North Korea.⁵¹ Relaxed sanctions would facilitate humanitarian and environmental assistance, encourage robust trade, and establish exchanges and cooperation in diverse fields, including agriculture, energy, public health, sanitation and welfare, medicine, safe water, mining, and tourism. Assuming sanctions relief, federal agencies would need to be directed and commercial companies incentivized to invest and engage with North Korea as no substantive engagement precedence exists.

Build a stable peace regime. The disestablishment and repurposing of opposing military forces that are arrayed to fight the next Korean War is the end state of building a stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. This notion has seemed to be abhorrent to politicians, diplomats, warfighters, and defense industries who dedicate purpose to and gain profit from defending their sides of the Korean demilitarized zone. It is useful to remember that the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement is not an end state; rather, it was meant as a provisional solution to supplant war with a military pact to enforce cessation of hostilities until concerned governments could negotiate a peaceful settlement.⁵² Therefore, in the interest of building a stable peace regime, protestations toward peacebuilding need to be mollified. For Pyongyang, it will necessitate creating meaningful reemployment for much of North Korea's 1.28 million strong Korean People's Army.⁵³ Reemployment of the North's surplus soldiers will necessitate massive social work programs throughout the country and access to overseas jobs as guest workers and peacekeepers. U.S. Forces-Korea should consider transitioning from a single-purpose force that mans, trains, and equips to defeat a North Korean threat to becoming a global



(Figure courtesy of the Nuclear Threat Initiative and James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies; information as of February 2018, <https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/north-korea/>. For more resources on North Korea, please visit www.nti.org/northkorea)

Figure. North Korean Strategic Nuclear Threat

force provider that is principally focused on deterring an expansionist communist Chinese threat.⁵⁴

The inter-Korean Comprehensive Military Agreement of September 2018 is an ample departure point toward building confidence as demonstrated by the euphoric actions taken early after its adoption, including the destruction of several ultra-forward guard posts in the demilitarized zone.⁵⁵ The task of building a stable peace regime will be difficult unless both sides fully commit to end all pretexts of hostility and then take cooperative actions to dismantle military posturing, planning, training, and equipping that is directed to defend against and defeat the other as an opposing threat. In short, unyielding belligerents must become accommodating peacebuilders if they are to succeed at building a stable peace regime. The task will be difficult.

Work toward complete denuclearization. Complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is undefined, but it is fanciful to imagine Pyongyang willfully eliminating its nuclear weapons capabilities and programs until transmogrification of political and economic relations is realized with Washington and Seoul. It is equally difficult to envision Washington and Seoul accepting from Pyongyang a denuclearization attestation absent a trust relationship because verification inspections without trust will not placate suspicions of cheating.

Denuclearization's low bar is Pyongyang's assent to persistent monitoring of its Yongbyon-based nuclear reactors and related facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency as it did previously for eight years under the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework and for two years under the 2007 implementation agreement of the Six Party Talks.⁵⁶ The high bar of complete



The United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission and the North Korean People's Army Mission to Panmunjom conduct a joint repatriation ceremony of a deceased North Korean soldier 11 September 2013 in the Military Armistice Commission Headquarters Area of the Korean Demilitarized Zone. (Photo courtesy of the author)

denuclearization is Pyongyang's approbation for disposal of its nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles coupled with Washington's endorsement of Pyongyang's peaceful use of nuclear energy without prescription or proscription of fuel fabrication and civil use of rockets to launch satellites, capabilities that Pyongyang has successfully demonstrated and other countries employ without censure. Pyongyang has adamantly resisted previous pressure to renounce its sovereign right to employ these technologies. Consequently, alternative options for energy production and satellite employment will need to be offered during the early stages of denuclearization until trust is built and prescriptions are ended.

Going Forward

Beijing strategically benefits as Washington and its allies tangle with a progressively complex security

threat from Pyongyang. This article examined the five denuclearization policies of the last thirty years to accentuate that relations normalization and hostilities cessation are Pyongyang's desired end state with Washington. For Washington, denuclearization has been its singular interest. However, a peace through denuclearization policy— meaning that Pyongyang must first fully denuclearize before realizing normalized political and economic relations with Washington (and Seoul) and before realizing a peace agreement—has persistently been the failed U.S. policy approach of each previous agreement. Had that policy approach been possible, it would have been implemented under one of the previous agreements that was presented in the earlier section.

Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is not only still laudatory, but it is also still achievable.

Likewise, normalized relations with Pyongyang is not a progressive agenda, it is an acknowledged national security interest that liberal and conservative administrations in Seoul and Washington have vigorously pursued for three continuous decades. Former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung used this analogy

policy with Pyongyang; his type of progressive support will be essential to Washington successfully implementing a policy of denuclearization through peace. While this policy approach tacitly accedes to Pyongyang's interim-nuclearized status, it is the correct policy approach, and it is eminently preferable to Pyongyang possessing

“As China and Russia actively contest U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific, Washington should seize the opportunity to draw Pyongyang into its security architecture with Seoul and Tokyo.”

to explain his “Sunshine Policy” of engagement with Pyongyang: “North Korea is like a mold, sunshine is the disinfectant.”⁵⁷ To appropriate that analogy: a changed regime (as opposed to a regime change) in Pyongyang is the desire, a denuclearization through peace policy is the way.⁵⁸

While Pyongyang persists in its desire to normalize relations with Washington, Washington has leverage to end this deteriorating security dynamic by immediately embracing Pyongyang in a policy of denuclearization through peace as was outlined above. The 2018 U.S.-DPRK Singapore Summit Statement is the right denuclearization policy framework, and the top three agreements are correctly ordered to implement a successful denuclearization policy that could pull Pyongyang into Washington's security network and reshape the Northeast Asia security environment.

Haste and resolve in implementing a denuclearization through peace policy is essential as has repeatedly been borne out by changing policies between successive administrations in Washington and Seoul. South Korean President Moon Jae-in has met in triple summitry with Kim Jong-un and ardently advocates an engagement

nuclear weapons as an enemy state. Thirty years ago, Washington rightly objected to Pyongyang's burgeoning pursuit of nuclear weapons, but back then North Korea had no nuclear capability. Less than fifteen years ago, Pyongyang had not even conducted its first nuclear detonation. Pyongyang today, according to a conservative estimate, possesses thirty nuclear warheads and has fissile material enough to increase its stockpile to about one hundred nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ Since 2017, Pyongyang has also had a promising second-strike nuclear capability with solid fuel road-mobile launchers and nascent nuclear submarine technology.⁶⁰ In 2017, a North Korean nuclear strike upon the United States was so palpable that then U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis reportedly remained vigil by sleeping in his clothes and frequenting the Washington National Cathedral.⁶¹

There is no upside to Pyongyang rising as a strategic nuclear enemy state with ardent animus toward Washington and its regional allies. Washington should abandon its reactive policies in Northeast Asia and seize the present opportunity to change Pyongyang from foe to friend by advancing a denuclearization through peace policy. ■

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Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump; North Korean leaders Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un; and South Korean presidents Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun, Lee Myung-bak, Park Geun-hye, and Moon Jae-in.

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