



North Korean delegation leader Ri Son Gwon (left) and South Korean Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon shake hands 9 January 2018 during a meeting at the Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone in Paju, South Korea. Efforts between the two countries to reduce tensions showed signs of progress; North Korea agreed to send a delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea, and both sides agreed to reopen an emergency communication hotline and to resume military-to-military talks. (Photo courtesy of the South Korean Unification Ministry)

North Korea Solution Changed Regime

Col. James M. Minnich, U.S. Army

Twenty-six years of ineffective policies have made denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula increasingly more illusory as the government of North Korea has repeatedly demonstrated its credibility as a nuclear weapons possessor, irrespective of international recognition. The question now is whether this can be reversed.

State Survival as a National Interest

State survival is the most vital of national interests. This is acutely true for Pyongyang, which perceives perils everywhere. In 1979, when North Korea began constructing its five-megawatt electrical gas-cooled nuclear reactor (it already possessed a proliferation resistant, two-megawatt thermal light-water reactor

that the Soviets built in the 1960s), it was years behind South Korea's secretive nuclear weapons program, which Seoul privately shuttered in 1981 for security assurances and recognition of political legitimacy from the U.S.¹ In 1971, President Richard Nixon had reduced U.S. forces in Korea from sixty-three thousand to forty-three thousand.² And, in 1975, U.S. presidential candidate Jimmy Carter campaigned to withdraw all U.S. forces from Korea—an exhortation that he never fully forsook.³ In December 1979, then Maj. Gen. Chun Doo-hwan seized national power in a military coup in South Korea. Five months later in May 1980, he brutally cracked down on a democratic uprising in Gwangju that inflicted hundreds of casualties.⁴ On 2 February 1981, only thirteen days after assuming the U.S. presidency, Ronald Reagan, in his first summit, met Chun at the White House. Reagan publicly extolled America's enduring commitment in Korea and bestowed upon Chun the mantle of legitimacy.⁵ Seoul's shuttering of its nuclear weapons program in exchange for Washington's accord of security assurances and political legitimacy is a reminder of what can be achieved with ample impetus and genuine guarantees.

So, what will it take for North Korea to surrender its nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons program? A resolute security assurance. This has been Pyongyang's persistent refrain for the past quarter century. In December 1991, as the Soviet Union collapsed, the two Koreas signed a treaty of reconciliation and nonaggression to advance peace by forswearing armed force against each other. Within weeks, they also signed a joint denuclearization declaration to further underwrite peace on the peninsula. In October 1994, as the specter of war loomed large, the United States and North Korea signed a framework agreement to eliminate the latter's nuclear reactors and related facilities in exchange for guarantees of security, normalized relations, and light-water reactors.⁶ From 2003 to 2008, the United States, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and North Korea met in seven protracted rounds of dialogue to denuclearize Pyongyang in exchange for guarantees of security, normalized relations, economic cooperation, and energy assistance. In 2012, Washington and Pyongyang signed a so-called Leap Day Deal to effectuate the same. All denuclearization attempts have failed, owing in large part to the disingenuousness of all sides.

A Policy of Changed Regime

Some pundits in the news postulate that America needs a regime change in North Korea. That thinking is narrow and thoughtless on many counts. What America needs is a policy of changed regime in North Korea.⁷ What is the difference? Regime change substitutes one dictator for the next. Kim Jong Un is now the country's third dictator, and a fourth might be no better. Changed regime is a policy of consistent, prolonged engagement that engenders a transformation from within by resolute exposures from without. A U.S. foreign policy of changed regime in South Korea was necessary for Washington to weather its consistent, prolonged engagement with Seoul, in the face of decades of successive military coups, electoral manipulations, human rights violations, and democracy suppressions. Washington now needs to adopt a changed-regime policy for North Korea.

A changed-regime policy could begin overnight, as was evinced following an abrupt inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in June 2000 between South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Il. By October, then U.S. president Bill Clinton had met in Washington with Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok, Kim Jong Il's special envoy and the highest-ranking North Korean dignitary to visit Washington. Later, on 23 October 2000, then U.S.

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Korean People's Army personnel launch rockets August 2017 during a target strike exercise at an undisclosed location in North Korea. (Photo courtesy of Korean Central News Agency)

secretary of state Madeleine Albright met Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang, making her the most senior U.S. government official to visit Pyongyang.

During Albright's visit, Kim appealed for security assurances, suggesting that like China's Deng Xiaoping, he too could refocus his resources from defense to economic development with the right security assurances from Washington.⁸ Kim also told Albright that he had come to appreciate that U.S. troops in South Korea brought a stabilizing force to Asia.⁹ Kim's rejoinder was as it had been since the early 1990s—let us end the antithetical relationship between the United States and North Korea.

Detente ended as quickly as it began. The U.S. presidential elections of 7 November 2000 left the United States in a constitutional crisis for weeks. Following President George W. Bush's assumption of office in January 2001, the euphoria of rapprochement between North Korea and the United States ceased. It was replaced by Bush's less than hospitable approach toward North Korea's Kim Jong Il.¹⁰ Such an approach by the administration caused public humiliation of South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung and utter antipathy for Roh Moo-hyun, who followed Kim Dae-jung as president from 2003 to 2008.¹¹ This was followed by eight more years of President Barack Obama's policy of

strategic patience, which was an unsuccessful attempt to pressure Pyongyang to denuclearize through U.S.-led economic sanctions.

Policy Actions

An effective changed-regime policy would quickly undertake a series of actions that should eventually align North Korean interests with those of the United States, bringing the entire Korean Peninsula into Washington's security sphere. At present, Washington's interests are not Pyongyang's interests, which is why a changed-regime policy is needed to effect persistent change. America's chief interest is for Pyongyang to abolish its nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons program. While this may not ameliorate the need to also eliminate chemical and biological weapons, reduce missile and conventional forces, enforce human rights, and adjudicate instances of terrorism and provocation, Washington should not lose focus on the important at the expense of the vital.

What follows are five policy actions that are paramount in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis. They include changes in U.S. and allied policy related to mutual security assurances, relations normalization, nuclear weapons and its program abatement and abolishment, cooperative prosperity, and nonnuclear energy provision.



Vehicles from 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, participate in Suho Lightning, a combined training exercise with the Republic of Korea Army, 13 November 2017 at Twin Bridges, South Korea. Suho Lightning was conducted in conjunction with Warfighter 18-02, a peninsula-wide, division-level simulation training exercise that incorporated U.S. and Korean forces. (Photo by Sgt. Patrick Eakin, U.S. Army)

Security assurances. First, it is necessary to extend to Pyongyang security assurance by lessening the perceived threats North Korea has with regard to its territorial sovereignty across the entire Korean Peninsula. This will require more than pronouncements and accords—it will necessitate tangible actions. Reminiscent of the United States and South Korea's cancelation of their 1992 Team Spirit military exercise, a necessary step in Pyongyang's acceding to the inter-Korean agreements of 1991, Washington and Seoul will need to suspend, and eventually discontinue, their combined military exercises that focus on defeating a North Korean threat. As a confidence-building measure to support discontinuance of such exercises, North and South Korea will need to agree to stop firing munitions in the contested areas of the Yellow Sea, a constant source of tension between the two parties. Moreover, all parties must agree to cease rhetoric as a means of intimidation.

Such security guarantees alone could yield significantly improved relations. The high probability of such steps meeting with success was evinced in 2009, when Clinton met privately in Pyongyang with Chairman Kim Jong Il, where the latter wistfully opined that had the situation in late-2000 progressed differently, "the

United States would have had [in North Korea] a new friend in Northeast Asia."¹²

Relations normalization. The United States and its allies must promptly normalize state and economic relations, thereby legitimizing North Korea as a state and Kim Jong Un as its supreme leader. This should be followed by an immediate exchange of capital liaison offices, followed by an exchange of embassies within six to twelve months. This should be done in tandem with ending economic sanctions and normalizing economic relations, allowing South Korean and other foreign businesses to operate in North Korea.

Initially abate, but ultimately abolish North Korea's nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons program. In what is perceived as an equal agreement by North Korea, it has a consistent record of abating its nuclear weapons program when it believes doing so is in its best security interests. In the fervor to advance security, Washington and Seoul should not demand that Pyongyang accomplish every aspect of denuclearization before implementing other tangible aspects of an agreement. From Pyongyang's perspective, denuclearization alone would not be normalization, it would be capitulation.

An honest evaluation of former efforts and agreements by the United States and its allies reveals a

Military Review

WE RECOMMEND



Soldiers drive sixty-eight ton M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and twenty-seven ton M2A2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles across a floating bridge over the Injin River 8 April 2016 near Seoul, South Korea. The Injin River is the seventh-largest river in Korea and flows from North Korea into South Korea across the Demilitarized Zone. Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, crossed the bridge assembled by the Republic of Korea Army 6th Engineer Brigade as part of a four-day combined arms river crossing exercise. (Photo by Sgt. Christopher Dennis, U.S. Army)

North Korea Policy Changed Regime

Col. James M. Minnich, U.S. Army

The denuclearization of North Korea has been a failed policy objective of the United States and South Korea for twenty-five years. Miststeps, hubris, and sophistry clutter past approaches to forestall a nuclear-armed North Korea, but they need not portend today's policy path. Lost opportunities abound, but it is not too late to peacefully

eliminate Pyongyang's burgeoning nuclear arsenal. North Korea's denuclearization will be a byproduct of a successful engagement policy, not its singular objective. The North Korea solution that is needed is a policy of *changed regime*, not regime change. A changed-regime policy will transform North Korea from within by resolute engagements from without

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For those who are interested in more detailed discussion and analysis of the history of negotiations between North and South Korea, we invite your attention to Col. Minnich's previous article, titled "North Korea Policy, Changed Regime" published in the Nov-Dec 2017 edition of *Military Review*, in which he elaborates on policy recommendations he asserts would mitigate the tension, animosity, and mistrust North Korea has with regard to the United States and South Korea.

To view this article, please visit <http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2017/North-Korea-Policy-Changed-Regime/>.

disproportionate premium placed on denuclearizing the regime as the cost for normalizing relations. However, absent trust, which can only be engendered from close associations, the United States and its strategic partners could never achieve adequate inspection protocols that would fully satisfy a policy based on just coercion. Though North Korea's willful abolishment of its nuclear weapons capabilities may take a generation to realize, to move in that direction will first require a willingness on the part of the United States and allies to change the security environment where Pyongyang no longer perceives Washington and Seoul as enemies.

Cooperative prosperity. To develop cooperative prosperity, the Kaeseong Industrial Complex and the Mount Kumgang Resort, both located just north of the Demilitarized Zone, should be immediately reopened and then expanded. Additionally, North Korea should be enticed to open its mining industry to U.S. and South Korean businesses, which also has the potential of displacing China as North Korea's lead trading partner in mining.

Repair and transfer nonnuclear energy—hydro and coal power generation. Hydro and coal power generation are two abundant nonnuclear energy power sources in North Korea; they are also more appropriate sources of energy, given the poor condition of North Korea's power grid. Negotiations to arrest Pyongyang's nuclear reactors—graphite moderated and light water—will, however, require the transfer of alternative energy sources. Washington must avoid negotiating points that perpetually proscribe North Korea's possession of nuclear reactors; Pyongyang will regard this as an infringement upon its sovereignty. Rather, Washington should prescribe the transfer of nonnuclear energy sources as acceptable to Washington. The international security community should understand that the trust necessary for North Korea to operate highly enriched uranium facilities for processing nuclear reactor fuel, devoid the trepidation of diverting its product into a nuclear weapons program, is the requisite trust to operate nuclear reactors—and that degree of trust is distant.

Pursue All Options before War

Since Clinton's final days in office, the presidents of the United States and South Korea have not been unified in their collective approach toward a policy of changed regime in North Korea. Since taking office in

January 2017, President Donald Trump has repeatedly stated, "All options are on the table" in dealing with North Korea.¹³ On 10 May 2017, South Korean President Moon Jae-in assumed the presidency with a trifold mandate to improve the economy, abolish political corruption, and peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. Moon has repeatedly affirmed his intent to improve inter-Korean relations.

While the specter of resumed hostilities on the Korean Peninsula incessantly persisted last year,

2018 opened with an inter-Korean agreement for dialogue, prospects of improved security conditions on the peninsula, and a U.S. agreement to suspend combined military exercises until after the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics.¹⁴ Now is the time for Seoul and Washington to boldly assume risk by adopting a changed-regime policy that will genuinely align Pyongyang within their orbits if they are truly committed to avoiding war unless it is the absolute last resort. ■

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