



ANATOLY TORKUNOV

Rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations

Choi Young-Jin, Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies, former Ambassador to the US, former Head of the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire

Next, we unfortunately do not have any representative from Japan or China, but we have one from Russia, Mr Anatoly Torkunov, who is a diplomatic scholar. He currently serves as rector of the Moscow Institute of International Relations, as president of the Russian International Studies Association, and also as the co-chairman of the Russian Japanese History Commission. Mr Anatoly, you have the floor.

Anatoly Torkunov, Rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations

Thank you very much, Professor Choi. All these talks about the resumption of dialogue between the two Koreas, about the new measures taken by all sides involved in this process, brought my memory back to 1972. At that time, I worked in our embassy in Pyongyang and it was my first diplomatic position after graduating from university. I remember that time because we were so happy to know that the joint statement of North and South Korea was signed in summer of 1972 and there were lots of hopes. We thought about very bright perspectives for the Korean Peninsula and for the two Koreas. By the way, at that time, we did not have diplomatic relations with South Korea and many of us dreamed about going to South Korea to work there and to get to know this country because we read a lot about the reforms in South Korea taken by President Park Chung-hee in the 1960s and '70s.

Much water has flowed under the Han River bridges since then but, unfortunately, again and again we come back to the same topics and we speak about the resumption of dialogue. I should say that the current reality is much more complicated than in the Cold War era. Then, the security in the Korean Peninsula was more or less guaranteed by the antagonistic nuclear super powers. Now, we can witness a complicated interplay of controversial national interests, both of big and smaller powers, each playing its own part in this geopolitical plane.

The Korean Peninsula remains the hub of bilateral, regional and global problems. The major actors are the two Koreas and the four powers. The two Koreas remain the major actors with totally incompatible priorities. Inter-Korean relations follow a repeated pattern. A crisis gives way to a détente, which in turn is replaced by another surge of hostilities. We used to assume that the Korean War of 1950-1953, which has not formally ended, started initially as a civil war between the competing elites, but later the two sides were supported by outside forces and the conflict remains international even today.

The essence of inter-Korean relations remains unchanged. The goals of the Korean War remain unfulfilled for both parties and each believes that only complete victory over its enemy and its capitulation can put an end to it. In the Kim Jong-un era, no major breakthrough is in sight. The policy of Seoul became more balanced. While North Korea had an outbreak of tension in 2013, it also calmed down. However, even now, the intentions of both sides still remain incompatible.

Pyongyang wants large-scale assistance from South Korea, which could strengthen the regime without any conditions, especially a condition concerning Pyongyang's right to security in relation to a nuclear deterrent. The South, through its trustpolitik, pursues the goal of controlling the situation and opening up North Korea, while softly inducing changes in the North in preparation for the eventual fall of Kim's family regime and unification on South Korean terms.



The pretext of prior de-nuclearisation and meaningful steps puts, in my view, a cap on any practical steps to cordially improve relations. At the same time, Pyongyang remains deeply suspicious of South Korea's motives and of course cannot be expected to yield in principal issues of preservation of its governance system. In fact, the fact that both Koreas share ideas of nationalism and want to solve their problems without outside interference gives some hope for the future. However, the international dimension of the Korean civil war in the early 1950s resulted in a situation in which the two Koreas cannot settle their scores independently without the intervention of the great powers, although the extent of the interest of the great powers is different.

Let me elaborate a little about the position of the two countries, the USA and Russia. The USA remains the principal actor in the Korean Peninsula region and Washington currently prefers the policy of containment of North Korea, the so-called strategic patience, while keeping a strong political and military grip on South Korea. A new testament to the US desire to keep ROK under control and limit its foreign policy manoeuvrability is the inclusion of ROK in the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense systems aimed against China and Russia. For the United States, geopolitical maturation is of primary importance. The growing effort to contain China is the most obvious reason for giving attention to the Korean issue.

International recognition of North Korean regime and normalisation of the situation on the Korean Peninsula would put into question the US military presence in the region and the creation of a missile defence system in Northeast Asia. The Obama administration has not developed an articulated strategy with regard to North Korea. Yesterday on the plane, I read comments on the recent visit of the newly appointed special envoy to Korea, Mr Sung Kim. From these comments, I understood that nothing new was being raised, no new ideas; new proposals; new initiatives. This in turn feeds the fears of the North Korean elite that Washington is hoping for a cataclysm in North Korea and its absorption into South Korea, or a leadership change that would make Pyongyang more malleable.

For Russia, stability and the prevention of a conflict on its eastern frontier, which could lead to changes in the geopolitical situation, is a priority in its Korean policy. Therefore, all other considerations and priorities should be considered secondary to this agenda. Unfortunately, it is questionable where the goal of de-nuclearisation of North Korea is attainable for the moment, so any diplomatic process is only a tool to hedge the risk, to stop North Korea improving its arsenal and prevent nuclear proliferation. Of course, North Korea's nuclear weapon programme and WMD proliferation issues are vital and should be solved, but not at the cost of stability. However, there is no need for North Korea to use these missiles while relations with these countries are normalised and Pyongyang's possession of these dangerous weapons is not a worst-case scenario, if responsibly handled.

At the same time, the non-proliferation issue cannot be suitably solved without addressing broader security issues. Russian experts believe that the North Korea's quest to get nuclear weapons resulted from the situation during the Cold War, when Korean security was guaranteed by the super powers. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a dangerous loss of equilibrium on the Korean Peninsula, leading to the possibility of the use of force. Potential reforms in neighbouring countries constitute a chance for Moscow to improve its position in Northeast Asia, strengthen the role of Russian business and regional projects, important from the geo-economic and geopolitical points of view, such as a gas pipeline to South Korea via the territory of North Korea, and the Trans-Korea railway connected to the Trans-Siberian.

The reforms would contribute to the implementation of these projects and they in turn would contribute to the stabilisation of the economic situation in North Korea. As you may know, Russian/North Korean relations play a very important role in strengthening its position in Northeast Asia. A deterioration of relations with Pyongyang has resulted several times in the decline of Russia's influence in solving the problems directly related to its national interest. Russia has always stood firm that North Korea's legal interests should be provided and this country should not be the object of isolation.

I believe the agenda of the diplomatic process should be comprehensive and not be concentrated solely on the North Korean nuclear problem, but should comprehensively address security issues, including normalisation of relations between all the parties. The solution to the Korean issue could also be found through political and diplomatic means, preferably within a multi party diplomatic process, which should not be regarded as a zero-sum gain. A new security system in and around the Korean Peninsula should take into account the legitimate interest of all parties.



For example, a new concept of maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula based on a system of cross-agreement among all six process participants can be suggested as a final result of these six party talks. Such a system would legally secure each participant's rights and obligations towards other members in regard to the situation on the Korean Peninsula and would make it possible to monitor the fulfilment of these obligations. In this case, the implementation of bilateral obligations arising, for example, from the agreement between North Korea and the United States would be subject to monitoring by such countries as China and Russia. In turn, the relations between ROK and the United States could be under observance by North Korea. Such a system could incorporate obligations stemming from the existing agreements with regard to the Korean Peninsula.

The issue of the de-nuclearisation of North Korea could be resolved with this framework. Thank you.

Choi Young-Jin, Professor at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies, former Ambassador to the US, former Head of the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire

Thank you, Anatoly, for sharing your thoughts. We particularly appreciate your presenting the crux of the matter in terms of a relationship. You explained that North Korea wants large scale assistance from South Korea to strengthen its regime. On the other hand, South Korea wants a rapprochement with North Korea, even providing large assistance with a view to changing its strategy and its society. There is a sort of deadlock. We also take note of the explanation about the nuclear issue. This question is not a stand alone issue. This is linked with larger regional security, as well as the North Korean question itself.

I would like to thank the five panellists for presenting their views in a very succinct and clear manner. The upshot is we have 15 minutes for exchange with the floor. Unless you, panelists, would like to react to some comments, I would like to open the floor to the audience. You have the floor.