

YIM SUNG-JOON

Senior Advisor at Lee International IP & Law Group; Former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and National Security Advisor to the President, Republic of Korea

Marcus NOLAND

Without any further ado, in light of our limited time, please try to keep it to roughly eight minutes. Mr Yim, the floor is yours.

YIM Sung-Joon

Thank you, Marcus, for the privilege to speak first, and I am supposed to be the last speaker in alphabetical order.

It is always nice to visit Marrakesh, but I think it is a pity and a regret that I have to talk about the most serious and grave security problem in the world currently.

This issue is not new, as you all know. It has, for 25 years, had the attention of the people in charge of security of most concerned countries. I was heavily involved when this issue came out in the early 1990s, and I have seen some participants work together to resolve the issue. These days, tension is high in my country, not because we expect any possible provocation by North Korea again, but because of the arrival of President Trump. The Korean government has mounted maximum-security vigilance in protection of the US President.

As I said, this nuclear issue with North Korea has been there for the last 20 years, so going through all the phases of this issue would take hours, so I will skip the early part of this issue and start from the recent developments of this North Korean nuclear quagmire.

Global outrage at North Korea's nuclear programme has grown since September of this year, when Pyongyang claimed a successful test of a hydrogen bomb, and made further threats to detonate another hydrogen bomb in the West Pacific Ocean. Unprecedented exchanges of personal attacks between the US President and the North Korean leader marked another escalation in the war of words. Mr Trump, calling him, 'Rocket man', told the UN that he would totally destroy the North if threatened, while Kim Jong-un called Trump, 'a mentally deranged US dotard'. I had to find the word dotard in the dictionary; I did not know what it really meant.

I think that we now have to squarely ask the question: why did international efforts fail to prevent North Korea from developing a weapons of mass destruction programme? What went wrong in the last 20 years? My answer is as follows.

Firstly, North Korea has invariably been cheating, and it reneged on the agreements it signed, where it promised to freeze and stop its nuclear programme in return for a security guarantee and economic benefits. Thus, North Korea is squarely to blame and should be held responsible.

After experiencing devastation of the country by the massive bombing by the US during the Korean War and being isolated at the end of the Cold War, North Korea set a national goal to develop a nuclear weapons programme, which could guarantee its regime's survival under any circumstances. That was also the supreme and standing order from Kim Il-sung, North Korea's founder, and later this order was enshrined in their constitution. Why then did North Korea come to the negotiating table and close those past deals to denuclearise?

North Korea made three agreements, but those three agreements were not implemented at all. The answer is simple: North Korea needed both the weaponisation of nuclear missile capabilities and certain benefits from outside, a security guarantee, economic assistance, and diplomatic normalisation with the Western countries. North Korea believed that it could achieve both objectives at the same time, continuing the WMD programme, while negotiating for



the necessary benefits. Now North Korea officially pursues nuclear and economic development together, and they declared it as 병진 정책 (“ByungJin JungChaek”) or “two-track policy”.

Secondly, the US, Japan and South Korea, including myself, were deceived by the unprecedented North Korean scam. Later, former Clinton officials said that they knew North Korea was cheating on the HEU programme, and planned to use that intelligence as leverage to keep the agreed framework in place, and the plutonium under lock and key. Cheating is bad, but being cheated is sometimes worse. Having learned from history, the Obama administration barely bothered to restart disarmament talks with the North, instead, it adopted a policy it called “Strategic Patience”, doing nothing, but under that policy they lost time, allowing North Korea to improve its mastery of nuclear and missile technology. On numerous occasions, including during his Presidential campaign, Trump vowed that he was committed to resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. He is on an Asian trip now, he will arrive in Seoul on Tuesday morning I think, so we are watching his lips.

Despite Trump’s tough talk, his choice of options may not be wide open, due to restrictions that are inherent in each of them. Among the potential options that have been raised, I would like to discuss a few of them and their ability to achieve the goal of CVID of the North Korean programme.

First, the military option. Donald Trump has said that any US military option would be devastating to North Korea, but he added that military action is not Washington’s preferred option to deal with North Korea’s ballistic and nuclear weapons programme. Theoretically, if North Korea fired an ICBM targeting US territory, or South Korea, or Japan, the US would make a pre-emptive strike on North Korean military sites and that could lead to North Korea’s massive retaliatory attack on South Korea, or even Japan. This scenario of going to war with North Korea would risk the lives of millions of people across the region. Regardless of how much has been said about possible military action, in reality, this war scenario is the last option to take. President Moon, from my country, and China have openly opposed any war scenarios on the Korean peninsula.

Secondly, South Korea’s nuclear option. As North Korea is closer than ever to full-blown nuclear capability, and prospects for solving this problem seem dim and prolonged, public opinion in South Korea has recently moved toward favouring a scenario in which South Korea also should go nuclear. The conservative political community in Korea strongly insists that the best way to deal with North Korean nuclear provocation and threats is to arm South Korea with its own nuclear weapons or re-deploy US tactical nuclear weapons, which were pulled out in the early 1990s. Should South Korea choose this option, it would also face unbearable difficulties and strong opposition from the international community, including the US, China, Japan, and others.

Thirdly, sanctions plus show of strength, that means, extended deterrence by the US. Ever since North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, North Korea has been under economic and financial sanctions introduced by the UN Security Council and the international community. The Trump administration recently adopted an executive order to deny North Korea’s access to the international banking system. These strengthen the sanctions imposed on North Korea, should be effective and are quite different from the past ones, which failed to affect North Korea’s already shattered economy. In order to thwart North Korea’s continuing provocation, the US and South Korea recently put on maximum military vigilance and conducted joint military drills, with various US strategic resources being deployed on and around the Korean peninsula, including three aircraft-carrier strike groups. In fact, since its last test of a hydrogen bomb, and firing of an ICBM in September, North Korea has maintained silence.

My conclusion is that a nuclear-armed North Korea is not acceptable. Secondly, unless South Korea and the US are attacked, military options are out of consideration. Continuation of stringent sanctions on North Korea plus extended US deterrence and show of strength would be the best option to deter North Korean provocation, which I hope will lead to a CVID resolution of this quagmire. Finally, should North Korea continue on this path, then the international community should be united to bring down the Kim Jong-un regime.

Marcus NOLAND

Thank you very much for setting the table.