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I will move to Dr. Paal. I will ask a very simple question. South Korea's and America's interests do not seem to be fully aligned, at least in the last few weeks, when there was a lot of bickering between Seoul and Washington. How do you see the trajectory of American and South Korean interests as we move forward in this process?

Douglas PAAL

Going directly to your question, as I try to write the story of the last few years in the Korean Peninsula with the emergence of new leaders in North and South Korea, and in China five years ago, and of course President Trump, the main players are all pursuing different objectives, and the storylines intersect in very strange way.

Just a year ago, when we talked on this subject in Marrakesh, it was all about fire and fury; the Trump administration had been enormously successful, despite its anti-diplomatic tendencies, in mounting a huge diplomatic campaign of UN Security Council sanctions, and often unnoticed beyond that, tremendous cooperation to constrain North Korea's diplomatic and economic activities beyond the sanctions around the world. Maximum pressure was being put on North Korea at the end of last year.

Who would have guessed we would be here today after that? I have to give a lot of credit to the South Korean President for his initiatives in this. There were interchanges between North and South Korea; we do not know what happened before 1 January, but on 1 January Kim Jong-un made a speech in which he said his nuclear and missile ambitions were essentially satisfied, and he wanted to take care of the needs of the economy and people of North Korea, together with the assurances of national security through defence measures and nuclear capabilities.

The South Korean leader, Moon Jae-in, was able to return to his faction's, his party's long-term interest in improving relations with North Korea, bringing down the barriers between North and South and enhancing the economic and other interaction with the North. Whatever else took place in North Korea that led to this 1 January speech of having both guns and butter, Moon took the initiative with the Winter Olympics to get the process going. You may remember at that time that US Vice-President Pence arrived at the Olympics and looked stunned, he did not know what to do; we were supposed to be opposed to everything to do with North Korea and everybody was applauding the North Korean teams, they were happy to mix together, and it looked very awkward for the US.

Fast forward to where we are today, and we have gone from a position of absolute opposition to the continuation of the so-called comprehensive, verifiable, irreversible denuclearisation of North Korea to something that has a new name but in reality is an acknowledgement that we have a new member in the club. We will not give them a pass, but like Israel and India, there is a new nuclear power in the world and North Korea is it. The question is now on what terms, what we want them to do to reduce their capacity to make more weapons, whether closing Yongbyon facility down or some others. We have gone from having very unrealistic expectations to having much more modest expectations of what can be achieved through bilateral negotiations.

President Trump is prepared to declare victory, maybe at this next summit, and say they are satisfied that progress has been made, threats have been reduced, and talk about eventual denuclearisation will continue, but that is just a distant horizon, not even a prospect. Trump will have satisfied the American desire to keep the Koreas separate from China, because Cold War strategy requires that we maintain the alliance structure, however unsatisfactory its terms may be, and at the same time he will have a greater ability to pressurise South Korea to take the terms that he dictates for the relationship, and this will have a knock-on effect for Japan as well. Their calculation is that South Korea and Japan do not have an alternative in the shadow of giant China to be an ally of the US, but the US will be able to set the terms.



The South Korean President has been soldiering on in all of this with his own purposes, to answer your question, to establish more and more linkages, trying not to transgress the lines drawn by the UNSC resolutions but increasingly doing so. Therefore, at the end of this situation we have China as a big winner. South Korea's leader is a big winner politically; that may not be sustainable in a democracy. North Korea is a big winner in this, and Trump, at least for the moment, is seen by Americans as having gone from threatening fire and fury to having a love affair with the North Korean leader. It is actually selling with the American people that he has brought peace, so it is a four-way win out of a very messy situation.