

KIM HONG KYUN

Former Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Issues

Steven ERLANGER

I think we will now go to Korea and KIM Hong Kyun, who has been a diplomat for a very long time. He is now out of the game recently, but he has been the Special Representative for the Korean Peninsula Peace dialogue and I am sure he has some interesting things to tell us about what is going on with Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim.

KIM Hong Kyun

Thank you for your kind introduction. I thank the World Policy Conference for having me here today and I thank the audience for staying late to listen to our panel. There is nothing new under the sun it says in The Bible, but I see completely new foreign policy trends being developed in and around the Korean Peninsula. First, the US President is directly dealing with the North Korean leader, including through face-to-face summitry, as well as beautiful love letters. Second, South Korea is on the verge of divorcing with its closest neighbor country, Japan, with which we share common values, common security interests and the ally. Third, the US-China rivalry expands from a trade dispute into a technological competition and now into security and military areas and this spills over into the Korean Peninsula.

Let me elaborate a bit further, first on North Korean nuclear issue. The US-North Korea working level talks on the denuclearization of North Korea finally resumed two weeks ago and quickly broke down without any outcome. Since President Trump had a historic summit meeting with Kim Jong-un of North Korea last year in Singapore, there has been no meaningful progress in the process of denuclearization of North Korea. There is also no agreement on either the definition of what denuclearization of North Korea is nor on a roadmap to achieve its final fully-verified denuclearization. North Korea wants full relief from sanctions in exchange for the dismantlement of Yongbyon nuclear facilities, which is only a part of its huge nuclear weapons program and it does not include its massive nuclear weapons arsenal. President Trump completely immersed himself in the re-election campaign and put North Korea as his biggest diplomatic achievement. President Trump wishes Kim Jong-un to be his loyal lover until his re-election day next year, but Kim Jong-un may think differently. He will think that his star is finally brightening and now he has the upper-hand. At a certain point between now and early next year, Kim Jong-un may threaten President Trump that he will resume ICBM tests unless President Trump agrees to a deal, a good deal for Kim Jong-un, but a bad one for President Trump and for the world. It is anybody's guess whether President Trump will succumb to this threat to save his re-election campaign, or call Kim Jong-un's bluff by re-introducing fire and fury. Either way, I think the goal of denuclearization of North Korea will vanish and North Korea will become a de facto nuclear weapon state.

Second, the South Korea-Japan relationship looks as bad. The relationship of the two countries has always been bumpy, to say the least, but it has never been this bad. In response to Japan's economic retaliation for a historic dispute, the South Korean government terminated the military information sharing agreement with Japan, called GSOMIA. This brought about strong concern and deep disappointment on the part of the United States because the agreement is the symbol of the US-South Korea-Japan trilateral security cooperation and the United States made great efforts to help conclude this agreement in 2016. For now, the chances for an amelioration of the relationship look very dim. Prime Minister Abe seems determined to radically change the nature of Japan's relationship with South Korea once and for all. In South Korea the emotion of the people and the nationalistic sentiment is so intense that it would be very difficult for President Moon Jae-in to find an easy solution. President Trump does not seem to care. He has no appetite to mediate between these two countries. In the meantime, China-Russia coordination regarding the Korean Peninsula becomes even closer and the US-South Korea-Japan trilateral capability to respond to North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile provocations becomes further weaker.

Lastly, US-China rivalry causes new and old headaches to South Korea. The US-China trade dispute negatively affects South Korea by reducing exports, especially to China. The US-China technological war puts South Korea in an awkward position between the two countries, as shown in the case of Huawei, in which the US requested that South



Korean companies did not use 5G communication equipment from Huawei. If the US-China rivalry deteriorates further and bifurcates the global supply chain, South Korea could be in a difficult position to take a side between the two. The US decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty and to deploy land-based intermediate range ballistic missiles in Asia could pose a serious risk for South Korea if the US wants to put these missiles on the South Korean soil.

To conclude, new foreign policy trends are being developed in East Asia, especially surrounding the Korean Peninsula. I think that South Korea needs both a well-thought strategy as well as lots of luck to navigate this uncharted territory safe and sound. Thank you.

Steven ERLANGER

Thank you very much, Mr. Kim. It obviously brings one to ask if the United States is still a reliable, not just partner, but mediator and leader of its alliances? I think that is just part of the challenge that our next speaker Douglas Paal has.