

## Prospects for Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula: Lessons from the Past for a Nuclear-Free Future

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### Abstract

The efforts of the international community to prevent, freeze or stop North Korea's nuclear weapons programme experienced many ups and downs since 1985 when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) joined the NPT.<sup>1</sup> Phases of promising agreements with plans for reintegrating a weapon-free North Korea into the international community were superseded by periods of heightened tensions with bellicose policies of the North Korean government and retaliatory hostile responses and maximum pressure by the US government. Now that the mutual verbal attacks and the combative rhetoric between Chairman Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump has been replaced by a friendlier diplomatic exchange, a new window of opportunity has opened. For negotiations to be successful, it is essential to avoid mistakes of the past, particularly confrontational consultations and all or nothing approaches, and instead build on a step by step action plan that includes not only the nuclear issue but all security concerns and economic cooperation. Whether this new opportunity will lead to a long-lasting and durable solution with a nuclear-free Korean peninsula depends entirely on the political good will of the various parties involved, not just on North Korea.

### A Promising Agreement

1. The following action plan was agreed between the United States (US) and North Korea: The parties reaffirmed their common goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner. The DPRK will shut down and seal the Yongbyon nuclear facility and invite back IAEA inspectors. The DPRK will discuss all its nuclear programmes including its plutonium extraction. The DPRK and the US will start bilateral talks aimed at

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<sup>1</sup> I am using North Korea and DPRK interchangeably in this paper.

resolving pending bilateral issues and moving toward full diplomatic relations. The US will advance the process of terminating sanctions. The parties agreed to cooperate in economic, energy and humanitarian assistance to the DPRK. The agreement was based on a step by step or action for action approach.<sup>2</sup>

2. What a blue print for a nuclear-free Korea! Unfortunately, this was not the deal agreed upon at the Singapore summit of Chairman Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump in June 2018, but an accord of the six-party talks (China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, USA) in 2007. At the time, this 2007 agreement was a breakthrough in the long-lasting nuclear crisis.
3. Instead of speculating what the present US-DPRK summits will lead to, we have to look at what lessons can be learned from this agreement. Why was this landmark agreement possible and why did it eventually fail? Signing such an agreement succeeded because pressure on the main players was mounting: First, the North Korean nuclear test of October 2006 made it absolutely clear to the international community that the nuclear crisis had reached a critical stage. If further nuclear proliferation was to be prevented, immediate action was required. Second, the North Korean government too was under pressure. The sanctions agreed upon in the UN were intended to restrict the import of goods and services by North Korea even further. Importantly, the Chinese government reduced its economic assistance, especially food and oil supplies. Thirdly, the agreement marked a major change of course for the Bush Administration, which at the time had been beset by six years of internal arguments as to whether to negotiate with North Korea or to squeeze the Kim government until it collapsed. The surprising turn-around of the Bush Administration, loosening its maximum pressure policy to negotiate with North Korea came about because other issues required attention; they were bogged down in the conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan.
4. But why did this promising approach eventually fail? From the beginning, the US and the DPRK, the main antagonists in this nuclear conflict, continued their confrontational strategy and had different interpretations of the implementation of the accord. Both sides were expecting and asking for prior concessions from the other side: genuine steps to close down the nuclear programme versus immediate economic and technical assistance. In 2008 the North Korean foreign ministry complained that the US had not removed the country from the list of 'terrorist states'. To negotiate with the North Koreans and to continue treating them as a rogue or terrorist state at the same time was a compromise, trying to somehow consolidate the still ongoing infighting within the Administration. The State Department pursued the softer line vis a vis North Korea whereas the Ministry of Defense under Donald Rumsfeld (until 2006) and Vice President Richard Cheney aimed for the collapse of the regime. Cheney said in 2003: "I have been charged by the President with making sure that none of the tyrannies in the world are negotiated with. We don't negotiate with evil: we defeat it."<sup>3</sup> Although, by

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<sup>2</sup> US Department of State. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80479.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Charles L. Pritchard, *The Korean Peninsula and the Role of Multilateral Talks*, in: *Disarmament Forum (UNIDIR)* (2005) Vol. 2, p. 28.

2007/2008 the State Department's position had prevailed, the Vice President's fundamental opposition had not been given up either.

5. Verification of the agreement was differently interpreted in Washington and Pyongyang. The verification issue got even more controversial when new hardline governments came into power in Japan in 2006 and in South Korea in 2008. Both governments demanded a written verification protocol. President Bush went along and Pyongyang refused.<sup>4</sup> While Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan had visited North Korea in 2002, the Abe government was non-compromising and was particularly concerned about North Korea's missile programme with ballistic missile ranges that could reach Japan. South Korea's President Roh Moo-hyun had also visited North Korea and introduced a so-called "sunshine policy". In contrast, his successor Lee Myung-bak refused any political or economic concessions to the North.
6. At the end of 2008, North Korea denied that it agreed to allow international inspectors to verify the agreement. The controversy on verification ended in a stalemate and the US announced that further oil deliveries would not continue without a verification agreement. In 2009 North Korea insisted that access should be allowed to verify deployment of US nuclear weapons in South Korea, which according to the US and South Korea was never part of the deal. North Korea increased its brinkmanship by claiming that its stock of plutonium had already been weaponized and announced plans for the launch of a communications satellite. This plan was criticised as a breach of a UN Security Council resolution. As a reaction North Korea pronounced the withdrawal from the six-party talks and the annulment of the 2007 agreement. IAEA inspectors and US monitors were ejected from the nuclear facilities in Yongbyon. The UN Security Council responded with financial restrictions on North Korean firms. In May 2009 North Korea conducted its second underground nuclear test and President Bush responded by classifying the North Korean commitments as insufficient.<sup>5</sup>
7. By the end of 2009, the 2007 agreement was dead. One lesson of those two years is that the North Korean government is an extremely complicated party to negotiate with and that accords reached do not necessarily last. But furthermore, the step by step or action for action approach envisaged functioned only in the negative sense. Actions by one side to take its own advantages from the accord were countered by retaliation strategies. The North Korean government certainly had a unique way of interpreting the agreement and has, when pressured, always reacted by polemics and threats. The Bush Administration took a long time to decide on its North Korea strategy and it was never convincing for the North Koreans since they had experienced too often changes of

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<sup>4</sup> Leon V. Sigal, For North Korea, Verifying Requires Reconciling: The Lesson from A Troubled Past—Part II, December 28, 2018, in 38 North, Stimson Center, <https://www.38north.org/2018/12/lsigal122818/>.

<sup>5</sup> Arms Control Association, The six-party talks at a glance, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/6party-talks>.

Washington's North Korea policy. While the US government requested a 'complete, verifiable, and irreversible'<sup>6</sup> stop of the nuclear programme as a precondition for negotiations, the DPRK government wanted to pursue a step-by-step approach with actions on both sides, but most importantly a security guarantee by the United States.<sup>7</sup>

8. The Clinton Administration tried a 'carrot and sticks' policy. The Bush Administration struggled internally about their North Korea strategy and eventually gave up its maximum pressure strategy and tried the Clinton approach. The Obama Administration, over the entire eight-year period, was characterised by non-activities regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons. For a full decade neither the US Administration nor any of the other participants of the six-party talks took a convincing initiative. This period was decisive in advancing North Korea's nuclear programme. Like previous agreements (1994 Agreed Framework, 2005 six-party accord) the promising 2007 deal flopped. It took a decade until the US and North Korea began talks about denuclearization at the meeting of Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un in 2018.
9. The North Korean leadership always wanted to negotiate at eye-level with the United States. However, previous US governments have always refused talks at the bilateral level. It should not be underestimated how important this psychological aspect is for North Korea. The six-party talks were actually a compromise for both North Korea (to negotiate with the US) and the US (not to be responsible for the lack of progress) by actually using the Chinese as the responsible government in the driver's seat.

**Table 1: Time line on conflict over North Korea's nuclear programme<sup>8</sup>**

1985	DPRK ratifies Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
1991	USA removes nuclear weapons from South Korea
1992	Declaration of North and South Korea to denuclearise the peninsula
1993	DPRK threatens NPT withdrawal, later suspension of the withdrawal
1994	US-DPRK Agreed Framework on halting the nuclear programme and sanctions relief
1999	North Korea agrees to suspend testing of long-range missiles
2000	North-South Korean presidential meeting
2002	US-President Bush categorises DPRK as part of 'axis of evil', imposing of sanctions North Korea accused of secret uranium enrichment
2003	North Korea declares withdrawal from NPT Six-party talks (China, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia, USA)
2005	USA freezes North Korean financial funds In six-party talks North Korea declares its readiness to denuclearise

<sup>6</sup> This position has been softened after the Kim-Trump Singapore summit. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa/us-softens-north-korea-approach-as-pompeo-prepares-for-more-nuclear-talks-idUSKBN1JU26E>.

<sup>7</sup> Charles L. Pritchard, the former North Korea special envoy of the Bush Administration, blames his own government for having made a mess in a previous round of negotiations with the Kim government. He is quoted by Nicholas D. Kristof in the New York Times of 27 April 2005 with the words: "They blew it."

<sup>8</sup> Council on Foreign Relations <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/north-korean-nuclear-negotiations>; Hanns Günther Hilpert and Oliver Meier (Eds.), (2018) Facets of the North Korea Conflict, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2018RP12\\_hlp\\_mro\\_eds.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2018RP12_hlp_mro_eds.pdf); Herbert Wulf, Nordkoreas Griff zur Bombe, Studien der Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik: Berlin, Studie 14, June 2006. <http://www.wulf-herbert.de/SWPStudie.pdf>.

2006	First North Korean nuclear test, followed by UN sanctions
2007	Six-party agree to an Action Plan, including halting DPRK nuclear facilities
2008	North Korea declares its fifteen nuclear sites and agrees on verification
2009	North Korea expels IAEA inspectors
2013	North Korea advances nuclear programme
2017	Visit of Kim Jong Un in South Korea
2018	US-DPRK summit in Singapore pledging to pursue peace and complete denuclearisation of Korean peninsula

## Options and Possible Scenarios

10. What are the options for denuclearisation or at least for a halt of the present nuclear programme? The Kim Jong Un government has vigorously pursued a nuclear and missile policy, clearly in violation of UN restrictions. The various UN Security Council resolutions illustrate that none of the major parties involved (except for North Korea) is in favor of these activities. One of the more fundamental reasons for the repeated negotiating deadlock in the past was that the interests of those five countries involved with North Korea are not uniform. While they all want to stop the nuclear programme, the chosen means of doing so vary greatly. The US policy favoured isolating various Kim regimes or even forcibly changing them. China, Russia, and to some extent South Korea, prefer economic and political cooperation. China and Russia only reluctantly pursued the strict sanctions favoured by the US Administration. As long as there is disagreement, North Korea can get away with its policy of flexibly using peace signals, brinkmanship or bellicosity. So, where do we go from here? There appear to be six approaches.<sup>9</sup>

### *Six scenarios*

11. **Wait and see:** This was basically the Obama strategy. But since North Korea has confirmed its determination and continues to improve its nuclear and missile capability this policy seems risky. Simply 'playing for time' is more likely to see the situation deteriorate rather than improve.
12. **Military measures:** Launching a military strike against North Korea – either by trying to deliver a decisive blow against its nuclear weapons facilities or even wider conventional military missions – is unlikely to succeed and more probably would precipitate a major war on the Korean peninsula in which many thousands, possibly millions of innocent Koreans would die.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, President Trump assured his Japanese and South Korean allies that 'all options are on the table'.<sup>11</sup> But bellicosity carries considerable risks.<sup>12</sup> This is exactly what the Kim government tries to tell the international

<sup>9</sup> I detailed some of these scenarios and their repercussions in a 2006 publication. Herbert Wulf, Nordkoreas Griff zur Bombe, Studien der Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik: Berlin, Studie 14, June 2006. <http://www.wulf-herbert.de/SWPStudie.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Paul, Military Options: (Too) Much Risk for (Too) Little Promise, pp. 62-67, in: Günther Hilpert and Oliver Meier (Eds.), (2018) (ibid.).

<sup>11</sup> Statement of President Trump after a North Korean missile launch in August 2017. Quoted in Washington Post, 29 August 2017.

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, The Korean Crisis (II): From Fire and Fury to Freeze-for Freeze, Report 298, Jan.

community by defying all UN resolutions: If we are attacked we are powerful enough to strike at Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

13. **Isolation:** Complete isolation of North Korea by barring all contacts and ending all communication. Given past experience, however, it seems doubtful that the North Korean government would give in to such pressure. Instead, it is more likely that the North Koreans would 'tighten their belts'. Furthermore, this would require full cooperation on sanctions from China. Beijing has always been hesitant to enforce sanctions strictly. They have repeatedly and plausibly proclaimed that it is not willing to tolerate North Korea's nuclear weapons. But China is in a dilemma. It cannot and will not accept the collapse of the North Korean government. Neither a chaotic disintegration nor an orderly North-South Korean unification is a tolerable political perspective in the eyes of the Chinese government.
14. **Maximum pressure:** A strategy that uses a variety of economic, diplomatic, intelligence and possibly even military means to enforce compliant behavior. The Bush Administration has tried this approach between 2001 and 2006 and grudgingly changed its strategies since the results were quite contrary to expectations. Similar to the isolation strategy maximum pressure led to defiant behavior in Pyongyang.
15. **Forced regime change:** How would this be brought about? Ruling out military action, the Bush Administration which had openly favoured this option offered only rhetoric, but no concept for overthrowing 'rogue state' governments. Except for the US government, none of the states involved favours an abrupt collapse of the regime in Pyongyang; the consequences of which would be incalculable, especially for South Korea and China who would have to cope with millions of refugees.
16. **Cooperation and security guarantees:** Given North Korea's dire economic and social conditions, its government has repeatedly announced that it is prepared to stop its nuclear weapons programme and to cooperate with the international community, if US nuclear weapons are removed from South Korea and if it receives security guarantees and economic assistance. During the 1990s the Clinton Administration pursued such a policy which led to the 1994 Agreed Framework. The Clinton strategy ended abruptly with the confrontational strategy of the Bush Administration. Nevertheless, after the advance of the nuclear weapons and missile programme, the Kim Jong Un government changed course to the surprise of all other actors by signaling its willingness to cooperate. Visits of North Koreans to the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea opened the door for visits to the North. North-South relations have improved and if what North Korea says is true, it is worth ascertaining more precisely what the conditions of such cooperation and the price of North Korean compliance would be. A policy of economic cooperation, with 'carrots and sticks' probably offers too little for North Korea to comply. Political confidence building measures, such as a security guarantee, are also needed to overcome the North Koreans' distrust of the United States.

### ***Learning from experience***

17. From North Korea's joining of the NPT in 1985 until today, the negotiations about a freeze of the militarily relevant nuclear activities in that country have seen many ups and downs, including periods with promising breakthroughs that regularly failed. Looking at the international scene regarding the various nuclear programmes outside the club of the Permanent Five (P5) (China, France, Russia, U.K. and USA), there are at least five different types of developments relevant for assessing the possible future of North Korea's nuclear weapons.
18. **The Israel model:** Despite the public knowledge about the existence of Israeli nuclear weapons, all Israeli governments have consistently pursued a policy of 'neither confirm nor deny'. Obviously, due to verified North Korean nuclear tests and its self-declared status as a nuclear power, the Israel model is not a blue print for the future of the North Korean programme.
19. **The Libya model:** The Libyan nuclear issue was resolved in 2003 when Col. M. Gaddafi agreed to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction programmes in return for a reset of its international relations. However, Gaddafi was dissatisfied with the slow process of normalising international relations. Eventually, the deposed Libyan leader was killed in 2011 as a result of internal violent conflicts and after a controversial NATO-led military intervention in Libya. Due to the events in Libya, as well as the killing of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the North Korean leadership considers its nuclear programme as their own life-insurance. Progress towards denuclearisation in North Korea is likely to take place only if the government gets fully fledged guarantees that externally forced regime change is not a policy option.
20. **The India model:** India is not a member of the NPT and has always criticised the NPT as an unjust treaty of nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Since the mid-1970s India has pursued a nuclear weapon programme and with a series of tests in 1998 it was clear that India had a viable military nuclear option. In 2005 the governments of the US and India released a joint statement, lifting a three-decade US moratorium on nuclear trade with India.<sup>13</sup> Although addressed to civil nuclear activities, the US-India rapprochement was a de facto recognition of India as a nuclear power, remaining outside the NPT. Could this be a model for the future of the North Korean nuclear programme? The decisive difference between the situation in India and North Korea is the fact that India is considered internationally as an important and a reliable global player, while the regime in Pyongyang remains the outcast who is not trusted, not even by China. Thus, it seems presently unlikely that the international community would go for a normalisation in its relations with North Korea without de-escalating the conflict and clear signs for denuclearisation.
21. **The Iran model:** In 2015, Iran agreed with the P5 plus Germany/EU to limit Iran's sensitive nuclear activities and allow international inspectors to verify this accord. The

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<sup>13</sup> Bajoria, Jayshree/Plan, Esther 2010: The US-India Nuclear Deal, Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/india/us-india-nuclear-deal/p9663#p3>.

P5+1 agreed in return to lifting the harsh economic sanctions. Although the Trump government is ditching this deal, the negotiating process with Iran nevertheless illustrates that a protracted conflict of interest between the Iranian government and the international community can be hedged. As in the case of North Korea, the Iran negotiations experienced many ups and downs; still it was possible to reach an agreement. A complicating factor for a potential agreement with North Korea along the lines of the Iran accord is the fact that the US government is, with its present policy, opting out of a binding international treaty. This erratic Washington policy raises deep concerns in Pyongyang.

22. **The South Africa model:** South Africa ended its nuclear weapon programme in 1989 by completely dismantling the existing weapons. It was the result of the anticipated end of Apartheid and the change to an African National Congress-led government. As long as such a fundamental change in government is not likely in North Korea, the South Africa model seems to be not a realistic blue print for North Korea's nuclear programme.

## The Genie Is Out of the Bottle - Can We Get It Back In?

### *North Korea's motives*

23. What are the North Korean government's motives for the bellicose approach from 2008 to 2017 that drove the country into ever-increasing isolation, followed by the sudden reversal of policies now? The regime seems to pursue at least three aims with these provocative actions followed by cooperative signals: One is internal, one relates to China and the third to the US. The most obvious reason for this strategy is the survival of the regime. The nuclear policy is meant to strengthen the regime's stability. Officially, the government in Pyongyang aligns its policy along the so-called '*Pyongjin*' line<sup>14</sup> which, unlike the military priority under Kim Jong Un's father Kim Jong Il, is supposed to balance economic and nuclear developments. The signals for cooperation, especially vis a vis South Korea, put even more emphasis on economic cooperation. The government is interested in a reversal of the sharp sanctions and wants to profit from cooperation, aiming at a boost of the economy and thus improving its own stability. But this does not mean that North Korea will surrender its nuclear programme viewed as critical to survival.
24. The second and the third reasons for North Korea's strategy are directed at China and the US: It wants to underscore that it cannot be shoved around, although economically dependent on China. The most recent visits of Kim Jong Un to Beijing indicate that this approach has worked. And it wants to dialogue with the US at eye-level. This has been generously granted by President Trump, in contrast to all his predecessors. So far, the North Korean leadership can afford this precarious balancing act because the complex and complicated US-Chinese relations in the region open up space for North Korean 'elastic' policies. When former US President Obama announced further sanctions

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<sup>14</sup> Alexandre Y. Mansouro, Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Doctrine and Strategy: What Everyone Needs to Know, Nautilus Institute Special Report, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/kim-jong-uns-nuclear-doctrine-and-strategy-what-everyone-needs-to-know/>



against North Korea after the September 2016 nuclear test, the Pyongyang foreign ministry ridiculed them as 'laughable and insignificant'. And indeed, the US has hardly any further sanctions mechanism left since they have already been pushed to the limit. Whether technology exports, food supplies, control of North Korean shipping routes, travel possibilities for political, military and economic leaders or international financial transactions, all of these have been already reduced to an absolute minimum. The master key for a possible further economic squeeze of North Korea lies in Beijing and not in Washington.

25. Sanctions and isolation have their effects but also limits. Maximum pressure strategies can backfire. Wait and see policies have allowed dangerous proliferation. Military options are not realistic. Externally forced regime change is wishful thinking. There is one important lesson that the North Korean situation teaches us: Even with hostile regimes the international community needs to negotiate directly.

### ***The European Union as a mediator?***

26. Instead of just leaving it up to the members of the six-party talks, the EU could play its part in finding a solution. The negotiations with Iran have shown that the EU can play an important moderating role. As a main player in international politics and an important economic power, there is a real opportunity for the EU to take a lead by engaging North Korea in direct dialogue. Such a policy, of course, requires close cooperation with the major players (the six-party talks members), especially the United States and China.
27. In both its European Security Strategy and its Strategy Against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the EU has recognised its responsibility to act in global crises and to address proliferation problems.<sup>15</sup> Why is it not acting accordingly in the case of North Korea even though North Korea is specifically mentioned in the Security Strategy? The EU should get involved, not the least because it will have to foot part of the bill even if it is others who resolve the problem.
28. The EU's present 'wait and see' policy is surprising, given its past performance. Back in 1998 the EU began an intensive political dialogue with North Korea and most EU countries opened diplomatic relations with the country in 2001. The EU contributed funds to improve North Korea's energy supplies and engaged in the 1994 Agreed Framework contributions.
29. Along with the UN sanctions EU governments have resisted further dialogue. The EU's inaction is even more difficult to explain when one considers its lack of 'historical baggage' in the region. European countries neither have a colonial past in Korea, nor did they play a prominent role in the Korean War, nor does the EU have a central strategic

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<sup>15</sup> European Union, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, June 2016 [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf);  
European Union Weapons of Mass Destruction Strategy, December 2008), [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2008/december/tradoc\\_141740.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2008/december/tradoc_141740.pdf)

interest in the region, nor vested interests. On the contrary, Poland, the Czech Republic/Slovakia, Sweden and Hungary played (and still play) a role as members of the United Nations Military Armistice Commission of Korea. Thus, conditions for a constructive EU role are positive.

### ***A phased approach and a plan of action***

30. Whatever format for negotiations will be found (bilateral North-South, bilateral US-North Korean, trilateral US-North-South Korean, revived six-party talks, six-party talks plus EU, or under the auspices of the UN) the process will be complicated and lengthy. The nuclear weapons cannot be removed in a quick and simple deal, ignoring all other issues involved. A cautious and phased process is most promising, a process that recognises the historical legacies and current strategic interests: Japan's colonial past in Korea, the Korean war, the partition of the country, the regional interests of neighbouring countries, the US-Chinese geopolitical and strategic interests, volatile security situations etc. This process goes way beyond a deal on nuclear weapons.
31. Kim Jong Un's change of policy and Donald Trump's reaction, after years of stalemate and months of mutual verbal attacks, has opened up a window of opportunity for new negotiations. This informal halt of the past provocations is a first step towards a more sustainable agreement. Given the urgency of solving the nuclear issue, it is not sensible to begin with pre-conditions before the negotiations. This has always been the position of the Bush Administration. But, as we know, this was not successful. Negotiating a deal to stop the North Korean bomb and reverse its nuclear and missile programme is not to 'kowtow' to Pyongyang and negotiating with an unfriendly government is not appeasement: It is the only viable option to prevent further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and particularly the erosion of the NPT.
32. A freeze-for-freeze,<sup>16</sup> or more ambitious an action-for-action, plan is needed for a sustainable solution – one that has precise benchmarks against which a reversal of North Korea's nuclear policy is measured, but that also allows for regional cooperation, confidence building and multilateralism. To succeed, such an action plan will also need to offer North Korea substantial economic assistance and security guarantees. Such a process could develop in three phases, encompassing the nuclear and missile programme as well as the areas of security and economics. Presently, the DPRK has to understand that the UN mandated sanctions will remain strictly in place until serious negotiations get under way.
33. During a first phase of *negotiations* the freeze of the North Korean nuclear and missile programme is the centrepiece. In return for a halt of the programme, North Korea should be granted legally-binding security guarantees. It is vital that the US is willing to take such a step. President Trump's reactions during and after the June 2018 Singapore summit seem to indicate this willingness. At the economic level those areas of prime importance for North Korea (energy, infrastructure and food supplies) should be on the negotiation table.

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<sup>16</sup> The International Crisis Group (*ibid*) calls it a freeze-for-freeze approach.

**Table 2. A possible action plan**

<b>Phase 1: Negotiations</b>	Nuclear Programme Security Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiations about the halt of all relevant nuclear programmes and halt of missile development</li> <li>• Negotiations about security guarantees, possibly unilateral stop of US-South Korean manoeuvres</li> <li>• Gradual removal of sanctions and commitment for the supply of technology, food and energy</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2: Implementation</b>	Nuclear Programme Security Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Korean membership in the NPT, IAEA inspections, freezing of all relevant nuclear programmes</li> <li>• Confidence building measures, reduction of conventional forces and legally binding treaties about security on the Korean peninsula</li> <li>• Full removal of sanctions, supply of oil, food, electricity, technology, cooperation in infrastructure and agriculture</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3: Finalisation</b>	Nuclear Programme Security Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete dismantlement of all militarily relevant nuclear facilities, removal of all weapon grade material in North Korea and removal of all US nuclear weapons from the region.</li> <li>• Demilitarisation of the North-South border, negotiations about the future political order on the peninsula</li> <li>• Normalisation of all economic relations</li> </ul>

34. The second phase of *implementation* will require North Korea to re-enter the NPT, freeze all relevant nuclear programmes and allow intrusive inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency. At the security level, confidence building measures, such as a reduction of conventional forces in the North and the South and a halt of US-South Korean military exercises, are required as well as legally binding treaties about security on the Korean peninsula. At the economic level cooperation is needed, including lifting of sanctions by the international community. Reconstruction of the power grid and cooperation in infrastructure projects and agriculture would have priority.
35. In the third phase of *finalisation* all military relevant nuclear technology will be dismantled in North Korea and the weapon-grade material will be removed from the country. The North-South border will be demilitarised and negotiations about the future political order of the divided Korean peninsula should start. This requires the removal of all US nuclear weapons from the region. At the economic level cooperation will be sustained on the basis of legally-binding contracts. All economic relations will be normalised.

## Conclusion

36. Despite the cautious signals for a possible new and promising round of negotiations, aiming at denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, the main problem, North Korea's

nuclear weapons, remains unresolved. Despite President Trump's commitment to 'provide security guarantees to the DPRK', and Chairman Kim Jong Un's reaffirmation of his 'firm commitment to complete denuclearisation' of the Korean peninsula,<sup>17</sup> neither is the kind of 'security guarantees' spelled out nor is what is meant by 'denuclearisation' defined. This is the task for negotiations, that will most likely be long-term, complicated and probably not without disappointments since many controversial issues still need to be resolved.

37. The North Korean government eventually got what they have been begging for over several decades: to negotiate with the US at eye-level. Judgment about North Korea's motives and internal politics must remain speculative since very little information about the isolated regime is available. In the past, North Korea has used its nuclear programme, including its willingness to negotiate the weapons away, for different reasons.
38. First, as a deterrent. North Korean officials have repeatedly emphasised that they feel 'cornered' by US pressure. This scenario presumes that North Korea never took seriously the negotiations and its international commitments under the NPT as well as the various rounds of negotiations.
39. Second, nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip: This assumes the North Korean government is prepared to stop its nuclear programme if it gets compensated by security guarantees and economic assistance and cooperation.
40. Third, the nuclear weapons as life-insurance for the regime: Whether the DPRK government will sacrifice this option is an open question, since the programme is far advanced by now. But this question is key to all future negotiations.
41. Fourth, the pursuit of parallel options: The DPRK government pursues parallel options of building up its nuclear and missile programme while negotiating its complete dismantlement at the same time. This seems a plausible scenario as long as the Kim government feels threatened.
42. Denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, particularly the stop on North Korea's nuclear weapon programme, can be seen as the test for the future viability of the NPT and the role of the UN as the guardian of arms control treaties. The policy of North Korea demonstrates a strong ambition to create a nuclear and a long-range missile programme. But at the same time, the Kim government has always maintained that it continues to pursue a policy of complete denuclearisation and that it is ready to negotiate the stop on its programme. Will North Korea really be prompted to give up its nuclear weapons and agree to dismantle all nuclear facilities with relevance for military use? North Korea is well-known for driving a hard bargaining position: What will the economic price tag be for the international community?

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/>

## The Author

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