



**DATE:** September 26, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Weighing Bad Options: Past Diplomacy with North Korea and Alliance Options | Carnegie Endowment for International Peace | US-Japan Research Institute

**MAIN POINTS:**

- With continued development of North Korean missiles and nuclear weapons, all must recognize the serious threat posed by North Korea.
- North Korea's fear of dismal precedents of dictators who surrendered nuclear power and accelerated development of nuclear power will prevent North Korea from giving up nuclear weapons.
- It is essential to involve China to exert more pressure on North Korea, as China is growing increasingly impatient with behaviors of North Korea.
- US and allies must clearly communicate to North Korea the unyielding objective of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula while engaging in an open discussion with China to resolve its concern of involvement in the North Korea nuclear problem.

The event can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/hUly509U60>, accessed 09/19/2017.

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**EVENT OVERVIEW**

**Date:** Monday, September 18, 2017

**Time:** 2:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**Location:** Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20036

**Attendees:**

**Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK)**  
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## HRNK Report

- **Christopher Hill**, Dean, Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver
  - **Mitoji Yabunaka**, Professor, Ritsumeikan University and Osaka University
  - **Keiji Nakatsuji**, Professor, Ritsumeikan University
  - **Douglas H. Paal**, Vice President, Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
  - **James L. Schoff**, Moderator, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Asia Program
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## SUMMARY

### Introduction

Today as Japanese citizens unfortunately grow accustomed to missile warning sirens and text messages, it is worth remembering that a decade ago this month the second phase actions in the six-party talks were jointly decided for implementing North Korean denuclearization in exchange for diplomatic normalization and economic cooperation. A year later, however, the six-party talks collapsed. This was the last major diplomatic initiatives to address the so-called North Korea problem. Two former diplomats who were deeply involved in this past dialogue with North Korea and who remain active scholars in the region, Chris Hill and Mitoji Yabunaka, joined the panel and reflected on events a decade ago and put them into present context, which

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involves new leaders, new technology, and new balances of power in the region. If we tried to launch a diplomatic surge with North Korea, how might we go about it, and what should we keep in mind?

**Christopher Hill: Where we were, where we are at, and where we should go**

There has been a sense of cynicism that crept into this process of diplomacy with North Korea, a sense that nothing can and will work. During the six-party talk ten years ago, many felt that any kind of negotiation with North Korea was illusory. US scholars and politicians should come together and discuss to dispel such belief because it sends a dangerous message to the North Korean hardliners – that Americans are convinced that North Koreans will never give up nuclear weapons. Some view that North Korea is just trying to be taken seriously by obtaining a nuclear weapon, that North Korea can easily be contained. US needs to recognize that this is a much more serious problem because we are seeing North Korean missiles that are no longer just “test versions” of missiles. It is clear that they have a production process. North Koreans are seeking to somehow decouple the US from the Korean Peninsula, and perhaps more broadly, from Northeast Asia. In case North Korea invades South Korea – which happened before – North Korea will warn US to not intervene by threatening to hold one of American cities at risk of nuclear attack. At that point, the American president has strong incentive to blink on South Korea and decide that South Koreans can handle this themselves. Although it may be a fanciful idea, the probability is indeed greater than zero.

Several things we need to do is to reassure our allies, be willing to negotiate, and work with China. First, US must reassure allies such as South Korea and Japan that they will be not blinked on. Second, US unwillingness to negotiate will push North Korea to have nuclear weapons. The third element is the most critical, and that is working with China. We need to have a serious sit-down discussion with the Chinese instead of tweeting and giving telephone calls. We need a real effort to understand each other and resolve concerns China may have in US involvement in North Korea issue, such as security problem and its effect on internal politics of China. Some argue that we should have a pre-emptive strike against North Korea. This would be one of the most difficult options because we would not get all their nuclear materials and we will need to convince South Koreans to approve of such contingent military attack.

**Mitoji Yabunaka: Japanese concern over North Korea problem**

While the six-party talks is often evaluated as a failure, the past circumstances granted hopeful outcomes at the time. In 2003, North Korea committed to abandon all nuclear weapons. One year prior to that 2005, the joint statement accompanied Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi who went

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to Pyongyang for the second time. Kim Jong-il explicitly stated to Prime Minister Koizumi that while North Korea believes it is useless to hold nuclear weapons, it is yet deemed necessary to withstand hostile American policy. They agreed to abandon all nuclear weapons in 2005. And yet, one year after that North Korea conducted a nuke test. Financial sanctions from the international community followed. Situation worsened after Kim Jong-un succeeded his father and became determined to go for nuclear and missile development. His need for nuclear weapon as a foundation to legitimacy against rising coups in North Korea and the unfavorable outcome of Qaddafi who gave up nuclear power in Libya both provide strong incentives for Kim Jong-un to continue his pursuit.

There are three options to deal with North Korea: military, sanctions, and negotiation. It is impossible to consider military option because their missiles are so much more advanced that retaliation is possible. As for sanctions, the UNSC resolutions are encouraging. But unfortunately, it is doubted whether it is enough to stop North Korean ambition since it falls short of a total ban or total embargo of oil and trade that will significantly deter North Korea. And China would not be willing to go too far due to unpredictable outcomes such as potential refugee problems, military action along the border, etc. The third option is to negotiate a resolution based upon sanctions after sanctions. Nonetheless, Japan has concern over this option because US may settle for freezing of the nuclear weapon instead of complete denuclearization, which is riskier for Japan that is already within the range of North Korean missiles. Therefore, the most important thing is to make objective aim very clear –denuclearization. North Korea is seeking to negotiate with US alone so they can elevate their status and become equal partner with US. President Trump might be interest in having that sort of bilateral talks instead of six-country talk. However, Japan and South Korea must be involved as key players. We need to push China to become more involved to add weight to our diplomacy efforts by persuading them that acquiescing to North Korean nuclear buildup will lead to open road for proliferation in East Asia. It is a difficult road, but a new sense of emergency and crisis must unite all countries to deter North Korea.

**Keiji Nakatsuji: A View from Tokyo**

First, I want to touch upon the petroleum embargo. In 1941, US imposed petroleum embargo against Japan. Prime Minister Tojo along with other military leaders knew that within half a year or so a Japanese military would become inactive. So, Japan decided to start war with the US. In that short period, the Japanese decision may not be so “irrational” as it decided to take extreme measures in response to extreme circumstances. Petroleum embargo with North Korea is also a critical decision that requires caution. The restraining attitude of Russia and China in this matter

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is appreciated.

Korean War started June 25th, 1950. Three days later, Seoul fell down. This is the problem of military option. This is no Syrian missile shooting case at all. A question to consider is, at what extent does President Trump understand geographical nearness of Seoul to the conflict? And Kim Jong-un seems to be learning lessons historical lessons, from the case of Saddam Hussein or Qaddafi. So, this is another case of learning history wrongly.

### **Douglas H. Paal: Chinese Position on North Korea Issue**

Nuclear capabilities are a fundamental element of survival for North Korea. The death of Muammar Qaddafi in the desert after surrendering his nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare capabilities to international community and US causes North Korea to fear giving up weapons. Nuclear testing has been increasingly successful with the missiles and the nuclear weapons, it is even more difficult for North Koreans to give up. This combination of the fear factor and the having it almost in your hands factors really make North Korea problem a tough one.

Furthermore, although we have not seen real shift in Chinese position toward putting extreme pressure on North Korea, credible Chinese scholars who retain influence in government circles are increasingly saying North Korea is now fundamentally threatening Chinese interests with its behavior. For example, the approximate thermonuclear test along the Chinese borders could go wrong that could hurt Chinese, pollute the atmosphere, etc. The war on the Korean Peninsula would fundamentally endanger Chinese interests due to fear of uncontrollable refugee flows and the costly need to intervene to protect the nuclear weapons from being falling into the hands of reckless non-state parties. China in the latest two resolutions of the UNSC certainly have gone further than they have before. Yet China will naturally avoid legally committing itself to imposing sanctions to have maximum flexibility.

It is also significant to note that we are in the period leading up to the 19th Party Congress in China. China wants to maintain stability and get smoothly through the 19th Party Congress without any exogenous factors emerging. A lot of work between now and sometime after the 19th Party Congress needs to be done so that we can communicate positions of the US with respect to containment and deterrence of North Korea. The UN General Assembly that is meeting this week is a fantastic opportunity to do that kind of work.

**Q&A**

**Q (Schoff):** I wanted to ask in general, what do you think is a productive balance of all these different types of tools – diplomatic tools – to try to affect North Korean calculus?

**A (Nakatsuji):** To have productive negotiations with North Korea, you need to make persistent, consistent, and clear expression of your position. For example, in 2003, everyone said that North Korea would never come to the six-party talks. However, North Korea joined the negotiation table when they saw US President Bush attacking Iraq at that time. You have to send a very coherent, strong message to North Korea. Mixed messages such as a tweet about “fire and fury” along with a remark saying “I’m honored to meet Kim Jong-un” from the White House may be confusing to North Korea.

**A (Hill):** I think that’s right. What you’re trying to say to them is that we’re not going to live with a nuclear North Korea. We just cannot accept that. So, we are going to walk away from this. We’re going to continue to come after you. I remember only half-joking if you open a bank account on the moon we’ll go back to the moon and shut it down. And in short, trying to make the point that if you think your security is better with nuclear weapons, think again. And I think sharpening the choices for them and making them understand that this is not a cost-free endeavor is important. They need to be clear that they are setting on a course. It’s not just isolation. You know, that doesn’t seem to be their worst nightmare, but we will in effect go after you wherever we can and never give you a night’s sleep. That’s another message. I think it is an extremely mixed and dangerous message to suggest that somehow there’s some level of nuclear North Korea that we can accept. And in that regard, I would call people’s attention to some of the things that North Korea has said of late, including to Japan suggesting that the geography notwithstanding, they can somehow imagine a future without Japan, namely, “sinking Japanese islands” now. This is sort of stuff that prize fighters say before a fight. But those are pretty serious words. So, I would simply caution people on the notion that somehow once North Korea obtains a couple of nuclear weapons this thing will all quiet down. I don’t see the evidence to support that. For that reason, I think we need to be very clear about our concerns.

**Q (Schoff):** That’s a matter also of timing in terms of as long as the ultimate destination is denuclearization. And I was enjoying reading your book outpost Chris (Hill), and I had not realized that you had raised the issue of an “interest section” back in 2007. And I gathered from the way you wrote it with the approval of President Bush all for that but the North Korea was not interested?

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**A (Hill):** It was interesting because the Chinese were pushing that because they really felt the interest section worked very well after the Shanghai Accords. They would also often describe North Korea as China several decades ago. I'm not sure if that's particularly accurate, but they were taught about that. They really pushed the idea of an interest section. So, I kind of went back to Washington, people kind of looked at me like I was some kind of crazy accommodationist. I think it'd be a nice thing to offer and if we could be in that position I think we could show that we're prepared to move ahead. So, finally I had to go right up to the president. Okay, we can offer that. So, I offered for North Korea, and they responded, "Are you kidding? We have no interest in an interest section." So, it didn't really get anywhere. One other message I gave to them pretty consistently, which was with denuclearization, is that everything's possible. They always wanted us to halt the exercises. And I always said, "Look, my only regret about exercises is we didn't have them in the spring of 1950." But I did tell them that in the context of denuclearization, I can imagine mutual pullbacks, mutual confidence building measures on conventional forces. I told them in the context of denuclearization, we can look at everything. But lacking denuclearization, we frankly can't look at much of anything.

**Q (Joseph Bosco):** Joe Bosco. Formerly with the Defense Department. A question for ambassador Hill. I'd like to play out the scenario, ambassador, that you laid out – that North Korea's motivation is either to use a nuclear shield for the purpose of aggression against the South or to decouple the US from the alliance system. You indicated such situation would be a calamity for the international strategic position around the world. My question to you is, what would China's view of that outcome be? Wouldn't that also serve China's interest? And hasn't the North Korean program been serving China's interests making it posed as the responsible stakeholder and the good-faith negotiator, meanwhile distracting the US diplomatically in every other way?

**A (Hill):** I think I will defer to my colleague Doug Paal on Chinese interests, but I will say I don't think there's a consensus within China on this issue of North Korea. And I think that failure to develop a consensus has been harmful, really, to China's role. And maybe after this 19th Party Congress there will be more of a consensus, but I don't think there is a consensus. I would say there is a body of opinion especially in China's security system, and if Steve Bannon thinks we have a deep stake he ought to get a load of what goes on in China. But you know, among those 20 million policemen in China, I think there's a view that somehow US troops on the Korean Peninsula are bigger threat than North Korean mischief. I think that exists. I think it's less prevalent in think tanks and less prevalent frankly in more senior levels. But I think it's very much there as a view, and I think to your point, when China and Russia joined with a freeze-for-freeze proposal, suggesting they freeze their tests – which I think frankly freezing tests is not

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going to freeze that nuclear program – in return for our freezing exercises, if I were a North Korean I would have gladly accepted that. So, I think that does kind of represent what you're addressing. But I'll close by saying if we solve this and we turn around to see how do we solve it, I think it's very unlikely that we would have or will have solved it without cooperation with China. And to the extent what we can solve it, I think we will probably find that working with China not just with tweets, but I mean with really serious effort with China was one of the main agreements, main elements ingredients in our having solved it. So, I just US China relationship is one I would call too big to fail, and I think we just have to keep at them and see what we can get out of it.

**A (Paal):** At the most generous level taking up from Christopher's comment on solving the problem, Chinese generally don't see problems to be solved. They see problems to be dealt with, to be handled. They've got 14 untrusting neighbors on the land borders of China. And they know they're not going to solve the India, and they're not going to solve the others. They're just going to deal with them what may come. So, they don't have the same impetus that Americans tend to jump in and try to solve things. Secondly, you're right, there's a very deeply held body of opinion that it's in China's interest to keep the US bogged down on the Korean Peninsula, not able to expand its influence tying down resources that cannot be focused on China. I think there's some erosion in this view, partly due to the very important decision to put the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system into South Korea. They've actually turned this issue around in South Korea where the popular polls were showing real affection growing for China and declining for the US. That's now been really reversed by China's heavy-handed approach. And I think a lot of the people who I mentioned earlier, the Chinese commentators, who have credibility, are starting to say this is hurting Chinese interest, not just what I mentioned which is potential radiation damage to Chinese or the refugee flows, but also reputational damage, since China is aligning itself with the wrong end of history in North Korea and not with South Korea which has a great future. The decisions have not been made, and I think before the 19th Party Congress, it would be a decision they don't want to make. But comparable to our continued American focus on the Middle East – and we've got a lot of cabinet and senior people now we're all focused on the Middle East – that suits China's long-term interests. It keeps us from focusing on China to focus on these area where China doesn't have a dog in the fight.

**Q (Michael D. Mossetig):** Mike Mossetig, PBS online news hour. Given that these have been multilateral negotiations, how do you assess the role of South Korea? You've dealt with liberal governments, conservative governments, and now we have a liberal government that's having to act and talk like it's a conservative government. How does all this parse out?

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**A (Nakatsuji):** From my view point, certainly we used to have and we still have Japan-US-ROK trilateral mechanism and consolidating oppositions' very family, and to counter with whatever occasions to go against North Korea, or even with China and Russia. Now, of course, as you say that South Koreans' positions may differ from time to time from president to president. But I think that I, myself, certainly even today, as they are saying a bit differently from Japan or a bit different from the US, that's also an asset. We can unite together. And I'm hopeful for that matter because they have their own reasons to say this and that. And there are many generations, the people in South Korea who have a different view: younger generations and older generations. But as a whole, I think that I'm confident that we can overcome any differences. Also, Japan, South Korea and China have a kind of concerted mechanism. We have to use it. And so, I think I don't mind the different views from South Korea, and we can kind of create a unified position even within that sort of differences.

**A (Hill):** By the way, when we go from one administration to another, it's not exactly seamless either. I mean, we've had our problems getting continuity. So, I think the South Koreans have done okay.

**A (Paal):** I would just add on this. I think there's a role with these progressive governments in South Korea for the good cop and bad cop on relationship with North Korea. You know, US can stand tough and other allies can be tough with us, but the South Koreans will have their interests in humanitarian relief and in various kinds of economic exchanges. So long as they're firm with us on the security side, there ought to be room for them to explore what might be available through the various means they've had over the decades, none of which has led us to Nirvana but the ability to let off steam from time to time. Now, having said that, I think this particular government came into office not equipped to do that because they have won the popular vote for presidency but they're far behind in the National Assembly, and their immediate priority is of domestic. And they're going to focus on getting the next elections in June to raise their level of support in the assembly, and to that end are focused primarily on domestic reforms, not on foreign policy. This means they tend to do whatever we ask them to do because they want to just keep that from the biggest source of trouble.

**A (Yabunaka):** I guess many of you heard our Prime Minister Abe that he's about to implement another general election, maybe taking advantage of a very extreme posture of Kim Jong-un. And we have discussed the decoupling possibility of our alliance system, but it seems Kim Jong-un is connecting us. And the Prime Minister Abe has been taking advantage of North Korea issue to implement and to realize his nationalistic policies last ten years or so. And this time alone, Kim Jong-un is doing too much so that we are having not perfect but still very

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important coalition among five other powers including China I think.

**A (Hill):** Now I think managing the alliance partners is perhaps an even greater task than managing the relationship with China. And so, I think we need to be careful, especially how we manage South Korea through a trend, through internal transitions. And I think Doug is quite right, this is about internal politics in South Korea, and I would start by suggesting that it's not very helpful to call the South Koreans appeasers.

**Q (Zhong Hua Lu):** Zhong Hua Lu from South China Morning Post. From the US, I mean White House of State Department, we are hearing a lot about talking about the sticks but not carrots. Instead, the US said the North Korean needed to do more first as a precondition to going back to negotiating table. So, I wonder if, is it time for US to make some offer to the North some carrots, and if so, what kind of carrots? What kind of offer could this administration offer? And given that in the UNSC it is already a lot of sanctions on oil supply or any other seafood or textile, is there enough room for US to make such offer in order to get North Korea back to the negotiating table?

**A (Hill):** First of all, North Korea agreed to denuclearize. They didn't just agree to it to the US, they agreed to it with all the five partners of the six parties. They agreed to a complete denuclearization of their country. Four years later, they said tried to say nope, we no longer agree to it. So, what the US has asked for is that North Korea, if to rejoin the talks, they should rejoin the talks on the basis of what the talks are. And the purpose of the talks it's not just to talk. It's to have the denuclearization as we politely said of the Korean Peninsula. So, that is not a precondition. The alternative is to just have talks and no sense of what they think the purpose of the talks are. And sometimes we hear the North Korean say, well they would like to have talks at the base of one nuclear country to another. Well, that doesn't really work for what we're what we have in mind. So, I don't call this a precondition. I just call this North Korea's case of not acknowledging what it previously agreed. But let's say we have a situation where North Korea does want to get back to talks on the basis of denuclearization, but they don't want to say that, they just want to simply reverse themselves and agree to something they haven't agreed to in years. That's what talks about talks are about. That's how you sit down and say okay, we understand we're going meet next Tuesday, you will reaffirm your position, but by the end of the week by certain dates, you will have an agreement on North Korea rejoining the talks on the basis of the purpose of the talks. I mean, you can work this stuff out, but what I want to emphasize is North Korea has shown zero interest in talks now. They have continued to say that they will not have talks about denuclearization. In fact, they even put in their constitution that they are a nuclear weapons state. So, this is a bit of a problem for us. And I don't think we're to

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blame for the fact that they refused to join disarmament talks. So, again, I look at my career diplomat, and I always support talks. But I think we need to be realistic about the purpose of the talks. And if it's something like look, we'll denuclearize, but we need some carrots from, we need some indication that you're trying to do something positive rather than all negative, because we don't want to say we're denuclearizing because of all these sanctions you've taken. Again, we can work that out, but the problem is they have not started that conversation at all.

**A (Nakatsuji):** This is not a time to show any kind of carrots because, as you know, North Korea just went for the nuke test, launching missiles, and took provocative actions after provocative actions. And then to show them carrots? It's not the time to do so. So, show our readiness or seriousness, and then finally, they come to the table then certainly many negotiations can take place.

**Q (Florence):** Florence, Global America Business Institute. My question is sort of a follow-up of the previous question. I understand the consequences of accepting nuclear North. However, six-party talks about ten years ago was about CBID, and without completely verifiable irreversible denuclearization of North Korea. It didn't work. Meanwhile, North Korea developed more advanced program. Wouldn't it be more difficult to give up nuclear program when you have more advanced and more powerful program? And I also understand that when we approach North Korea there should be a constant unison, unified voice. Is it a dialogue first, or denuclearization first? Which one is first? They're two very different processes that will bring in North Korea to the table.

**A (Hill):** First of all, I don't think we have a chicken and egg problem of dialogue first or denuclearization first. That's what talks about talks could deal with. But I think we need to be very clear. North Korea decided not to give us any kind of verification in the regime in 2008. They gave us a declaration which we felt was incomplete, but we accepted it, with understanding we needed verification which is some kind of international standard. And they refused to give us any verification. Now, was this because they didn't want to deal with the Bush administration anymore, and deal with Obama administration? Whatever. They did not give us any verification. In the meantime, they continued to develop weapons. Very serious program has continued. And then to make the argument "we continued to make nuclear weapons, and now it's kind of hard to give them up since we worked so hard on this" is kind of an argument that I have a little trouble with my six-year-old making that argument, let alone a country. So, again, if they want to get out of the issue that they've put themselves into, there are plenty of channels. They know our telephone number. And I want to emphasize something that Mr. Yabunaka said, that in the earlier time when the US alone dealt with North Korea, no one else had a role. That's over. I

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mean, true, you know, Japan needs to be there, equal party to the talks, South Korea, Russia too, they have a border there. And so, I think it's very important that we all be there. Sometimes when you can't make any progress, you say well, we have six-party talks, but maybe it should be seven parties or 66 parties or whatever. But the issue is that North Korea has refused to engage in these negotiations, and that is the problem we're facing.

**A (Yabunaka):** Of course, 2010 and today, they have developed more missiles and nuclear. Also in 2010 we didn't have this kind of sanctions. 90 percent of the trade is cut. This kind of an international coordination has not taken place at that time. So, one way or another, we have to keep working on that. And by the way, that was before Qaddafi. So, this whole argument that we looked at Qaddafi and we felt bad about that, I don't think quite just holds up to the time sequence.

*Report by: Ayoung Kang, Research Intern*