



**DATE:** October 5, 2017

**SUBJECT:** North Korea and the Nuclear Future | George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government

**MAIN POINTS:**

- Although the issue has indeed developed to a greater degree in recent months, this escalation of North Korean nuclear missile crisis is not a drastic strategic game changer for US.
- North Korea's main goal in having nuclear capabilities is to deter anyone from attacking the country and preserve the system of governance by the Kim regime.
- The most logical option to take as of now is the policy of "Massive Pressure," whereby the US and other states can pressure NK away from their belligerency through various sanctions and diplomatic compromises.
- In the end, rationality and deterrence against preventing an attack will prevail in solving NK nuclear problem.
- In order to reassure US allies and reaffirm US reliability, denuclearization of NK should be the primary goal.

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**EVENT OVERVIEW**

**Date:** Friday, September 29, 2017

**Time:** 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

**Location:** George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government, Hazel Hall 120 — 3351 Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22201

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**Attendees:**

- **Mark Fitzpatrick**, Executive Director of International Institute for Strategic Studies-Americas (IISS-Americas) and head of the IISS Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Policy Programme
- **Ellen Laipson**, Director of the International Security program at the Schar School of Government and Public Policy at George Mason University

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**SUMMARY**

Ellen Laipson, Director of the International Security program at the Schar School of Government and Public Policy at George Mason University began by welcoming the audience, comprised of about sixty people. Laipson briefly spoke about the objectives of the Schar School and introduced the event topic, the recent North Korean nuclear crisis and its implications for the global community as well as the Korean peninsula. Afterwards, Laipson turned the time over for the distinguished speaker, Mark Fitzpatrick.

Fitzpatrick began by placing his credentials for the topic of concern and his long years of dealing with the issue of NK. He then proceeded to say that he was hesitant to label the NK nuclear crisis as a strategic game changer for US. His reasoning was:

1. NK nuclear crisis is not a new threat to US and its allies; the country already had the capability to reign nuke capability for the last several years.
2. US had the responsibility to protect not only the American citizens and soldiers living abroad in threatened countries—South Korea and Japan—but also the citizens of its allied countries as well.
3. NK's primary objective of developing nuclear ICBMs is to hold US cities at risk so that US will be reluctant to come to the aid of NE Asian allies, should they be threatened also. It wants to be able to threaten South Korea and hold off US in order to deter anyone from attacking the country and preserve the system of governance by the Kim regime.

Regarding the concerns that NK wants to reunify the Korean peninsula under its rule, Fitzpatrick stated that this is not one of NK's primary goals; he thinks that NK knows that it cannot attack South Korea without a great consequential cost. He added that while it is possible that NK can

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cause a lot of damage, NK won't be able succeed in overtaking SK as it is vastly inferior in comparison to the military capabilities of US and SK. Instead, he greatly weighed upon the theory that NK's utmost intent is regime survival.

Fitzpatrick believed that US shouldn't play into NK's game and be fended off because of the nuclear threat. He said that POTUS Trump's speech to the UN, although it had its faults, had a very important component: "Any attack on US or its allies will be met with destruction." This, Fitzpatrick added, was significant because it reassured US allies—South Korea and Japan—of its strength and respective responsibility to their security. This kind of reassurance can deter NK from attacking anyone and it can support the greater goals of non-proliferation. He mentioned his book, *Asia's Latent Nuclear Powers*, discussing about how Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea all have the capability to build nuclear arsenals in terms of their existing nuclear facilities, should they need it for their national defense. Fitzpatrick argued that the reasons for these countries still being without the nuclear capabilities are due to the overarching benefits of US partnership and the corresponding promise of nuclear umbrella. Fitzpatrick did also mention that POTUS Trump made a mistake in his UN speech by making a threat that he cannot honor as such promises can harm the US reputation in the future. Furthermore, Fitzpatrick stated that deterrence is necessary and what matters most today is deterring NK attacks on US or its allies, and any US leaders should retaliate with "fire and fury" if necessary. However, he did acknowledge that implications may arise for US if NK attacked an unpopulated area of the Pacific, but he nonetheless affirmed that if nuclear weapons were used in such case, US will meet NK with a greater response.

Fitzpatrick also discussed the current dialogues of whether or not US would launch a preventive attack against NK missiles in his speech. He explained how a preventive attack is very risky, and will most likely start a war if launched against NK. He predicted that NK will respond to the preventive attack by immediately attacking US bases in SK and Japan, perhaps, even with nuclear missiles. He reasoned this, stating that it is NK's doctrine to fear the potential first-strike, because this would be the affirming signal to a full on invasion of NK and the fall of the Kim regime, thereof. Such concern of NK is further evidenced and "proved" through POTUS Trump's "fire and fury" remark; Fitzpatrick worries that this may potentially cause NK to misinterpret US intention, leading to a calamitous war in the Korean peninsula. In addition to the first-strike option, Fitzpatrick also talked about the massive strike option—whereby US will attack and attempt to take down all known nuclear facilities and transportation capability from NK. This is dangerous because human intelligence is not robust in NK and there's a possibility that NK may hide some nuclear weapons in one of their tunnels—at which if US did engage in massive strike, then NK and US will engage in first nuclear war since the end of WWII.

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As an alternative option, Fitzpatrick weighed his support upon the policy of “massive pressure.” He favored the use of secondary sanctions—employing US leverage against other countries so that other countries will stop its interactions with NK—will reaffirm US leadership in dealing with this issue. At the same time, Fitzpatrick also questioned whether leverage and sanctions alone can change NK’s hostile posture. He stated that unfortunately, he doesn’t think these actions can bring any real change in regards to NK nuclear crisis, because NK’s government is one that doesn’t care about its people. NK regime only cares about preserving the regime, so they won’t “buckle under the sanctions.” Fitzpatrick reasoned that even when China cut off its oil supplies, NK didn’t stop developing its nuclear arsenals. NK is supposed to have three months of aviation fuel; if a war did occur, it would not be longer than three months, so they don’t need a lot of oil in the first place, and, if needed, they can find substitutes for oil like liquified coal.

Regarding the options for diplomatic engagements, Fitzpatrick did not lose hope and stated that, although rare, diplomacy did work with NK in some instances. While it is true that NK did violate every single deal that they made, sometimes NK didn’t violate the agreement for several years—1994 agreed framework lasted about eight years before it fell apart. In short, diplomacy can work because one can buy time with it. Also, if sanctions do work, then NK needs to know who to “cry uncle” to. Fitzpatrick exemplified the Iran deal in showcasing how harsh sanctions convinced Iran to come to the negotiation table and willing to accept hard limitations regarding the development of the nuclear weapons program. He asserted that US should parallel this course of action in dealing with NK. Additionally, he did mention about the option of missile defense for protection, but he said that, while it may be worthwhile, it is not an assurance or the answer in dealing with NK nuclear crisis.

Fitzpatrick believed that NK was not as irrational as many believe it to be. He shared his differing view and said that he saw a very rational leader in NK that managed to survive for five years after the power vacuum left after the previous leader. Despite the actions that he took, Kim still survived and is a rational man therefore; so, Fitzpatrick doesn’t see any reason to doubt that any rationality would prevail and deterrence against preventing an attack will prevail. He then concluded by highlighting the importance of alliance management. In order to reassure the US allies—mostly Japan and SK—denuclearization of NK is and should be the primary goal. If the US does not maintain its reliability, SK will get nukes—meaning US will lose its strategically significant ally.

**Q&A**

**Q (Ellen Laipson):** In regards to your emphasis in denuclearization, looking at the example of Pakistan, a possible pre-example of NK crisis today, at what point should we do a fall back to plan B? What would be next acceptable outcome that would still be minimally acceptable from the American interest perspective? At what point do we look like we are stuck at an unachievable position and when do we ask what is the next option?

**A (Mark Fitzpatrick):** That's a brilliant question. Let me go through some of it. That is the big issue of the day. Russia and China have been instituting that US needs to strike a deal with NK so that NK will freeze their nukes. Forget about denuclearization, just make NK freeze their developments, in exchange what NK—probably SK and US military operational exercises. This idea is totally unacceptable for variety of reasons. I think that there are variation of that that could be acceptable. US wouldn't give up all of their exercised but could change the scale of the exercise—like not 30,000 but maybe 20,000 troops. The real issue here is if freeze is worth anything. If it is not connected to NK accepting US denuclearization goal, which they accepted in 2005 but they no longer accept, does it mean anything? That's a tough one because I see advantages of a freeze. But these advantages shrink with every advances NK makes in their nuclear program. If we could have frozen them before they tested an ICBM or an H-bomb, then that could've been good. But think about it. If NK can freeze and unfreeze anytime they want, what use is the deal? Without any proper verifications, it's really pointless. Even if we do put priority on a secondary goal, of stopping the development, a) you still want to make denuclearization as your goal. There's also a difference between accepting NK as a nuclear state and recognizing the reality that NK has nuclear weapons. To me the reality is clear: They are a nuclear power. But I don't accept them as a nuclear-armed state and I would not want my government to accept them as such either. You switch over when you make a calculation about the benefits to a secondary goal, how likely they are achievable, and what you have to give up to get them. US has to ask whether halting NK's development of nuclear weapons are a big enough benefit to go forward with striking a deal.

**Q (Ellen Laipson):** Then, what are your thoughts about the outlier states of NPT, like India, Pakistan, and Israel (even though they never admitted to it)? Can NPT be perhaps negotiated to include other nuclear states like these?

**A (Fitzpatrick):** No, NPT will not be renegotiated in the way these states have been allowed a “halfway” acceptance into club. Yes, they have been basically accepted into the club because they provide good strategic relationship with US. When we did this with India, this conflicted Pakistan and made Pakistan decide it needed nukes in order to equalize with India. India was enjoying all the benefits of a nuclear cooperation with US, advancing India’s economy and such. This is developing new kind of problems that undermine strategic stability. There needs to be a compromise with Pakistan which is akin to India’s that will somehow make India not unhappy. This is an important lesson to our discussion today. In order to strike a deal with one country, you must think about how other countries will react—how the other will react. If we strike a deal with NK, what will be SK’s reaction? What will be Japan’s?

**Q:** My name is Zachary Marks, and I would like to backtrack to the first question. What could the US offer that could be acceptable to us as well as to NK?

**A (Fitzpatrick):** I used to think that you could find some benefits that would be equal to the benefits that NK thought that it was getting from nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons give NK regime safety, regime survivability, a protection from outside invasions. I think this is wrong. Nuclear weapons are not going to protect the leadership from popular uprising. They look at when Gaddafi died in a ditch when he gave up his nuclear weapons. NK talks about these instances all the time. You could give NK security assurances but it won’t do the trick. you could provide lots of energy assistance to advance their economy—we tried that and it didn’t work. I just don’t see anything actually. I think the answer to your question is nothing—I don’t know, I’m not sure.

**Q:** I am a student in this program, and I want to ask about the potential implications to this issue caused from the upcoming Japanese election.

**A (Fitzpatrick):** With or without the election that has been recently called, Japan is certainly its strategic culture in ways that we have not seen past few years. Like interpreting the constitution in allowing a real mutual security relationship where they come to the assistance of US military forces if they were to be attacked, is an important change. It has, however, not gone as far to introduce intensive strike options against NK. They are talking about it but so far, they are not going down that route. Japan is certainly changing its strategic culture, where they are now wanting to be able to come to support US troops, if they were in danger. Japanese elections are tricky because there’s a 50/50 chance that LDP will lose many seats that Abe will be toppled.

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In that case, will Abe's successor be more or less cooperative with the US? Probably less. And the successor will have less political strength to bring about military change as Abe. Also, Abe-Trump relationship will go bye-bye.

**Q:** Hi, George Hutchinson. For years we have been downplaying NK's nuclear capabilities. Also, I don't know if I would downplay this reunification aspect, necessarily. If you take that away, you're sort of taking away Kim Jong-Un's reason for being. At some point, he has to address his internal desires and legitimacy thereof. Regarding accepting the fact that NK is a nuclear power, it should be important to ensure the proliferation peace. Sanctions, although well-intended, have really not been effective. And in some regards, they even helped to accelerate nuclear ballistic missile program. One thing that wasn't mentioned as an alternative would be: if there was an achilles heel in NK, wouldn't it be human rights? I think the international community will really come and rally behind human rights issues. Wouldn't this be, then be more effective to pursue than military options?

**A (Fitzpatrick):** Ok, you mentioned about five things so I'm going to say yes, no, yes, no, no. Yes, objectively we have downplayed NK nuclear capabilities. I'm guilty of it. You are wrong about how reunification is a source of legitimacy for Kim Jong Un. In terms of what they say, their doctrines, reunification is not top several goals that they talk about in NK. The "dual path" of economic growth, military first, and of *Juche*, is what matter to them. Proliferation, yes, we do need to worry about that a lot. Also, the missile cooperation between Iran-NK is certainly worrisome; I don't see a solid evidence in the nuclear cooperation, but it's still worrisome. The most important thing about sanctions is that if you can turn off the material that aids the program, that's a big plus for sanctions. Just look at Iran. I don't see any logic that sanction accelerated the nuclear program in NK. The achilles heel and Human Rights in NK. Yes, this can unify the world. But, would it help to topple the regime? I don't know. Yes, we can put more pressure on them about human rights. But, say you are at the negotiation table, would you put relaxing the human rights amongst your top priorities if you are worrying about nuclear weapons? No I wouldn't. Maybe in the top five. Is it an achilles heel? Yes and no. I think that NK is really nervous about human rights issues. Yes, it does scratch a nerve for NK.

**Q:** Hi, my name is Katie. Is there any concern that SK will follow Israel with regards to covert nuclear developments?

**A (Fitzpatrick):** No, well, first, they cannot develop nukes covertly because the free press is so robust and frankly irresponsible, that it cannot be hidden from the US or their people.

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When everyone knows, this will lead to security vulnerabilities as well as an unfavorable position in the global community. Their economy will decline and the US will put sanctions on them as well, if this did occur.

**Q:** What might be some ways of engagement with NK in a way that will answer these issues of identity and issues of legitimacy in NK?

**A (Fitzpatrick):** I'm not sure I can answer that question. Well, the six party talks in 2005 dealt with this a lot: Sovereignty, recognition, equality, and normalization among partners. It all fell apart when US put sanctions on NK money laundering. I'm not sure that NK was ever ready to give up its deterrence ability, its nuclear weapons program. They were willing to slow it down, but I don't think they were ever willing to give up the core of it. But we should've still stayed on that path. We were on that path but NK never accepted the verification process. This is so important in arms control negotiations because it requires the other side to take off its clothes and you could say that this is an assault to sovereignty or trust. But the US and the USSR found a way to have mutual verification.

*Report by: Grace Kan, Research Intern*