Toda Peace Institute

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Building Stable Peace on the Korean Peninsula:

Turning Armistice into a Stable Peace Agreement

Report of Tokyo Colloquium 2019 organised by The Toda Peace Institute

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Introduction

After missile launches and threats of 'fire and fury' in 2017, international relations on the Korean peninsula have improved in 2018. The inter-Korean peace process pursued by President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong-un and the summit meetings of 2018 suggest there may be an opportunity for consolidating this improvement. This raises three central questions. How can the Korean peninsula be denuclearised? What are the prospects of a formal declaration of the end of the Korean war? How can the armistice be turned into a permanent peace agreement?

To address these questions, the Toda Peace Institute brought together leading representatives of five of the states at the Six Party Talks, for a track 1.5 meeting in Tokyo, in February 2019. Coming shortly before the February 27-28 summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-Un, the Tokyo meeting was an opportunity to share knowledge of recent developments, analyse the impediments to peace, and discuss ways towards a stable peace on the peninsula. The meeting exchanged views about which parties should be involved in negotiating the multiple linked issues, in what sequence the issues should be addressed, and how progress in negotiations is related to domestic politics in the region. The conference also examined whether the EU could play a useful role in generating the right conditions for multiparty discussions.

The conference pointed to the importance of dialogue as a basis for negotiated solutions to a set of multi-party complex issue problems. By bringing together different perspectives from the region, the Toda Peace Institute aims to stimulate creative thinking and resources that can help to bring about the conditions for building peace on the Korean peninsula and more broadly in North East Asia.

The conference began by exploring the perspective of leading figures in the Korea talks from South Korea, China, the United States, Russia and Japan, and a senior EU representative. Other analysts and experts then offered their observations. No North Korean representative was present, but an outside analyst offered an interpretation of the North Korean position. All the contributors were speaking in a personal capacity, not on behalf of their governments.

Regional Perspectives on Building Stable Peace on the Korean Peninsula

A South Korean perspective

Under President Moon Jae-in, South Korea has been pursuing a policy based on three principles: no nuclear weapons; no war; and no regime change. South Korea will not seek unification by absorbing North Korea on South Korean terms.

For the past seventy years, Koreans have been concerned with how to manage an unstable peace. Having suffered heavily from war and the spectre of war, South Korea is now pursuing a peacemaking policy. This is distinct from a policy of trying to keep the peace through military deterrence and alliances, which was tried in the past, and it is distinct from peace building. If peacemaking is successful, this will lead on to building a stable peace in which the states on the Korean peninsula would lose their fear of fighting one another.

South Korea has been pursuing a three track approach to peace. The first is through operational arms control. There have been significant achievements here. Since 1 May 2018, the two sides have refrained from hostile activities on land, sea and air. Broadcasting through loudspeakers and distribution of leaflets have ceased, 11 guard posts have been destroyed, landmines along the DMZ have been eliminated and remains of soldiers returned. The two sides have agreed to create a maritime peace zone to prevent accidental military clashes. So military confidence building measures between the two Koreas have been quite successful.

The second track has been to transform the armistice into an end of war declaration and a peace accord or treaty among the concerned parties. President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong-un agreed to make an end of war declaration and to negotiate a peace accord in 2018. Article 3 of the Panmunjon Declaration states that 'South and North Korea will actively cooperate to establish a permanent and solid peace regime on the Korean peninsula. Bringing an end to the current unnatural state of armistice and establishing a robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is a historical mission that must not be delayed any further.' But that did not happen. Neither the US nor North Korea was ready to adopt an end of war declaration at the Singapore summit. The US saw the end of war declaration as too hasty a concession to the North, and feared that it would precipitate demands for the US to withdraw its forces from the South and alter its guarantees under the ROK-US alliance. It is also unclear who the parties would be to an end of war declaration. China has made it clear that it expects to be a party. South Korea agrees with this, since China is a party to the armistice agreement. South Korea still hopes to pursue this track, and North and South have agreed to pursue either trilateral meetings with the United States or quadrilateral meetings also involving China to seek an end to war, a peace treaty and a peace regime.

The third track is denuclearisation of North Korea and the Korean peninsula. On this there are big gaps between the US and North Korean positions. The US has insisted on the principle of 'dismantle first, rewards later', while North Korea's position is that there should be simultaneous reciprocation based on the principle of 'action for action'. The US has demanded that North Korea declare its nuclear facilities and opens them to international inspection, while North Korea regards handing over a list of its facilities as tantamount to giving an enemy a target list. If North Korea declares fewer nuclear warheads than the 60 to 65 that US intelligence believes it holds, Pyongyang fears it will be accused of cheating and holding part of its arsenal to attack the United States. Washington wanted the denuclearisation of North Korea first, while Pyongyang has only agreed to the eventual denuclearisation of the whole Korean peninsula, including the withdrawal of the American nuclear umbrella. South Korea has sought a middle ground between these positions, such as an exchange of sanctions relief for dismantlement of the Yongbyon nuclear complex. Recently, the US and North Korea appear to have come closer to the South Korean position.

South Korea sees a need for a road-map, setting out an incremental approach. The road map would link incentives to steps forward, including suspension of US-South Korean military exercises, replacement of the armistice with a peace treaty, acceptance of North Korea's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy and a space programme and normalisation of diplomatic relations between North Korea and the US. The North has to put on the table all the options leading to complete and irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear facilities and ballistic missiles. There can be flexibility in the sequencing of denuclearisation and steps towards a normal diplomatic relationship. Without a process linking denuclearisation to other issues in the peace process, there won't be progress. China also takes the view that denuclearisation and a North-South process need to go in tandem.

Irrespective of progress on denuclearisation, South Korea will pursue arms control and confidence building measures. Seoul considers it unlikely that North Korea would initiate the use of nuclear weapons, but a conflict in the region could escalate to nuclear use, so military confidence building measures remain vital.

A Chinese perspective

China sees the recent summit diplomacy as moving the situation on the Korean peninsula in a positive direction. However, it is questionable whether this warming phase of relations will last. The achievements of 2018 did not go as far as the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula made on 20 January 1992. The provisions of the April 27 declaration at Panmunjom on the nuclear issue fell well below the earlier statement. The Trump-Kim summit statement was also less significant than previous ones.

Some factors in the situation point to the possibility of change. First, there has been a significant shift of strategic policy in Pyongyang, to 'concentrating all resources and efforts to socialist economic construction'. In this respect the year of 2018 in North Korea is comparable with 1978 for China, when Deng Xiaoping made economic construction the centrepiece of Chinese policy. This was the prelude to reforms and opening up. However, in 1979 China normalised its relations with the US. In 2018 North Korea has been unable to follow suit. Second, enhanced multilateral and unilateral sanctions on North Korea are severe. China's trade with North Korea has shrunk by 50% in ten months. Thirdly, the intensified

summit diplomacy is a positive factor. President Trump has been willing to meet Chairman Kim Jong-un.

However, other factors are unchanged. Over the past two decades, periods of improving relations have been followed by new crises. It is not clear that we have yet escaped this cycle. The reason for the cyclical movement of the process is the strong mutual strategic mistrust between the parties. That has not changed between Pyongyang and Washington, or even between Pyongyang and Seoul.

China sees the two issues of peace and denuclearisation as closely linked.

The US sees denuclearisation as a matter of non-proliferation. However, for North Korea, nuclear weapons are seen as a matter of fundamental security. North Korea argues to China that the sequence of moves should be: first, improvements in the bilateral relationship; second, the peace issue; third and lastly, denuclearisation of the peninsula. Since nuclear weapons are their ultimate security guarantee, North Korea will give them up last.

The two sides have a very different logic, so there is mutual distrust. Each side holds deep suspicions of the other. On the one hand, there is the suspicion that Pyongyang will never sincerely and completely denuclearise. On the other, there is the suspicion that the US will never give up its desire for regime change, and that Seoul will not give up the desire to absorb the North. Lack of mutual confidence is a fundamental obstacle. The deep-seated hostilities between the North and the US and between North and South Korea remain. The state of war, and the Cold War on the Korean peninsula, continue.

If the international community wants North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons, it has to build confidence to enable them to do so. The key to solving the nuclear issue and the peace issue lies in shared security for both the Koreas. Only when all the parties, primarily the two Koreas and the two major external powers, the US and China, make joint efforts on the shared security of the two Koreas, can the peninsula break out of the cycle of repeated crises.

The Chinese position is that Korea's problems can only be resolved by the two Koreas themselves. China had its differences with Pyongyang, especially in the 1990s, but always saw North and South Korea as the arbiters of the fate of the peninsula. All negotiations should be based on this assumption.

The US and China have been warring parties in the past, during the Korean War, but now they hold many of the external keys to peace and prosperity. So they should both be important participants in the multilateral negotiations, and they should both be parties to any agreement terminating the state of war.

The US and North Korea should take the lead on the nuclear issues. But because of their mutual distrust, they cannot be expected to solve all the issues. Eventually three party talks may be needed. On the peace issues, the four parties (North Korea, South Korea, China, US)

are crucial. They should contribute to the format of a permanent peace declaration. The ambiguous 'directly related parties' formula is unhelpful.[1] There should be a four-party process for the peace declaration, and for denuclearisation.

An American perspective

The US finds North Korea a very difficult negotiating partner. In the US view, North Korean representatives are inflexible; they don't change positions, they repeat their positions. They keep talking of US hostile intent.

There have been significant changes in the US approach. The position now is quite close to where it was in 2000, when US-North Korean negotiations came close to a breakthrough. However, the Trump Administration approach has been very different from the past. It has replaced careful staff work, preparation and visits with personal summitry. In this respect, the summit in Vietnam on February 27-28 is likely to repeat Singapore. The bar is set rather low, but this is a pity, because there is a unique opportunity which there has not been since 2000. It is necessary to move on from the armistice to a lasting peace treaty.

As a starting point, the summit should do no harm. President Trump should avoid a deal that reduces US troops on the peninsula. That might harm the alliance and the strategic balance. The US wants to see the Yongbyon nuclear facilities dismantled, under IAEA inspection. Using the Yongbyon complex as an entry point, the US needs a framework that continues after the 2020 US elections. Analysts of North Korea in Washington agree that the US needs to move on from 'complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement' (CVID). CVID first is not a viable option. President Trump and Secretary Pompeo have made that clear. "Parallel actions" are the current watchword in Washington. The summit is not expected to lead to a big package deal or a significant roadmap. It would clear the bar if it leads to a process towards some key interim steps, which would have to include some of the peace measures. An end of war declaration, which would be a political document, is worthwhile, but it needs to be accompanied by an agreement on the need for complete denuclearisation and the need for the armistice to stay in effect until there is a final peace treaty.

Lifting sanctions is possible. The easiest sanctions to lift would be the South Korean ones. In particular a natural step would be to allow the reopening of the Kaesong Industrial complex and the opening up of the Kongmin Mountain site for tourism since it has historical significance to both the North and the South.

Washington is willing to exchange liaison officers as a step towards diplomatic recognition. Humanitarian aid could also be helpful. But there hasn't been much thought in Washington on peace issues, because denuclearisation comes first. It is worth discussing a framework for peace, which includes North and South Korea, the US and China as participants. But there is an aversion in Washington to talking about peace mechanisms if that means erosion of the ROK-US alliance.

[1] In 19 September 2005, the Joint Statement declared that 'the directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula'.

The relationship between a peace agreement and denuclearisation is a matter of sequencing. North Korea wants a peace assurance first. The US, South Korea and Japan want denuclearisation first. It is unrealistic to think that North Korea will give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for a promise. There needs to be a mechanism relating denuclearisation to peace processes between North and South Korea and between the North and the USA.

North Korea demands the elimination of hostile intent, but the US sees removal of the nuclear umbrella as undermining alliance relations. North Korea's opening demand has been an end to joint US-South Korean military exercises and an end to exercises involving US strategic forces. The US did agree to suspend these under the Trump Administration.

It is unclear whether North Korea really wants peace. It has survived, based on its belief in deterrence linked to massive external attack in response to hostile action from the South or the US. That fear was real over 65 years. Can North Korea survive if there is genuine peace, opening of borders, and open trade and investment?

The status quo, with about 60 North Korean nuclear warheads and an intercontinental missile system, cannot continue. Tensions have been lowered as a result of the summits. But there has been little significant movement on denuclearisation.

Chairman Kim Jong-un has given a strong hint that he wants sanctions relief. Economic well-being is a top priority for him, creating the biggest opening for denuclearisation there has been for years. However, the approach has to be an incremental one, step for step and action for action. The US seeks a declaration of nuclear facilities as soon as possible, so that it can know what it is dealing with. Secondly, verification with IAEA inspections. Thirdly, dismantlement. North Korea has made piecemeal offers on dismantling particular systems. The US wants a systematic approach and will push for that at the Vietnam summit.

A Russian perspective

This is a crucial moment, before the second US-North Korean summit. For the first time in 45 years, there is a glimmer of hope. There needs to be a balance of interests. North Korea has been consistent for the last 30 years in demanding guarantees that the US will not attack North Korea or undermine the regime from the inside, before it can address concerns about its military development. The US has always refused. It expected the regime to collapse. President Trump has recognised that this strategy was a mistake. What is now developing aligns with Russia's view that the road map ahead should start with a suspension of testing in exchange for suspension of exercises, move on to bilateral agreements, and then to multilateral arrangements.

It is not realistic to see the armistice developing into a peace agreement. The armistice was signed by military commanders, and South Korea was not a signatory. It was meant to lead to a conference to settle outstanding issues, but the conference failed. The armistice has been breached many times, on both sides. The US broke its terms by introducing nuclear weapons into South Korea in 1956.

The armistice should be replaced by a new peace system on the Korean peninsula, involving North and South Korea, the US, China, Japan, Russia and other countries. There is an international interest in peace on the peninsula, since a conflict on the Korean peninsula would be a disaster for the global economy.

The strategy of seeking denuclearisation in exchange for security guarantees seems unattainable, in the short run, because the US political system seems unable to keep promises that previous governments have given, and the US and North Korea disagree on the meaning of denuclearisation. In the short term, the way to avoid confrontation and maintain stability is to pursue a strategy of 'conditional, reciprocal, incremental denuclearisation.'

An agreed roadmap for staged denuclearisation could be comprised of the following steps:

- North Korean ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and elimination, under agreed verification procedures, of all nuclear weapons test facilities;
- A halt to the production of nuclear weapons;
- Disablement and then destruction under IAEA supervision of all production facilities;
- An end to nuclear design and research activity, especially on ICBMs;
- Ending the production of weapons-grade fissile material and eventual dismantlement of facilities and limitation and reduction of nuclear warheads.

Staged progress toward denuclearisation would be met by reciprocal US steps including phased sanctions relief, a declaration of intent to end the Korean war, and a permanent peace treaty.

This process would mirror the US-Soviet/Russian arms limitations process. Although the North Koreans might not get to zero nuclear weapons, sustaining the political momentum behind incremental progress would be important.

Although the US and North Korea are the key parties in the summit, the negotiating process should broaden out to four and then six parties and include UN involvement. A set of bilateral agreements could create an interlocking framework for a multilateral agreement. A monitoring mechanism would be needed, and this could be a basis for institutionalising rapprochement. The Six Party Talks were never formally ended, and the Working Group on Peace and Security could be revived, as the Swedish Foreign Minister proposed in 2018, as a way to discuss the issues and the meaning of denuclearisation. This seems the way to go.

A Japanese perspective

At present Japan is marginalised in the negotiations. Japan aims at three objectives:

1. To avoid war and confrontation on the peninsula that could escalate to war;
2. To avoid chaos in the North;
3. To achieve complete, verifiable denuclearisation.

One objective should not be pursued at the expense of the others. Denuclearisation should not be pursued so vigorously that it starts a war. Nor should North Korea be accepted as a nuclear state in order to get peace.

For the US, the ICBMs are the critical issue, but for Japan, the medium range missiles are more important.

The parties need to think about offering bigger and bigger incentives as the negotiations proceed. It may be necessary to help North Korea increase its GDP, and to help with technology, industry and finance. If North Korea accepts denuclearisation, Japan and other countries should stand ready to offer huge material incentives.

An EU perspective

The EU stands for a rules-based international order and respect for international law. It is committed to all treaties regarding arms control and disarmament, and full implementation of them by the signatory parties. North Korea is a party to the NPT. The EU has never accepted its withdrawal. But it is in breach of its obligations. All its nuclear activities are illegitimate and contrary to international law.

It is important to tackle the human rights dimension together with arms control. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran (JCPOA) had a track on human rights as well as on nuclear issues. There's a question of whether to compartmentalise issues or package them together. The OSCE deliberately created baskets, to balance the need for human rights with security and economic cooperation. There is no contradiction between supporting human rights and advancing security.

The prosperity of Europe is intimately linked with that of Japan, China and South Korea. Any instability brings risks to trade and shipping, and threatens a global impact. Therefore finding ways to contain threats and seeking solutions is in the interest of the EU.

The EU follows a twin track approach. It brings pressure to bear on states which flout international norms. So the EU fully supports sanctions against North Korea and has taken its own special measures. The EU expects these sanctions to continue. But it also pursues dialogue, and aims to keep channels of communication open. EU member states have local representation in Pyongyang and intend to keep them open.

The EU wants a negotiated settlement and requires full compliance of North Korea with international law and norms. North Korea must abandon all its weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Its intercontinental and medium range missiles need to be addressed. The EU would demand complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation.

The EU of course is in the 'outer circle' of actors concerned with North Korea. It has relevant expertise on verification mechanisms. The EU and its member states have relevant negotiating experience. In the case of Iran, and in arms control more generally, agreement does not depend on trust. The point of arms control agreements is to deal with lack of trust. The EU can draw on its experience of negotiating with Iran, where it played a key role, and also on its experience of reconciliation in Europe, in Africa, and in Aceh. The EU stands ready to support a road map and a lasting solution. As a large donor, the EU is ready to provide humanitarian assistance.

Europe has a regional security architecture, with provision for exchange of military information, security cooperation and confidence building measures. North East Asia lacks such

an architecture. Perhaps lessons can be drawn from the CSCE experience, which started in 1975, under conditions of mistrust.

To achieve a solution, the neighbours will have to be involved. The talks need to be embedded in a multilateral process, which could also include the EU. The EU stands ready to help if the actors in the region want it.

Discussion and Analysis

Having heard these regional perspectives, the conference then moved on to a range of further presentations, followed by discussion and question and answer sessions. These touched on wider contextual issues as well as further details of the parties' positions. They included:

- An analysis of the current North Korean position;
- the latest elaborations of the US position as indicated by Steve Biegun's remarks at Stanford;
- possible scenarios for the future;
- the relationship of North Korean developments to the wider global context for arms control and disarmament,;
- a discussion of sanctions relief;
- the role of civil society and domestic politics in the North Korean question.

The North Korean position

North Korea's strategic priority now is economic development, which is the basis for sustaining its government in the long term. To secure this, it needs a stable regional environment, which requires a better relationship with the United States. So Pyongyang has a strategic interest in securing better relations and in preventing the collapse of the talks. It can offer limited concessions to keep the Americans at the table.

There is disagreement over whether North Korea is open to complete nuclear disarmament. The chances of this seem very small. There are strong incentives to keep a nuclear deterrent. Freezing existing capabilities may be a more realistic goal.

Bilateral rivalry between the US and China is growing rapidly, and the relationship is becoming competitive rather than cooperative. This might stimulate competition for influence on the peninsula. North Korea may not trust US security guarantees, but it may be able to play the US and China off against each other to create a breathing space for itself.

The second US-North Korea summit could be a step towards an end of war declaration or a four-party declaration of peace, but it is unclear that these would reduce the perceived threat to North Korea. North Korea has said that it does not seek the withdrawal of troops from South Korea. Rather, it seeks a secure environment in its immediate area, and wants to reintegrate itself into the international community. That is the real incentive for North Korea.

Recent elaborations of the US position

In remarks at Stanford University in the run up to the Vietnam summit, Stephen Biegun, the US Special Representative on North Korea, gave some indications of possible evolution in the US position.

Firstly, he said that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had been told that North Korea would dismantle its nuclear material enrichment facilities. This was important, but it would have been better if it had been made as a public statement rather than privately.

Secondly, the US is now prepared to pursue talks on peace in parallel with talks on denuclearisation. In the past, the US insisted on denuclearisation first, so this is a radical shift.

Thirdly, he talked about a road-map. This is significant, especially in the context of Chairman Kim Jong-un's New Year speech, in which Chairman Kim reiterated his pledge to achieve a permanent peace regime and denuclearise the Korean peninsula, but warned that North Korea would 'consider a new way to safeguard our sovereignty and interests' if the US failed to keep its promises. Biegun also made a vague reference to 'declarations going forward', which might have meant an end of war declaration. It is reported that the State Department has accepted this, and President Trump has said that the Cold War and the Korean War are over.

Fourthly, Biegun suggested that the US is willing to contemplate initial sanctions relief.

Fifth, Biegun said that the US was not involved in any discussion of troop reductions or withdrawals from South Korea. This came in the context of President Trump's previous review of options for troop reduction, intended to pressure South Korea to increase its contribution to the defence burden.

Sixth, the US is thinking through options for a peace treaty. The preference would be for a peace agreement, which would not require Senate approval. North Korea also avoids the term 'peace treaty' and talks in terms of 'a peace settlement', a 'peace regime', 'full normalisation of relations' and 'a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean peninsula.'

Future scenarios

In US policy-making circles, people focus on three scenarios.

The worst case is a military confrontation, which seemed to be a possibility in 2017 when President Trump threatened North Korea with 'fire and fury'. Policy-makers worried last year about the risk of military confrontation if President Trump's demands were too high. Now they worry about a 'bad deal', which fails to secure denuclearisation. There is also the unwelcome scenario of the status quo continuing, with North Korea keeping its nuclear weapons.

A separate analysis from a Japanese perspective sees four possible scenarios.

In the first, North Korea would denuclearise, on a step by step basis, just enough to keep the US satisfied. Meanwhile the US would make it possible to improve relations. North Korea would pursue economic reform. This would be a great opportunity for Japan, and about the best that can be realistically expected.

In the second, there would be crisis. North Korea would say it would denuclearise, but would not do so. The US would put pressure on North Korea again. In the past, crises took place after talks had started, so this scenario is a possibility. The military option might be considered more credible now. In the past, there had been question-marks about Chairman Kim's rationality, but the international community has now formed the impression that he is a rational actor. A crisis could also arise if President Trump was in serious domestic trouble and wanted to manufacture a foreign crisis to divert domestic opposition. This would be a very bad scenario for Japan. Would visitors come to the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 if a nuclear crisis was a possibility?

In the third, President Trump would lose interest in Korea and pull US forces out of South Korea, creating a vacuum in the region that North Korea might exploit.

In the fourth, Chairman Kim Jong-un could experience President Gorbachev's fate. He might introduce reforms, but find they precipitated a collapse of the state. At the best, this could lead to peaceful unification, but at the worst, chaos in North Korea could have serious consequences for Japan.

North Korea in the wider context of arms control

In questions and answers, commentators observed that North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes are having effects on arms and arms control in the region and globally.

Already regional actors have started to hedge against the risks in North Korea by investing in new military systems. Japan has spent $18 billion on off-the-shelf purchases of ballistic missile defences from the US. The US and South Korea are also investing in missile defences. But Russia and China see these as targeting their missiles, and this induces them to increase their nuclear capabilities. So the holding of nuclear weapons by North Korea has a damaging effect on global arms competition.

The developments also feed in to Japanese demands for extended deterrence, which in turn affect the INF Treaty. For example, Japan welcomed the Nuclear Posture Review because it regards sea-based nuclear cruise missiles as a centrepiece of extended deterrence to Japan.

It was also pointed out that modernisation and development of the US arsenal could have destabilising effects on the Korean peninsula. While the US presses for denuclearisation of the peninsula, it is proposing militarily usable small-yield nuclear weapons that might be forward deployed, for example in Okinawa. This would make Japan a target for China and North Korea.

The opposition of the Permanent Five members of the Security Council to the Ban Treaty enables North Korea to hide behind the other nuclear powers.

However, the confidence building measures that are now in place offer a completely different environment from the past. The United States maintains communication channels with North Korea at summit, high-level and working-levels. South Korea also has communication channels with North Korea at all levels and in multiple functional areas. South Korea has set up a liaison office in Gaesung that operates all day, twenty-four hours. South Korea and the United States have established a working group that is being held every two weeks. Going

forward, it would be useful for South Korea, North Korea and the United States to institutionalise a trilateral crisis monitoring and management mechanism. If the United States and North Korea progress toward normalization of relations, that would of course also dramatically improve their ability to sustain dialogue, including during a period of crisis.

Sanctions relief

The US may be coming round to a step by step approach to North Korea, with mutual concessions at each stage. Disablement and dismantlement of the Yongbyon nuclear complex with IAEA verification may require the lifting of sanctions and the acceptance of economic cooperative projects between North and South Korea. Lifting of sanctions is possible, but not straightforward. In many cases, it would require Congressional approval to lift the US unilateral sanctions. Lifting multilateral sanctions would require UN approval. South Korean sanctions would be the easiest to lift, and South Korea has already proposed sanctions relief as a quid pro quo for dismantling the Yongbyon complex.

There is little obvious effect of sanctions on middle class life in Pyongyang. North Korea would be more vulnerable to sanctions if it had a market economy and a bigger middle class. In general, it was noted that sanctions have not been terribly effective as a tool to compel regimes to change their behaviour, but the lifting of sanctions has been found to be an effective inducement.

The role of civil society and domestic politics

Is there a role for civil society in addressing the North Korea issue? It is not clear that there is any civil society in North Korea. Nevertheless, it was suggested that international civil society could help to relieve the isolation of North Korea, in the context of a developing peace regime. The precedents of Vietnam, Russia and China suggest that engagement does help, even if human rights remain problematic. Opening up North Korea is fundamental to bringing about change. Civil society can engage in building peace, and on other issues like scientific and medical cooperation, divided families and agricultural development. There needs to be a channel for that to take place. Civil society can also play a role in the domestic politics of the regional powers. For example, it could play a role in the US, by encouraging lawmakers not to oppose the suspension of US military exercises in Korea.

Domestic politics has an important impact on policies towards North Korea in all the regional states. This can be both positive and negative. For example, the 'candlelight revolution' in South Korea helped to bring President Moon to power and made his policy of pursuing peace possible. But South Korea has also seen the rise of nationalist opposition to this policy, which could ultimately constrain how far South Korea can go.

Conclusions

The North Korea situation remains a potentially dangerous conflict. The current warming of relations is welcome, but there is a risk that this may be only a phase in a cycle of improvements followed by crises. Expectations for the forthcoming summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un are low, but it was agreed that the current situation does offer an opportunity for progress in the long-running conflict.

This is a complex conflict, with multiple issues and multiple actors. Clear differences of view were expressed between the perspectives from different regional states. There are differences over whether peace or denuclearisation is the priority, over which actors should be involved in negotiations, and over the sequencing of the negotiation process. These differences are exacerbated by mistrust not only between the regional powers but also between the major world powers. Mistrust is not insuperable, however. Peace and conflict research suggests that strategic mistrust can be addressed by small initial cooperative gestures, which if reciprocated can build trust, elicit further cooperation and change enemy images.

Notwithstanding the differences between regional states' perspectives, this conference suggested the possibility that elements of a consensus might be emerging on the approach to be taken.

A number of participants favoured a step-by-step process of reciprocated measures, which would exchange verifiable measures to suspend, reduce and eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons for sanctions relief, economic cooperation, security guarantees for North and South, and ultimately acceptance of North Korea into the international community. An end of war declaration and the move to a permanent peace treaty would be an important part of this process, though participants differed on the sequencing. A key step would be to build on the suspension of nuclear tests and military exercises by closing down the Yongbyon nuclear complex in exchange for lifting of selected sanctions. Agreeing a road-map on the way forward is a priority.

In order to achieve such steps, dialogue between the parties is essential.

At the same time the international community must uphold compliance with international law and international norms. North Korea must be brought back into compliance with its international obligations, and it has to be held to international standards of human rights.

Civil society has a constructive role to play in a peace process, facilitating the opening up of North Korea, and holding regional powers to the path of dialogue rather than confrontation.

A process leading towards a stable peace agreement on the Korean peninsula would open opportunities for building a cooperative security architecture in North East Asia. Denuclearisation of the peninsula would bolster the prospects for international arms control and the ultimate banning of all nuclear weapons. On the other hand, a return to nuclear build-up, crisis and confrontation on the peninsula will have grave consequences for the region (especially for South Korea and Japan), for the prospects for international arms control, and for international peace and security.

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