

A Helsinki Conference for Asia

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On April 21, 2018, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, announced that his national policy of pursuing economic development and military security in parallel would be superseded by a new policy. The successes of North Korea's nuclear program, he said, made it possible now for the country to adopt "a new strategic line," giving priority to the economy. An optimistic commentator in South Korea concluded that Kim was now "ready to bargain away nuclear weapons for the sake of economic development." Another said, "Whether Kim Jong-un will become the Deng Xiaoping of North Korea will depend on whether the international community . . . can provide security guarantees and opportunities for economic development so that it can denuclearize."¹

This was the latest twist in a series of developments that took a dramatic turn when, on March 8, 2018, President Donald Trump learned that South Korea's national security adviser was in the West Wing, meeting with American officials. He invited him into the Oval Office, and when told by the South Korean that he was bearing an invitation from Kim Jong Un to a bilateral meeting to discuss denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the president accepted on the spot. The North-South Korean summit is set to take place in Panmunjom in April. A Kim-Trump summit is expected to follow in May.

Kim's offer to put denuclearization on the table—the objective sought by the United States and the world community—came as a surprise to the president, who seized the moment with alacrity. This surprise—but not the alacrity—was unwarranted. US-North Korean agreements in 1994 and 2005 had also accepted denuclearization as their goal. Moreover, the phrase "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" has a broader meaning for Kim than for the Americans. In the past, this term has embraced not only the removal of American short-range nuclear weapons—which occurred in 1991—but also the withdrawal of US ground forces (which serve as a trip wire for the US deterrent), the removal of US nuclear armed submarines and bombers from their regional bases, and, above all, the revocation of the US extended deterrent that currently guarantees South Korean security.

Does this mean that the president was mistaken in agreeing to a negotiation sought by Kim? Not necessarily. The groundwork for such a meeting had been patiently laid by a US ally rightfully concerned that events are spinning out of control and could even



lead to war on the peninsula. To rebuff the offer would have been perceived as churlish and intransigent. Moreover, President Trump's sense of drama served him well in this instance: US eagerness for peace should be on the front pages, not our guarded (if understandable) sense of pessimism.

American participation, however, is not without risks. If diplomacy "succeeds" by North Korea gaining recognition as a nuclear state, dividing US alliances in the region, and weakening international sanctions in exchange for easily reversible North Korean commitments, it will be a historic blunder occasioned by a lack of preparation, experience, and comprehension on the part of the White House. If diplomacy fails, the option of military action will gain perhaps an irreversible momentum.

In the paper to which this is an introduction, I offer a comprehensive set of proposals to achieve the objective proffered by Kim: the dismantling of his nuclear missile program in exchange for a guarantee of North Korean security. What is novel about these proposals is that they recognize that a US offer of a guarantee can never be sufficient and that the elements of such an offer that would appeal to North Korea would be destructive of our alliances and, in the end, fruitless anyway.

It is imperative that the United States develop at once an innovative set of proposals to bring to the negotiations. It will be tempting to avoid doing so, in the hope that—unlike 1994 and 2005—the North Korean leader will prove more tractable even though he is in a stronger position now than he was then. Avoiding developing such proposals will appeal to those who want to enter the negotiation and "play it by ear," relying on improvisation and flexibility to make an advantageous deal. This tactic also covers over the lack of expertise, the loss of experienced Korea experts from the US government, and the short time available to develop a coherent strategy.

Such temptations must be overcome. Without careful planning, we will reap the worst of both worlds: we will be held responsible by the Korean people for the breakup of the negotiations while failing to reassure our regional allies because we appeared willing to bargain away their security to pacify an implacable foe.

Moreover, we must carefully consider the role of China in this matter. Once again, it is seductive to attempt to outflank China and bring home a successful agreement without its participation. In fact, only by means of a Chinese nuclear guarantee to North Korea can the United States perpetuate its own extended deterrent, protecting South Korea and Japan with American nuclear weapons. Negotiating this will be a key

element in any successful deal with North Korea. There is no time to waste and much new thinking to be done.

The United States must have a plan for success that is something other than wishful thinking. We must also have a plan in case the talks fail that demonstrates our steadfastness as an ally as well as our deep reluctance to risk a new war in the region, and this plan must lay the foundation for future US action.

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The Helsinki Accords, signed in the summer of 1975 at the conclusion of the first Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, were a historic diplomatic achievement.² They were urged on the Americans by our European allies as a way to reduce tensions between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Since the 1950s, the Soviet Union had sought to formalize international acquiescence in its dominance over Eastern Europe. The Accords, through guarantees of the inviolability of frontiers and noninterference in the internal affairs of states, aimed to do just that. In return for their formal recognition of this political order, the United States and its Western European allies pressed the Soviet Union for commitments on human rights. The Final Act, signed at a summit meeting in Helsinki, reflected both of these goals, although at the time the human rights provisions of the Final Act were thought to be of little realistic significance. The agreement in effect marked the formal end of World War II by granting recognition to all the European national frontiers (including Germany's division into the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic) that had arisen in the aftermath of the war.

All this is familiar territory for those who study diplomatic and strategic history. What is not so familiar is the application of this paradigm—the multilateral conference to end a decades-long war as a method of reducing tensions—to the Korean crisis. The key lies in linking the recognition of national borders and a commitment to nonintervention with denuclearization and extended deterrence.

I.

On September 3, 2017, North Korea conducted a test of a nuclear weapon.³ Seismic tremors from this test suggest that it was almost certainly a hydrogen bomb in the early stages of development. The test followed an August 28 intermediate-range ballistic missile launch over Hokkaido, Japan, and this was succeeded by the launch on November 28 of an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.⁴ At least fifteen missile tests and six nuclear tests have occurred since the



current crisis began.⁵ The purpose of these tests is to pose a sufficient threat to the United States such that not only would Washington be unwilling to launch a campaign to change the North Korean regime, but it would also be unwilling to put its homeland at risk in order to enable South Korea to resist demands for a forcible reunification of the peninsula. Those who say that these developments do not represent a material change in affairs could not be more wrong. This change was foreseen in 1994 by former American national security advisor Brent Scowcroft and again in 2006 by former US secretary of defense William Perry.⁶ Both men concluded that America could not sit by and let this deadly threat mature. And yet, we did. Some felt that the remote possibility of a North Korean attack on the American homeland or our forces abroad simply did not pose a significant threat.⁷ As a trenchant critic of US policy put it in a letter to me,

I find the idea of North Korea as a “threat” to America ludicrous. What are they going to do? Invade California? The word threat, like terror, is now so abused as to be beyond rational debate. It is fear politics. Clearly it is conceivable that Korea could, for some demented reason (and I gather they are not demented), loose off a rocket that landed on American soil. It would cause a lot of damage, depending on where it landed. But then what You could kill a lot of North Koreans. And then what? It is the old fallacy of the bomb, that it wins wars. It merely causes damage.⁸

A good many commentators believed that when the North Koreans achieved the technological ability to attack the US homeland, nothing of any strategic significance occurred. As one thoughtful and rightly respected writer put it in *The Atlantic*,

North Korea’s successful test earlier this week of an intercontinental ballistic missile has triggered all of the expected alarms. . . . But apart from the psychological impact on Americans, the development doesn’t fundamentally alter the military standoff that has been in place for decades. Kim and his father before him have long had the capability of inflicting mass casualties on South Korea and the nearly 30,000 American forces stationed there. . . . So unless the lives of Americans on American soil are inherently more significant than the lives of those serving in that part of the world, or than Korean and Japanese lives, the game is the same. When death tolls are unthinkable high, it’s like multiplying infinity.⁹

For the reasons I will express below, I am convinced that these critics are mistaken and that something of historic importance is happening in North Asia. Our present enervation, the sense of inertia in US policy, arises in part because we lack the imaginative ideas commensurate with the radical change in the strategic situation. We are, in the

famous words of Churchill, “decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift [and] solid for fluidity.”¹⁰

II.

At present, the United States appears to have only three options: (1) the continued diplomatic pursuit of phased negotiations with North Korea, by which it is hoped that the imposition of economic sanctions—and the ultimate promise to lift those sanctions—will induce the North Koreans to freeze the development of their nuclear weapons program, halt further missile testing, and eventually roll back their nuclear weapons program; (2) the use of military force either as a demonstration to dissuade the North Koreans from pursuing their nuclear weapons ambitions or to actually destroy the weapons facilities and launchers that are the embodiment of those ambitions; and (3) the tacit acceptance of a North Korean nuclear arsenal capable of delivering nuclear weapons to US soil, coupled with threats to retaliate against North Korea were those weapons ever to be used to attack the United States.¹¹

China has an important role to play, as the United States recognizes, in all of these scenarios. What is less well recognized is that each of them would be a misfortune not only for America but also for China. Moreover, the endgame for North Korea, as we shall see, is no less fraught. But the North Koreans, unlike the United States and China, have less room to maneuver off the fatal track on which they have set themselves. The very *raison d’être* of the regime, as it has tirelessly insisted to its people, is to resist the United States. The North Korean regime must persist in its confrontation with Washington if it is to maintain its despotic grip on power. A dynasty does not commit suicide out of a fear of death.

Yet there is one further possibility, which I will describe in a moment, though it will not be realistically evaluated and pursued so long as these three options are encapsulated by their advocates, as they are, in a chrysalis of self-deception and intoxicating but ultimately deadly illusions of hope. So, first, let’s see what’s wrong with each of these options and how costly their pursuit would be to America and China, but also to North Korea.

III.

The first option depends on the international community aggressively pursuing economic and diplomatic pressure on North Korea.¹² Since 2006, at the urging of the United States, the UN Security Council has adopted numerous resolutions imposing increasingly costly sanctions on North Korea, including severe limits on its



weapons trade, banking, and various financial transactions.¹³ China is the key player here because approximately 90 percent of North Korea's international trade is with China.¹⁴ It is doubtful, however, that there is any decisive influence the international community generally and China specifically can gain from the imposition of sanctions that will result in the Kim regime abandoning its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs. That is because the regime sees these programs as the ultimate guarantor of its security and has shown itself willing to impose enormous suffering on its people and incur the hostility of many states—including China—to assure its hold on power.

Privately, many people who urge this option recognize this. But they say that if negotiations could at least slow down North Korea's programs, eventually the people of North Korea—either in a general uprising or acting through alienated members of the leadership—will overthrow the regime. It will be increasingly difficult for North Korea to keep its citizens from being exposed to the world outside and, it is said, this will increase pressure on Kim Jong Un to find ways to strengthen the economy, increase international trade, and pursue economic growth.¹⁵ The fact that the regime has thus far decisively rejected a policy of opening itself to the world, the possibility of which it had earlier entertained with Chinese interlocutors, makes it clear, however, that nothing short of a coup d'état or a revolution could alter North Korea's commitment to be a nuclear weapons power. I am not aware of any reporting that such events are imminent or even likely.¹⁶ While I have the deepest respect for those who have endorsed this posture, I do not believe that negotiating a combination of incentives to slow down the North Korean nuclear project can be justified on the grounds that it will provide us with the time to ensure we are ready for the collapse of the current political structure in Pyongyang that, in light of current trends, these critics believe will eventually happen.¹⁷ On the contrary, time is not on our side, and we have wasted a good deal of it already by engaging in such optimistic thinking.

The second option—the use of kinetic attacks on the North Korean military—is, in my view, totally unrealistic at this time. Those who suggest it seem to have lost track of the reason why we are opposing North Korea's nuclear programs in the first place. We are in Korea to protect an ally, the Republic of South Korea, and to reassure another ally, Japan, which is largely disarmed. The consequence of a US preemptive strike against North Korea would leave Seoul in ruins. It would be an act for which America would not be forgiven and one that could well unravel both the system of US alliances and US nonproliferation efforts in the region for which our deterrent and our military presence have been responsible. It would also impose enormous costs on China. An American military attack on North Korea would trigger the Chinese military alliance with North Korea.¹⁸ China would be compelled to deploy military force in North Korea

with the objective, at a minimum, of creating a buffer zone to prevent millions of North Koreans from pouring into China. The North Korean regime might well collapse under such attacks, but the consequences for China, including a South Korean military presence on its border, are quite unacceptable. Moreover, we must contemplate that potentially uncontrolled factions of the North Korean military would take possession of those conventional and nuclear weapons the Americans did not destroy and that this could lead to a lengthy and horrific conflict.

The third option, which might be called a version of “containment,” is no more realistic than the first two. This would mean the acceptance of the development of a North Korean nuclear weapons capability that threatens the American homeland. But, it is urged, the United States was willing to accept just such hostile capabilities in the case of the Soviet Union and China. By credibly threatening to destroy those countries by means of nuclear retaliation should they attack the American homeland, US forces kept that homeland safe. That was the rationale, at any rate, responsible for the Kennedy administration’s decision not to preempt the nascent and vulnerable Chinese nuclear program, as many in that administration urged.¹⁹

The problem is that North Korea’s strategic objectives are very different from those of either China or the Soviet Union. North Korea’s paramount goal is to unite the Korean Peninsula.²⁰ There is no geostrategic ambition so compelling as the unification of societies that have been rent asunder by war. And while the US deterrent would doubtless protect the US homeland, striking the US homeland is not the North Korean objective. Rather, its objective is to put South Korea in the position of asking the United States to leave the peninsula so as to avoid a conflict that would destroy both North and South Korea. This would not be an unrealistic choice by South Koreans who could well calculate that the American defense of their government would mean the destruction of their society. Such a scenario might be superficially appealing to China. After all, isn’t it Chinese policy to see the United States leave the region and abandon its local alliances?²¹ In fact, this may be the most dangerous option of all for China because it leads directly to the proliferation of nuclear weapons to both South Korea and Japan and the formation of a South Korean-Japanese condominium against China. It is the US extended deterrent protecting these countries that has kept them from acquiring their own nuclear arsenals (and that has allowed them to nurse historic enmities). Remove this deterrent, and both states have the technology, technocracy, wealth, and face threats that would impel them to acquire their own nuclear weapons.²²

Our current approach to the North Korea problem is a combination of both kinetic and diplomatic threats, occasionally alternating with the offer of incentives. This approach



cannot succeed. There is nothing the United States can do *to* North Korea that will lead to its renunciation of its nuclear weapons program. North Korea—even before it developed the capability to strike the American homeland with nuclear weapons, North Korea already posed an unacceptable risk of retaliation against our allies in response to an American military intervention. Moreover, there is nothing the US can do *for* North Korea that might induce it to denuclearize because the Kim regime is convinced that, for domestic reasons, the leadership can only be assured of remaining in power by keeping its country on a war footing against the United States. Finally, there is nothing the international community, including China, can do *to* North Korea in the way of greater sanctions or *for* North Korea by abating sanctions. Neither action could possibly persuade the Kim regime to give up its nuclear weapons because the regime has concluded that only its threats to others have preserved it thus far.

The failure to achieve a denuclearized Korean Peninsula would be a serious defeat for US policy. North Korean nuclear capability would deter the United States from protecting its regional allies were they threatened, extorted, or attacked by North Korea. This result would risk dissolution of the American northern Pacific alliance and the unraveling of our strategic position in Asia. This is emphatically not the situation we faced in Europe when two superpowers confronted each other at the head of multistate alliance systems—NATO and the Warsaw Pact. North Korea is not the Soviet Union, and its history of risk-taking and bizarre regional predations is unique among contemporary states. Moreover, our current policy of pressuring China to pressure North Korea not only minimizes our influence in the region, it would not—even were it successful—really compel China, which has every incentive to prolong our role as supplicant.

It is true that containment worked to resolve the Cold War in our favor, and without the horrors of a nuclear conflict. But our situation in Europe had two salient features: the presence of the US extended deterrent for NATO that prevented the possibility of aggression in Central Europe to reunify Germany and the Helsinki Accords that ultimately settled the issue of borders and opened up the Warsaw Pact states. My proposal has elements that are analogous to both these strategic and legal foundations. Chinese nuclear deterrence is a crucial element in my proposal but, as we shall see, not the only important initiative. Rather, it sits inside a much larger diplomatic and legal framework.

IV.

Leonid Brezhnev, according to Anatoly Dobrynin, relished the “publicity he would gain . . . when the Soviet public learned of the final settlement of the postwar boundaries for which they had sacrificed so much.”²³ It is noteworthy that the North Koreans have,

for many decades, called for an international conference to end the Korean War, and they have now apparently been joined in this call by South Korea (which unfortunately could sacrifice an important bargaining chip if the United States fails to incorporate this concession to North Korea within a more comprehensive plan).²⁴

To appreciate the importance of the North Korean position, we must step back a bit from the immediate political crisis and review the historic strategic and legal circumstances that brought us here. In July 1950, American and other allied troops under UN command entered the conflict that began on June 25, 1950, when North Korea crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. In July 1951, peace negotiations began at Panmunjom between the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (which had intervened in the war in October 1950) and the Korean People's Army of North Korea on one side, and the United Nations Command, headed by the United States, on the other.²⁵ These negotiations lasted more than two years during which, despite some UN successes, there was a military stalemate. The final agreement, signed on July 27, 1953, merely provided for an armistice and created a two-mile-wide demilitarized zone roughly along the 38th parallel. That cease-fire agreement still provides the governing arrangement as the UN resolutions remain in place. Legally, the Korean War is in abatement, but it has not terminated because no final peace settlement has been agreed to. Indeed, both North and South Korea claim to be the sole legitimate government of the peninsula.²⁶

For China, this situation is similar, in some significant aspects, to that faced by the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s. Then, too, the national boundaries of its allies were not finalized because these frontiers had been forged in the aftermath of World War II and there was no peace agreement between the USSR and the other states that fought the war. In that sense, the Helsinki Accords of 1975—though not a binding treaty—finally ended World War II and recognized the inviolability of the postwar borders.²⁷ Although we think of Helsinki as important in the context of human rights, the promises offered by the USSR to uphold basic rights were purchased at the price of the states of NATO conceding the national borders of the Warsaw Pact states.

I propose a similar conference, convened by the United Nations, to include North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, and the United States, with the goal of finally ending the Korean War and recognizing the borders of both Koreas as inviolate.²⁸ Roughly speaking, America and China would be in the positions of the United States and the USSR at Helsinki—a role that China has long coveted. The crucial predicate for the success of the conference will depend on the Chinese guarantee of extended deterrence to North Korea linked to North Korean denuclearization and intrusive



inspections by the United Nations of the kind negotiated with Iran. I do not see that any option other than a Chinese nuclear guarantee has the realistic potential to compel Pyongyang to come to an agreement that denuclearizes the peninsula. (Washington has already given such a guarantee to South Korea. It is this guarantee that has kept South Korea nonnuclear.²⁹⁾

A nuclear guarantee from China for the inviolability of the North Korean regime is the basis for this option, although it sits inside a larger complex of initiatives. If China were to give a credible nuclear guarantee to North Korea in the case of a US invasion or preemptive strike against the regime, there would be little point in North Korea risking the survival of its regime by developing long-range nuclear weapons. This policy is not to be confused with the current mutual defense pact between North Korea and China, one cornerstone of which is China's no-first-use policy. Getting under China's nuclear umbrella, however, could provide Kim a greater chance of long-term survival than a nuclear arsenal vulnerable to US first strike and antimissile technologies. In fact, I think it can be shown that without the protection of Chinese nuclear extended deterrence, Kim's allegedly defensive strategy will almost certainly lead to his eventual destruction, with enormous human costs to the peoples of the peninsula.

From Kim's point of view, there is much security to be gained by such a guarantee of deterrence against the United States and much security to be lost if North Korea continues its present course when further technological advances in the United States render the North Korean arsenal ever more vulnerable. Our aim must be to reorient Kim Jong Un's paranoia, making him more afraid of losing a unique opportunity for security in the eyes of his own people than he is afraid of dependence on China.

We must stop kidding ourselves about the incentives we can realistically employ to force or induce compliance from North Korea. Nothing short of a credible guarantee of the regime's preservation will modify its behavior. Kim will starve his own people and run incalculable risks because he believes he has no other credible choice. No guarantee that the United States gives is credible to the North Korean leadership. The course of action I am proposing is not without its own risks. It could increase the chance of a Chinese-American confrontation and would link Chinese nuclear strategy to a surrogate that is unpredictable and appears to relish conflict. Nevertheless, it is a more promising option than those currently being canvassed. At present, we are dangerously drifting, in part because almost everyone in the United States thinks that every avenue has been explored.

V.

In various recent venues, I have argued that a Chinese guarantee of extended deterrence to North Korea, analogous to those the United States gives to Japan and South Korea, is the best path—perhaps the only realistic path—to a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.³⁰ But even if I am right, why would China want to assert its leadership in this way? Why in the world would China, which has a fraught relationship with the North Korean regime, want to extend its nuclear deterrent to protect that regime and thus assume additional risks of retaliation against the Chinese homeland should it ever have to make good on that guarantee? And if it did, why would the North Koreans—who at present are so wary of China—accept the offer? (There have been rumors that just such a proposal may have been on the agenda of the Kim-Xi meeting in March 2018, but I have been unable to confirm this.)

As I've indicated, the alternatives for China are bleak. The continuation of the current diplomatic strategy by which the international community has made China responsible for pressuring North Korea is a strategy that makes both China and the United States look helpless in the region and makes China responsible for the failure of an impossible diplomatic task. The outcomes of the three scenarios I described earlier all have incalculable and potentially deadly consequences for China. On the other hand, accepting the leadership role I have described as a co-convenor of a conference that finally ends the Korean War and that takes these catastrophic options off the table is very much in China's interest. It would secure for China a diplomatic role as a great power that its economic growth alone cannot achieve. It would defuse a regional conflict with the United States. And it offers the only realistic means of restraining a troublesome ally whose ultimate ambitions do not coincide with those of China.

At present, the People's Republic of China has a "central deterrence" relationship with the United States. That is, the Chinese nuclear arsenal, which includes nuclear warheads that can be launched by missiles from submarines, threatens the United States with retaliatory attacks on the American homeland as a way of preventing a US strike on the Chinese homeland. "Extended deterrence," by contrast, describes the protection Washington gives to allies like South Korea and Japan: we undertake to retaliate on their behalf against any state that attacks them, and this includes a nuclear threat against nuclear-armed states like China, Russia, and North Korea.



VI.

Why would North Korea accept such a Chinese offer? As best we can surmise, North Korea's logic rests on the rationale that fully tested and deployed nuclear capabilities will ensure the safety of the regime.

North Korea's reasoning appears to run like this: no guarantee by the United States or by the international community (which North Korea believes is being led by the United States) can be trusted. Only the capability to deploy hydrogen fusion warheads launched by long-range ballistic missiles that could destroy American cities can provide an ironclad guarantee for the regime. North Korea believes that there is nothing of such value to the Americans on the peninsula that would lead the United States to risk—or suffer—the deaths of millions of Americans. They are not alone in believing this. Many commentators have remarked that if Libya and Iraq had developed deliverable nuclear weapons, their totalitarian regimes would be in power today.³¹ Kim Jong Un, looking at Libya and Iraq, might conclude that Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein should have developed deliverable nuclear weapons. That's because there would have been nothing of such value to the Americans in a regime change for Libya and Iraq that could have possibly persuaded Washington to risk—or suffer—the deaths of millions of people: not oil, not imperial hubris, and certainly not a desire to vindicate human rights or develop democracy. In North Korea's eyes, once testing confirms its capabilities, the regime will be safe and its dynasty can rest easy.

It's true that even without nuclear warheads and long-range ballistic missiles, North Korea could still threaten millions of people in Japan and South Korea, two of America's closest allies. But that threat might not deter the United States from seeking regime change in North Korea owing to the notorious problem that bedeviled our alliances in the Cold War—the possibility that the mere threat to damage US allies would be insufficient to deter Washington from a surprise first strike against the Soviet Union or China. Therefore, Pyongyang has developed the capability to deploy hydrogen fusion warheads launched with long-range ballistic missiles that could, without anything like pinpoint accuracy, destroy a number of US cities.

There is an error embedded in this reasoning, however, that—unless urgent steps are taken by North Korea to defuse the situation—will almost certainly lead to the destruction of the regime. That catastrophic error is the result of precisely the move that Kim thought would render his regime invulnerable. As long as only American allies, like South Korea and Japan, were threatened by North Korea, there was no urgent need for the United States to act to remove the Kim regime. It was thought

that if we simply played for time, eventually the sort of internal contradictions that resulted in the collapse of the regimes that governed the Warsaw Pact states would bring about a similar transformation in North Korea. Washington could afford to wait. Many things might occur: a revolution in North Korea, a coup by internal dissidents (perhaps in league with Chinese sympathizers), the rise of a Kim descendant who gave priority to economic growth and international trade. All of these were not unrealistic hopes. Nothing much was lost by this wishful thinking, it was believed, and much catastrophe was avoided.

But now, whether by design or miscalculation—whether by the regime or by some faction thereof, by the North Korean state or by nonstate actors who buy or barter for North Korean weapons—the US homeland has been placed in a jeopardy that will definitely concentrate the American mind. As a consequence, there is an immense and compelling incentive for Washington to surge the development of its nuclear damage limitation capabilities: the ability to limit North Korea's capacity to inflict retaliatory damage on the United States. Changes in technology derived from the revolution in rapid computation and communications that is still accelerating will decisively erode North Korea's retaliatory capabilities.³² Techniques like hardening and concealment that currently protect the North Korean arsenal are being made obsolete by advances in accuracy, the timing of detonation, and remote sensing devices.³³ New guidance systems, data processing and telecommunications, artificial intelligence, and many of the other by-products of the computer revolution are driving this development.³⁴ Absent the new North Korean threat to the American homeland, the United States might well forgo the pursuit of such damage-limiting capabilities because the acquisition of this capacity brings with it other risks, like launch-on-warning protocols. But North Korea's maneuvers to secure its future have made it now so deadly to America that—unless some decisive step away from this fate is taken—the removal of the regime is sealed.

At present, North Korea's policy rests on a total acceptance of the "deterrence assumption."³⁵ This is the assumption that a state's possession of even a modest number of deliverable nuclear weapons renders credible the threat to destroy another state, such that any other state contemplating an attack will be wholly dissuaded from destroying the state possessing such weapons. Already, however, the developments in technology and tactics just mentioned promise to fatally undermine the premise of survivability that underlies this assumption.

As a result, at present the future of the North Korean regime is deeply problematic. In the short run, Pyongyang will arm as quickly as possible and make threats as dire



as it can conceive. But even without war in the immediate time frame, which would certainly destroy the Kim dynasty, North Korea is living on borrowed time. Two bits of jargon are helpful here: decoupling and uncoupling. “Decoupling” is the refusal to use US weapons on behalf of US allies out of fear of retaliation against the American homeland, e.g., the fear during the Cold War that the US deterrent would become detached (“decoupled”) from the extended, non-homeland theaters in Europe and Asia it protected.³⁶ “Uncoupling” reflects the fear that the United States would in an actual war lower the risk to the American homeland by confining its nuclear retaliation to the extended theater in a tacit bargain to spare the homelands of the nuclear armed combatants.³⁷ (“Fighting to the last German,” it was sometimes said, in case of Soviet invasion of West Germany if the use of US nuclear weapons was limited to attacking the invading force.³⁸) Eventually, the United States will strike North Korea’s war-making machine because the nuclear scenario will have shifted from “decoupling” to “uncoupling.” That is, North Korea’s threat to the US homeland will drive the American will to accept considerable risks to her allies to neutralize that threat. Despite South Korean statements that no US strikes on North Korea should take place without South Korea’s consent, a more accurate description of US policy was given by John Bolton just prior to his being named national security advisor: “No foreign government, even a close ally, can veto action to protect Americans from Kim Jong-un’s nuclear weapons.”³⁹

Only one maneuver can save North Korea—the acquisition of a credible nuclear guarantee by Russia or, much more likely, China. Their arsenals are of very different sizes—China’s being much smaller and more vulnerable. But in any case, it is scarcely conceivable that Washington would risk nuclear retaliation just to rid the world of the Kim regime. Given recent Russian behavior, there is little reason to think that it would play a constructive role in the conference I am proposing. A Chinese nuclear guarantee, negotiated as a necessary predicate to convening the conference—which both China and North Korea have long sought—is the key.

The difficulties are threefold. The first lies in persuading North Korea that its negotiating strength is at its apogee now—for the reasons I have given—and that its peril will only grow in the absence of such a guarantee. The second is persuading China, which has a no-first-use policy regarding nuclear weapons, to adopt a program of extended deterrence to protect its fractious and unpredictable neighbor. Nor is it obvious that the US leadership has the will to press for such an imaginative but counterintuitive policy.

But in fact, not only is this a way out of the current crisis—it is the only option that, with the adoption of other policies like the mutual renunciation of reunification by

force of the Koreans, can eventually lead to a denuclearization of the peninsula. That is because the extension of nuclear deterrence by China would depend on North Korean compliance with intrusive inspections. Should North Korea be found cheating, the Chinese guarantee would evaporate. This is a far more powerful check on North Korean duplicity than any other realistic threat.

This approach is far preferable to the policies we are currently pursuing. Those policies are weak and ineffectual, dangerous and self-destructive, or both. (This is why the North Korean propaganda machine trumpeted, rather than suppressed, President Trump's threats to unleash "fire and fury . . . the likes of which this world has never seen" and to "totally destroy North Korea."⁴⁰) Moreover, such threats unnerve the publics of our allies in the region and discredit those political elements that support an alliance with the United States.⁴¹ Finally, it is always possible that in such an atmosphere, a stray airliner or North Korean missile launch that goes awry might trigger a regional holocaust. Our strategic objective in the region is not to weaken North Korea or China but to strengthen our alliances with South Korea and Japan. The current policy has just the opposite impact, making Washington look feckless and menacing at the same time.

On the other hand, as one British military historian has observed, once the DMZ is internationally recognized as a border, North Korea will enjoy the protection of the United Nations—which in the medium term should be attractive to Kim.⁴² In the longer run, however, we may hope that this very stability may tend toward unification on South Korean terms—like German reunification, which ultimately proceeded from Helsinki.

VII.

Let me anticipate a few objections.

As I acknowledge below that it takes more to reassure an ally than to deter an enemy, why would a Chinese guarantee be sufficient to convince Kim "to go naked," as one of my correspondents asked? Some have also noted that the precedent of Saddam in 1993 and 2003 suggests otherwise. It should be pointed out, however, that there was no great power guarantee to Saddam to ensure his regime's survival in the event that he truly abandoned his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and was seen to have done so.

Game theory suggests that Washington might be averse to acting, and this prediction gives grounds for Kim simply taking his chances.⁴³ Moreover, perhaps my argument proves too much: If Kim were really in such trouble in light of developing US



capabilities, then why would he even need a guarantee? He should, rationally, denuclearize on his own.

There is a certain logic to this, but politics is more a matter of history and path dependence than of rigorous rationality. Given where Kim is now—not perhaps where he should be had he really thought things through—he could not unilaterally denuclearize and remain in power. Too much of his regime's hold on its people is premised on the American threat and his resistance to that threat. It may be that this is a stupendous example of the fallacy of sunk costs. But if so, it wouldn't be the first time that world events turned on such agates, viz., the US tragedy in Vietnam.

What of the risks to China of being tethered to such an ally? How then does China handle the entrapment problem of a North Korea emboldened to challenge South Korea in the hopes that South Korea and America will be deterred by the possibility of a Chinese retaliation? One might argue that the Chinese could play the strategic ambiguity game as we do vis-à-vis Taiwan. But such an ambiguity would make it even less likely that Kim would see the assurance as reliable enough to abandon his nuclear weapons.

I have earlier briefly referred to the risks China might run with any alliance linking it to North Korea. China, however, already has such an alliance. In any case, the nuclear guarantee, as I emphasized, is a defensive one. Kim could hardly be confident that China would join him in extraterritorial adventures—indeed, quite the contrary. The potential withdrawal of the Chinese guarantee would be a powerful deterrent to North Korean adventurism. Finally, strategic ambiguity is not what I am suggesting, but rather an explicit extended deterrent. That guarantee promises to secure the borders of North Korea and its right to run its internal affairs without intervention—that is the Helsinki point.

VIII.

It is a familiar quotation of Nietzsche's that "forgetting our objectives is the most frequent stupidity in which we indulge ourselves." What is less well known is his explanation: "Along the journey we commonly forget its goal. Almost every vocation is chosen and entered upon as a means to a purpose but is ultimately continued as a final purpose in itself."⁴⁴

In this essay I have devoted some time to arguing that despite the difficulties each party might perceive in exploring my proposal, North Korea and China both have good reasons to pursue it. While I have adverted to the costs to the United States

of continuing on the paths we are currently traveling, I have not spent much time on why we ought to be able to get the US government on board. Indeed, I hope it won't sound captious to say that the US government may be the most difficult party to persuade. That's because there are considerable psychological and cultural costs whenever a policy of decades is abandoned. Bureaucratic veterans and participants in the national security conversation have to rethink their conclusions and entertain the possibility that they have been consistently wrong.⁴⁵

Indeed, with conventional wisdom so tightly wound around certain premises—China would never make the offer, North Korea would never accept—there is little incentive to go back to fundamentals, especially the fundamental point of why we are in the region to begin with and what risks there are to the security of South Korea and Japan in continuing our current drift, whether it is a drift to war, or acquiescence, or humiliating and dangerous retreat. It seems that Nietzsche's observation has not spared the United States.

Confronting North Korea is a means to a purpose; have we forgotten that purpose in the process of almost seven decades of confrontation? As my correspondent wrote, it can't really be that we are afraid of North Korea invading California.

We are concerned about North Korea's threats to America because we are committed to the security and peace of South Korea. We fought a difficult war there to preserve South Korea's independence the first time North Korea invaded. Our objective then was to stabilize a world order committed to the rule of law, the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and—above all—the freedom of peoples to pursue their own national destinies without intimidation from their neighbors. Institutions were created and supported that encouraged free markets and open trading arrangements, government by representation, and security cooperation because we believed these were means to achieve our ends. Indeed, to secure these freedoms in Asia and in Europe, the United States ran really dreadful risks to its homeland. Now a new threat to America is poised to become a reality. Do we really understand why we have to repel it?

If the danger is nuclear proliferation to South Korea and Japan, what's wrong with that? France and the United Kingdom have independent nuclear deterrents. If that is the only way that South Koreans can remain a free society, then why shouldn't they protect themselves, should they care to? If they do, and feel they need nuclear weapons to do so, why should we discourage them? And if they don't—if they are coerced into a unified state that reverses the prosperity and representative democracy they now enjoy—what business is it of ours?



One answer is that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is going in the wrong direction. It is our objective to reduce the number of weapons worldwide because we fear that the likelihood of their being used would increase, which would be a catastrophe for civilian populations. Another answer lies in how this proliferation would have come about: here it would have been as a consequence of the collapse of the US nuclear guarantee, which means that it carries with it the destruction of our most important alliances in the region. Another answer is that democratic solidarity is threatened by warfare, and strong alliances have—thus far—prevented the return of great power armed conflict.

Moreover, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons to South Korea and Japan is an important goal of China, with whom we wish to have cooperative and peaceful relations. Making China feel less safe may be satisfying to those who regard conflict between America and China as inevitable, but this may simply make conflict more likely. For those who think China is certain to be our ultimate adversary, it should be pointed out that China's greatest geostrategic weakness is a lack of allies. Strengthening North Korea, one of its few allies, can't be a positive step. A unified Korea under Pyongyang would be a formidable partner for Beijing.

But perhaps the most salient reason why we should be concerned about proliferation is that it would amount to a reversal of what has been, up to now, an astonishingly successful international strategy by the United States to use alliances to transform states ruined by war and to link them to our own security. We pursued this strategy because we faced a potentially mortal threat to our constitutional way of life and because it was congruent with our most hallowed values of respect for the individual conscience and hostility to state coercion.

Does anyone believe that abandoning South Korea and Japan will improve the lives of their peoples, strengthen their solidarity with the lives of our people, and diminish the strength of those parties who would dearly love to remove the American example from the possibilities available to the future? Or have we, along the way, forgotten the objectives of US strategy?

Let's remember precisely what this crisis is really about. It does not concern a threat against the United States per se, but rather a campaign to unify the peninsula by persuading South Koreans that we will either not risk our own homeland to protect them or, if pressed to intervene, will allow South Korea to become a cemetery by confining the battlefield to their homeland in order to spare ours. How America responds to this crisis will influence the expectations of states all across the world, for decades to come.

I would like to conclude by quoting a letter to me from Rolf Ekeus, the distinguished diplomat who as much as anyone is familiar with the history and politics of nuclear deterrence and proliferation. He writes,

The situation on the peninsula is gradually and systematically worsening and I doubt that the confirmation and continuation of policies with no new thinking will lead to anything else than a catastrophe.⁴⁶

NOTES

- 1 Lee Jong-seok, former unification minister of South Korea, and Cheong Seong-chang, North Korea expert at Sejong Institute, quoted in Choe Sang-Hun, “Will Kim Jong-un Trade His Nuclear Arsenal to Rebuild Economy?” *New York Times*, April 21, 2018, accessed April 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/21/world/asia/north-korea-kim-jong-un-nuclear-tests.html>.
- 2 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Final Act, August 1, 1975, 14 I.L.M. 1292, reprinted in 73 State Department Bulletin 323 (1975).
- 3 Elise Hu, “North Korea Claims Successful Hydrogen Bomb Test,” National Public Radio, September 3, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/09/03/523913820/north-korea-possibly-conducts-sixth-nuclear-test-south-korea-says>.
- 4 Choe Sang-Hun and David E. Sanger, “North Korea Fires Missile over Japan,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/world/asia/north-korea-missile.html>; Mark Landler, Choe Sang-Hun, and Helene Cooper, “North Korea Fires a Ballistic Missile, in a Further Challenge to Trump,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/28/world/asia/north-korea-missile-test.html>.
- 5 See “North Korea Missile Tests: A Timeline,” CBS News, September 6, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-korea-missile-tests-a-timeline>; and “A Timeline of North Korea’s Nuclear Tests,” CBS News, September 3, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-koreas-nuclear-tests-timeline>.
- 6 See Brent Scowcroft and Arnold Kanter, “Korea: Time for Action,” *Washington Post*, June 15, 1994, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1994/06/15/korea-time-for-action/73e7cb5b-73e9-4503-916f-9b601b67087d/?utm_term=.b97409622cfb; and Ash Carter and William Perry, “If Necessary, Strike and Destroy,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2006, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/21/AR2006062101518.html>.
- 7 See, e.g., Demetrios Caraley, *September 11, Terrorist Attacks, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Academy of Political Science, 2002), 73–74, discussing how the North Korean nuclear program acted largely as a deterrent to ensure regime survival, not for “war-fighting purposes.”
- 8 Simon Jenkins, email to author, copy on file with Hoover Institution.
- 9 Mark Bowden, “What Did North Korea’s Missile Test Really Change?” *The Atlantic*, July 5, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/north-korea-icbm/532692>.
- 10 Winston Churchill, “The Locust Years,” speech before the House of Commons, November 12, 1936, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/Locusts.html>.



11 I have not described the so-called bloody nose option, of which one variant is an attack on a North Korean ICBM test or on testing facilities. I simply do not see this as a true option so much as one more example—and a particularly reckless one—of postponing rather than preventing North Korean acquisition of a nuclear threat against the American homeland without regard to the political impact of such US behavior on our regional allies.

12 Avril Haines, “North Korea—A Path Forward,” speech at the Brookings Institution, October 10, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/fp_20171010_north_korea_keynote.pdf.

13 See UN resolutions as follows: S/RES/1695; S/RES/1718; S/RES/1874; S/RES/2087; S/RES/2094; S/RES/2270; S/RES/2321; S/RES/2356; S/RES/2371; S/RES/2375; S/RES/2397.

14 See Eleanor Albert, “The China–North Korea Relationship,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 28, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-north-korea-relationship>. See also Anne Gearan, “U.S. Wants More U.N. Sanctions over North Korea’s Nuclear Arms, Warns Time Is Short,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 2017 (statement by then US secretary of state Rex Tillerson to UN Security Council), accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-an-apparent-shift-tillerson-says-us-willing-to-hold-direct-talks-with-n-korea/2017/04/27/a2093a0e-2bac-11e7-b605-33413c691853_story.html?utm_term=.1dd5e1ca006c.

15 See, e.g., “A New Breed of Conglomerates Is Helping to Prop Up North Korea,” *The Economist*, January 25, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/news/asia/21735631-want-flight-pyongyang-cigarettes-potted-pheasant-petrol-new-breed-conglomerates>; and “North Korea’s Economy: Spring Release,” *The Economist*, February 26, 2015, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/news/asia/21645252-tantalising-signs-change-are-emerging-whether-they-signal-more-profound-shifts-less>.

16 But see “Donald Trump May Be Bluffing over a Pre-emptive Strike on North Korea,” *The Economist*, January 27, 2018, analyzing emergent capitalism in North Korea as the seeds of pluralism.

17 For the most eloquent of the advocates for this option, see Haines, “North Korea—A Path Forward.”

18 Ankit Panda, “China and North Korea Have a Mutual Defense Treaty, but When Would It Apply?” *The Diplomat*, August 14, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/china-and-north-korea-have-a-mutual-defense-treaty-but-when-would-it-apply>.

19 See Franz-Stefan Gady, “How a State Department Study Prevented Nuclear War with China,” *The Diplomat*, October 25, 2017, discussing how the State Department understood that the status quo would still be maintained even with Chinese nuclear missiles because they would be cautious in using them, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/how-a-state-department-study-prevented-nuclear-war-with-china>.

20 See Alex Lockie, “North Korea Doesn’t Just Want Nuclear Weapons for Defense—It Wants Them to Retake South Korea,” *Business Insider*, August 7, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/north-korea-nuclear-weapons-to-reunite-korean-peninsula-2017-8>; and Tom O’Connor, “North Korea Wants to Reunite with South, But Only If U.S. Stays Out,” *Newsweek*, January 17, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/north-korea-wants-reunite-south-only-if-us-stays-out-783963>.

21 See, e.g., Todd Rosenblum, “How to Persuade China to Abandon North Korea,” *Politico*, July 18, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2017/07/18/china-north-korea-american-troops-removal-000476>.

22 See Richard C. Bush, “The Real Reason a North Korean Nuclear Weapon Is So Terrifying—and It’s Not What You Think,” Brookings Institution, August 9, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/08/09/the-real-reason-a-north-korean-nuclear-weapon-is-so-terrifying-and-its-not-what-you-think>.

23 John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 190.

24 See James Dobbins and Jeffrey Hornung, “End the Korean War, Finally,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/opinion/end-the-korean-war-finally.html>. See also Choe Sang-Hun and Jane Perlez, “Treaty to Formally End Korean War Is Being Discussed, South Confirms,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2018, accessed April 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/18/world/asia/north-korea-south-treaty.html>.

25 See Thomas Paterson, et al., *American Foreign Relations*, vol. 2: *Since 1895* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2014), https://books.google.com/books?id=hkjaAQAQBAJ&pg=PA288&lpg=PA288&dq=Feb.+1951+peace+negotiations+began+at+Panmunjom&source=bl&ots=stnBlaFcnK&sig=gm_eW9DcGwlsBBI2Fl7bVqkLEqQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKUWjAo47Xu7DZAUGk1kKHxjUAMUQ6AEIjQEwCQ#v=onepage&q=Feb.%201951%20peace%20negotiations%20began%20at%20Panmunjom&f=false.

26 For the South Korean claim, see Chapter 1, Article 3, Constitution of the Republic of Korea, accessed April 12, 2018, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_117333.pdf. See also Scott W. Harold, “Countering North Korea’s Political Warfare,” *The Diplomat*, February 10, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/countering-north-koreas-political-warfare>. For the North Korean claim, see Thomas Fingar, *Uneasy Partnerships: China’s Engagement with Japan, the Koreans, and Russia in the Era of Reform* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 126.

27 See Helsinki Final Act, Section 1(a)(IV).

28 I have not included Russia in the group, despite the fact that it has been one of the participants in the Six Party group talks. Russia was not overtly involved in the Korean War and has no necessary role in a peace conference to legally terminate that war. Moreover, Russia’s recent behavior suggests that it has little interest in supporting the international security order.

29 For commentary on this issue, see Adam Taylor, “Why Doesn’t South Korea Have Nuclear Weapons? For a Time, It Pursued Them,” *Washington Post*, July 31, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/07/31/why-doesnt-south-korea-have-nuclear-weapons-for-a-time-it-pursued-them/?utm_term=.d9194d76ee58.

30 *Time* magazine published two essays of mine on North Korea in late September and early October. See “A Way Forward in the North Korea Crisis,” September 21, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://time.com/4950248/a-way-forward-in-the-north-korea-crisis>. These essays suggested interlocking diplomatic and military proposals for resolving the current crisis in the peninsula. One common reaction to these essays was that it was a fine idea but the Chinese would never participate, and if they did, the North Koreans would reject their participation. To answer these objections, I wrote three short essays posted on *Lawfare*. These, interestingly, prompted interest from various quarters in Europe and elsewhere. On January 20, 2018, Bloomberg did an extensive interview with me on the subject. See “A North Korea Solution: Take Kim Out of the Loop,” accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-01-20/a-north-korea-solution-take-kim-out-of-the-loop>. Then in late January, the BBC China solicited, translated, broadcast and then posted an essay summarizing my proposal—it was their lead story, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/world-42861585>. That, in turn, prompted interest in various quarters in China. This was followed by a *Forbes* piece commenting on the proposal: Jay Ogilvy, “Unraveling the Mess in North Korea,” *Forbes*, February 1, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2018/02/01/unraveling-the-mess-in-north-korea/#7061e4119c45>.

31 See, e.g., Andrew J. Pierre, “If Gaddafi Had the Bomb,” *Huffington Post*, August 4, 2011, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-j-pierre/if-gaddafi-had-the-bomb_b_846820.html; and Kenneth N. Waltz and Mira Rapp Hopper, “What Kim Jong Il Learned from Qaddafi’s Fall: Never Disarm,”



The Atlantic, October 24, 2011, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/what-kim-jong-il-learned-from-qaddafis-fall-never-disarm/247192>.

32 See Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence,” *International Security* 41, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 9, accessed April 12, 2018, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/isec_a_00273_LieberPress.pdf.

33 Max Singer, “The New Threat of Very Accurate Missiles,” Hudson Institute, August 9, 2016, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/research/12727-the-new-threat-of-very-accurate-missiles>; Oriana Pawlyk, “Air Force’s Bunker-Busting MOP Receives an Upgrade,” *Military.com*, January 29, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.military.com/dodbuzz/2018/01/29/air-forces-bunker-busting-mop-receives-upgrade.html>; “The Nuke Detectives,” *The Economist*, September 5, 2015, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/news/technology-quarterly/21662652-clandestine-weapons-new-ways-detect-covert-nuclear-weapons-are-being-developed>.

34 “U.S. Defense against North Korea Missiles Improved, Pentagon Testing Agency Finds,” Bloomberg via *The Japan Times*, January 24, 2018, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/24/asia-pacific/u-s-defense-north-korea-missiles-improved-pentagon-testing-agency-finds/#.Wpb3zPmnHIU>; Esther Hutcheson, “Artificial Intelligence Can Improve Radioactive Particles’ Detection,” *Phys.org*, July 8, 2015, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://phys.org/news/2015-07-artificial-intelligence-radioactive-particles.html>.

35 See Bobbitt, *Democracy and Deterrence*, 200; “Under Trump, a Looming North Korean ICBM Threat Brings Alliance ‘Decoupling’ Fears Back to East Asia,” *The Diplomat*, May 9, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/under-trump-a-looming-north-korean-icbm-threat-brings-alliance-decoupling-fears-back-to-east-asia>.

36 Bobbitt, *Democracy and Deterrence*, 105 (Henry Kissinger’s famous description of decoupling).

37 Bobbitt, *Democracy and Deterrence*, 107 (definition of “uncoupling” derived).

38 Jeffrey Lewis, “A Boy and His Toys,” *Foreign Policy*, September 6, 2014, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/06/a-boy-and-his-toys>.

39 Ankit Panda, “John Bolton Enters the Trump Administration: What to Expect,” *The Diplomat*, March 23, 2018, accessed April 24, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/john-bolton-enters-the-trump-administration-what-to-expect>.

40 Peter Baker and Choe Sang-Hun, “Trump Threatens ‘Fire and Fury’ against North Korea If It Endangers U.S.,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/world/asia/north-korea-un-sanctions-nuclear-missile-united-nations.html>; Ali Vitali, “Trump Threatens to ‘Totally Destroy’ North Korea in First U.N. Speech,” NBC News, September 21, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-un-north-korean-leader-suicide-mission-n802596>.

41 Brad Dennett, “Here in South Korea, People Fear Donald Trump More Than Kim Jong-un,” *Independent*, September 7, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/north-korea-kim-jong-un-donald-trump-nuclear-war-threats-south-korea-gangnam-what-its-like-a7934036.html>.

42 Alan Mallinson, email to author, on file with Hoover Institution.

43 On the other hand, game theory has other implications for my proposal. Shortly after publication, I received a note from the game theorist Horace W. Brock pointing out that two important results in game theory strongly reinforced my proposal. First, in 1968, the German Nobel Prize winner Reinhard Selten published a path-breaking paper entitled “A Simple Model of Imperfect Competition, Where 4 Are Few and 6 Are Many,” *International Journal of Game Theory* 2, no. 1 (December 1973), accessed April 12, 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF01737566>. Selten analyzed cartel behavior, in particular the impact of the number of players on cartel stability. He proved that the probability of the players agreeing to the terms of a cartel was 100 percent if there were up to four players. Then, if there were five, the probability of

each player's joining fell to 22 percent. Finally, for six or more members, the probability of cartel creation plummeted to zero. Think of airlines: we have seen that, when there are three carriers, all three implicitly collude, and airfares and profits are strong. Then, if one or two new airlines enter (recall Freddie Laker), price wars break out and airfares drop sharply.

The second development in game theory was due to Selten's co-Nobel prize winner, John Harsanyi (a third co-winner was John Nash). Until Harsanyi's work in the late 1960s, game theory had assumed that each player knew almost everything about his antagonists, i.e., their level of risk aversion, their preferences, and their resources. Harsanyi extended game theory to deal with cases where players knew much less, that is, to cases of "incomplete information." The solutions to incomplete information games are much more unstable and prone to "mistakes" and miscalculations than are those of complete information. See John C. Harsanyi, "Games with Incomplete Information Played by "Bayesian" Players, I-III. Part I. The Basic Model," *Management Science*, 14, no. 3 (November 1967): 159–82, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www2.cs.siu.edu/~hexmoor/classes/CS491-F10/Harasyani.pdf>.

When the insights of these two theoretical results are applied to international relations, we now know that the greater the number of players, and the more incomplete the information, the greater the instability and the chance of war. To begin with, when there are five nations involved (think of the five empires at the outbreak of World War I or the five players in the Korean crisis), there are more than thirty coalitions that can form and complicate matters as they did in 1913. We know from Selten's result that the probability of a stable agreement in such a game is negligible. With only two players, however, there are no coalitions at all. In this latter case, game theory predicts the kind of stability we witnessed between the USSR and the United States between 1950 and 1990. Now factor in incomplete information and the fact that the magnitude of incomplete information explodes with the number of coalitions. The result: an even greater degree of instability.

Brock's main point was that my strategy transforms today's unstable game of five players (Japan, the United States, China, North Korea, and South Korea) into a stable two-player game of relatively complete information: the United States and China.

44 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Wanderer and His Shadow," reprinted in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 642.

45 I was disappointed to read this reaction from a former senior official who had himself labored on this subject while in office. He began by observing, "Unlike many who write about this, I am humble about how much we know about North Korean intentions," but then he quickly concluded, "I think your suggestion is a non-starter for the DPRK." It may well be, but for many US government officials a more accurate answer is, "Your suggestion is a non-starter for me." North Korea's intentions are best determined by approaching it.

46 Rolf Ekeus, email to author, on file with the Hoover Institution.



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Working Group on National Security, Technology, and Law

The Working Group on National Security, Technology, and Law brings together national and international specialists with broad interdisciplinary expertise to analyze how technology affects national security and national security law and how governments can use that technology to defend themselves, consistent with constitutional values and the rule of law.

The group focuses on a broad range of interests, from surveillance to counterterrorism to the dramatic impact that rapid technological change—digitalization, computerization, miniaturization, and automaticity—are having on national security and national security law. Topics include cybersecurity, the rise of drones and autonomous weapons systems, and the need for—and dangers of—state surveillance. The group's output will also be published on the Lawfare blog, which covers the merits of the underlying legal and policy debates of actions taken or contemplated to protect the nation and the nation's laws and legal institutions.

Jack Goldsmith and Benjamin Wittes are the cochairs of the National Security, Technology, and Law Working Group.

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