

Special Lecture by Amb. Joseph Yun

“The US and North Korea: What Next?”

October 22, 2018

Lecture

Joseph Yun

Today I wanted to talk about the experience that I had working in both the Obama and Trump administrations and things I saw—the transition of US policy towards North Korea. After that, I want to talk about my own thoughts on where we are going in the US-North Korea relationship. I was with the US State Department for 33 years; I joined in 1985. I had the fortune of being assigned to Korea twice in 1996 and 2005—both were very interesting times. When I was assigned in the 1990s, I witnessed the transition to Kim Dae Jung, who made his own brand of policy called the “Sunshine Policy.” When I worked in the late 2000, there was another transition from the Roh administration to Lee Myung-bak. I was happy to see Professor Lee there, who was the head of the transition for President Lee. That was a tough transition going the other way, from a conservative to a very liberal North Korea policy under the DJ administration, and then subsequently, from a very liberal policy to a conservative one when South Koreans elected Lee Myung-bak.

The transition I will be focusing on is the one between Obama and Trump. In mid-2016, I was in Kuala Lumpur as an ambassador. When I got the call to be the Special Representative for North Korea Policy, I was very excited. At that time, we still had Obama in the White House. In mid-2016, everyone expected Hillary Clinton to win the next presidential elections. I worked for Hillary when she was the Secretary of State in the years 2009-2012, so I knew her very well. I

traveled with her to several places. I found her very friendly. I had high expectations to work for her, with the assumption that she would be elected as the next president of the US.

In early November, I thought I would retire very soon, but for some reason, the Trump administration decided to continue working with me. I knew this was a new administration, and I believed that with North Korea, engagement was key. What good is it to be a diplomat if you do not talk? In November, I called my North Korean counterparts in New York, and said that we need to get together and prepare for the new incoming administration.

When I contacted the New York Channel—which had been cut, the North Korean officials were very adamant, rejecting to talk to anyone from the Obama administration. They were very angry at the whole policy of strategic patience. They felt that they were ignored. But moreover, they were angry at Obama for giving an interview early on in 2016, in which he said, “I believe in the long term, regime change of North Korea is the only answer.” North Korean officials cut the New York Channel and said, “why should we talk to you if you believe regime change is the answer.” That persisted until January 20.

I invited North Korean officials to talk again at the end of February 2017. However, this is when Kim Jong Nam was assassinated in Kuala Lumpur, where I used to live. It was clear that this was not an accident. There were clear links to North Korea. The US administration said that they could not come to talks because of this assassination. Hence, the first attempt for engagement had failed.

Meanwhile, we began a policy review in Washington DC, and the first item for foreign policy review was North Korea. It took three months to review various options. This review involved the White House, State Department, Defense Department, Treasury, Energy and intelligence agencies. The policy that resulted at the end of the review was “maximum pressure and engagement.” Throughout last year, maximum pressure was the main policy. Given the continued testing of North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles, we had no other choice. I believed the tension reached a high point in November last year. Already by September, North

Korea had tested six nuclear weapons. They developed a thermal nuclear device that was probably estimated to be about 200 kilotons—fifteen times the Hiroshima bomb. In November last year, they tested Hwasong-15, a bona fide ICBM missile system, which exacerbated tensions.

The South Korean president undertook efforts of diplomacy, using the PyeongChang Olympics as the tool to convene a new round of diplomacy. I do think the situation is materially different in comparison to one year ago. After the Olympics, Kim Jong Un came out from the shadows; he met with Xi Jinping three times, South Korean President four times. Secretary Pompeo went to Pyongyang four times, and of course, Trump and Kim Jong Un held an unprecedented summit on June 12 this year.

We have important agreements now, between Moon and Kim and between Trump and Kim. We are anticipating a second Trump-Kim summit and a visit by Kim Jong Un to Seoul.

What does Washington think about all this? President Trump, has moved on from fire and fury to “we’re in love.” To some degree, there is a healthy amount of skepticism in Washington. A lot of experts in the US worry that there are many agreements being made in the top-level, without any fundamental work being done in the lower level. In here lies a potential problem.

As Trump sees it, there are no missile tests, no nuclear tests, returned three Korean-American prisoners, dismantled Punggyeri, and there are plans to dismantle Dongchang-ri missile site. Above all, the US president believes that he has a warm relationship with Kim Jong Un. For him, it is important to have a degree of trust, degree of seeing eye-to-eye.

What I thought was very significant was around two to three weeks ago, Trump declared that he was not in a hurry for denuclearization. To me, it was surprising to see a US president saying this. It indicated a shift in policy. Whatever is expected by John Bolton or Mike Pompeo for early denuclearization is not necessarily what President Trump is looking for. So what does this mean practically?

I think this is what Pyongyang is looking for. They want more breathing space. They want to drag this process out. They want less pressure. Above all, they want reciprocal action by the US before they take any further actions.

I think this is a fairly comfortable situation for South Korea. South Korea values reconciliation. Reconciliation and lack of hostility are very important goals for South Korea. They seem to be fine with this kind of space where tensions are reduced. This is also fine for China and Russia. If you remember the Chinese and Russian proposal, they've always advocated for what they call "freeze-for-freeze," which means North Korea would freeze nuclear and missile tests in return for a freeze in US joint military exercises. China and Russia would be satisfied with the situation, since after all, this is their plan.

Four months after the Trump-Kim summit in Singapore, we have reached a "new equilibrium" or "new normal"—tensions are reduced; each side is making minor concessions (blowing up a tunnel now and then); little or no military exercises; moratorium on testing; leaders getting along. The real problem with this new equilibrium is that it does not address the fundamental problem and the cause of instability, which is North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

North Korea, according to what appears in their state media, seems to be comfortable with the current situation, making minor adjustments, which is why there is a degree of skepticism in Washington about whether North Korea will ever denuclearize. This is a tough situation for Americans to accept that there may be no likelihood that North Korea will denuclearize in the foreseeable future.

We are stuck at an impasse. Overall, there are four options on moving forward:

WAR: Go into North Korea by force and try to take them out. This will certainly provoke a war, which is unacceptable to everyone including the US. Option of war was never realistic. This option was just there as a ray of options.

RETURN TO MAXIMUM PRESSURE: many people in Washington support this, but I think it is unrealistic especially with the trade war between China and the US. China is not going to cooperate in imposing maximum pressure. China and Russia have made appeals at the UN to give sanctions relief to North Korea. South Korea would also find it very hard to go back to maximum pressure policy especially after the summits and promises and declarations that have been issued.

ACCEPT NORTH KOREA AS A NUCLEAR STATE: The reality is that North Korea has nuclear weapons. This was their goal. North Korea's goal is to follow India—be accepted by the international community as a nuclear state. The US, however, cannot accept this policy. The idea that North Korea possesses nuclear weapons is completely alien to the international community, including China and Russia. They worry that this would trigger a domino effect—South Korea and Japan may develop nuclear weapons to follow suit. This would also go against the Non-proliferation Treaty, which is considered the most successful international security agreement after the Second World War. The accepted P5 and only four others—India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea—have nuclear weapons. The NPT has limited the spread of nuclear weapons development. It seemed South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Germany, the Netherlands, and other countries all wanted nuclear weapons in the past. Hence, P5 would not be willing to jettison the success of the NPT.

FIND A POLITICAL PATH THROUGH DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS: this is the only available option. People say that we've tried that before and failed. There is blame to go around. For many of you who have studied the Agreed Framework of 1994 and the Six Party Talks, there are many reasons these failed and there is enough blame to go around. But this does not mean we should not try again. It could be multilateral or bilateral. Regardless, you need a political agreement that outlines the process step-by-step. I was happy to see that at least on the side of the US, they are showing a complete willingness to engage this option. My successor—Steve Biegun—was here in Seoul to discuss options. He was in Russia and Brussels as well. The idea for step-by-step is if you make some progress

North Korea wants an end-of-war declaration. I do believe that should be given if there is something in return. Some people have talked about nuclear inventory declaration by North Korea, which would be a great thing to have. But they are showing that they are willing to dismantle Yongbyon. So again, there are steps that North Korea, the US and others can take. As we make moves, there will be progress on a number of fronts. I would want to see a liaison office to open, just like South Korea established a liaison office in Kaesong. The US should open one in Pyongyang and North Korea should have one in Washington DC as well. This is not a gift for anyone, but a gesture that will facilitate a political and diplomatic dialogue. I hope there are more cultural exchanges. There should also be more humanitarian assistance that goes into North Korea. It is a travesty there to see many North Koreans suffering of tuberculosis. All of these things can be good trust-building measures.

No one will deny that the North Korean denuclearization process will be a long process.

This is what negotiation is about: what is it that your adversary wants? Can you give it to them? If not, how much of it can you give? At this time around, you have the attention of the two leaders, President Trump and Kim Jong Un, which gives a huge amount of top cover. In that sense, I am optimistic that if this new normal or “new equilibrium” can prolong, trust can be built.

In the US policy for North Korea, there are two fundamental pillars: One is that there should be another war. Certainly when we design policy, this is at the back of our mind. Second is that the US-South Korea alliance should not be weakened. Through these two fundamental policies, we can approach North Korea as it is with our eyes open yet make progress as well.

Discussion

Sohn Ji-Ae

Why did you leave the State Department?

Joseph Yun

I resigned from the position of Special Representative for North Korea Policy at the end of February 2018 for two reasons:

1) Secretary of State Tillerson was in conflict with his boss, President Trump, which made the State Department very weak. The Department was being ignored. Especially on North Korea issues, it seemed we were not making progress.

2) Most of the work that I believed should be handled by the State Department was being done by another agency, the CIA.

Given these reasons, I felt that I was not spending my time usefully.

Sohn Ji-Ae

You mentioned that foreign policy is pretty much driven by the White House. Within the White House, however, who drives foreign policy?

Joseph Yun

In the U.S., foreign policy is driven by the executive branch, which refers to the president and the ministries. Congress virtually has no say. In this case, as you have all seen, Trump is a very

strong president, so he is going to drive the policy as he wants it. Typically what would happen is that there is a National Security Council which is led by the National Security Advisor, who is currently John Bolton. The NSC would invite agencies, ministries (State, Treasury, Defense) to forge a common policy. Earlier on in 2016, this is what happened: through NSC meetings, we produced the maximum pressure policy. In this instance, the president is the foremost driver of US foreign policy, and then the other drivers are National Security Advisor, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense.

Sohn Ji-Ae

At this point, Trump is in the “love” phase with Kim Jong Un. Could the time come when NSC and Bolton take a much harder line at North Korea and Trump takes that as his policy?

Joseph Yun

Even though the NSC wants to take another line, it's ultimately Trump who makes the final decision. It's possible that Trump will take on NSC's policy advice, but it does not seem so now. President Trump is quite happy with what he has achieved so far. That is, reduction in tensions, no missile tests, and some sites being destroyed. This is what I call the new equilibrium. Is it sustainable? How long will it last? I mean certainly it will go on until the end of this year, but is it sustainable till next year and the 2020 elections? I don't have an answer to that.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Many are wondering what Trump's strategy is towards North Korea. Is there a strategy?

Joseph Yun

I think there is a strategy. It's the case with Trump's approach to China, KORUS FTA, NATO, NAFTA. He wants to go very hard and then see what happens. We've seen the very hard stage in 2017. Now it's the pull back stage. He is waiting for some kind of significant concession from Pyongyang which has not been achieved yet.

Sohn Ji-Ae

What would that be?

Joseph Yun

Serious step towards denuclearization. I don't think anyone expects what we call CVID, but something significant. For example, the dismantlement of Yongbyon is a significant step. The declaration of nuclear inventory would be a significant step, too. There are many significant steps that North Korea could take, which would fall short of complete denuclearization.

Sohn Ji-Ae

You mentioned that this could be a long-term process, especially with the "we can wait" statement from Trump. Would the DC community be okay with such a diplomatic, long-term approach? There seems to be a lot of impatience in DC.

Joseph Yun

I would say that the American community in general would be okay with a long-term strategy. If you look at who are against the long-term strategy, it's the Republicans. Now you have a Republican president who pretty much controls the Republicans in Congress, so I don't think there is any noise on that front. Democrats usually want diplomatic engagement, so he is in a good place. The question is when would Trump himself become impatient? I don't think external events would make him impatient as long as there are no tensions and there are minor movements from North Korea, which will always detract us. I am not sure when Trump would become impatient.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Because we have so many leaders who have put their necks on the line for this, there is a danger that the “down” side of the process would become more difficult.

Joseph Yun

You are right. Leaders draw big pictures, but progress is made by lower level officials that meet regularly in a framework that allows some movement. How long will the process take? Siegfried Hecker believes that even if North Koreans say yes to denuclearization, it will take ten years to complete. Then there is the whole idea of the “irreversible” part of CVID—nothing is irreversible. How can you make the scientists forget something they know? Then there is the verification problem. North Korea is a huge country. You can probably hide a couple of bombs worth of fissile material under the table. To believe that you can get CVID without complete buy-in from the North Korean leaders is a dream.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Dr. Hecker came to Korea a few weeks ago, and he made similar statements. He explained this is one of the reasons why there needs to be trust between the US and North Korea. Is this your theory as well?

Joseph Yun

Yes. Right now there is no trust at all. In my experience, it is important to have a conversation with North Korean counterparts where you speak your own real views of what could move forward. Everything right now is scripted, making it hard to move beyond a surface level. To their credit, Kim Jong Un and Trump believe they have built trust. But I do not think that that has filtered down.

Sohn Ji-Ae

It's even more difficult when you've had a history of distrust. Both North Korea and US feel they have been cheated by the other side in the past. Do you think the current process going any differently than in the past?

Joseph Yun

This is why I think the key is to work with small steps, such as building a liaison office. Once you have a liaison office, it takes effort to pull it back down. Opening up for humanitarian assistance, to have more cultural exchanges – these are things that help build trust. When I talk to North Korean officials, they say that the US has to drop hostile intent. When I ask what that means, they have a real hard problem in defining hostile intent, but they see it everywhere—US pressing for human rights, pressing for religious freedom, support for NGOs and civil society,

actions in Congress passing resolutions, editorials. These are all hostile intent, and it's hard for me to say that we don't have much control over them.

Sohn Ji-Ae

One of the things that North Koreans have defined as “hostile intent” is the sanctions. Easing of sanctions is one of the things that North Koreans want.

Joseph Yun

There are two types of sanctions: one imposed by UN Security Council Resolutions, and the other imposed unilaterally by the US. For the former, it will take UN voting to ease these sanctions, which would be very difficult since most of the conditions for these sanctions is the denuclearization of North Korea. This is the bar. It would be very difficult for the US to vote for the removal of these international sanctions.

Unilateral sanctions are implemented by legislation from Congress. Hence there must be legislative action to rescind these sanctions. It's not black and white—you don't remove everything at once. There are things like giving waivers, changing limits. For example, during the Winter Olympics, we saw some sanctions waiver for South Korea to send assistance for North Korean athletes. North Korea is arguing, “if you want to build trust, can you at least remove some sanctions.” This is going to be their major request.

Sohn Ji-Ae

The US will probably make some demands to North Korea in order for the US to ease sanctions. What would these be?

Joseph Yun

Currently, the official position is that there has to be a complete denuclearization for relief of sanctions. But again, once you get into negotiations and meet face to face, it is entirely possible to draw hypothetical scenarios: what would happen if we increased the amount of the oil that could be imported? What would you do? These are questions that negotiator should have to probe what they can give, what they want, what the price is. I think this is a constructive way to go than having many leader-led meetings without any follow-up meetings.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Do you see this happening? Is there some movement in Washington towards this kind of policy?

Joseph Yun

No, I don't see such movement, which is why there is going to be another summit. When there are summits, you prepare the groundwork first. So we will have to see whether the preparatory process for the summit will lead up to some of these steps. We will have to see people like Choi Son Hee and Steve Biegun getting active in probing on what we call "summit deliverables."

Sohn Ji-Ae

Do you think you will ever see a denuclearized North Korea?

Joseph Yun

I don't think denuclearization will happen quickly or soon. I do hope that it happens within my lifetime. I think as you mentioned, trust is very important. There are many interpretations on why North Korea has nuclear weapons. My belief is that these are for regime survival. I believe regime survival is their foremost goal, so if regime survival can be assured, then denuclearization may be possible. However, it will be very difficult to convince there will be regime continuity without nuclear weapons.

Sohn Ji-Ae

For North Korea, regime survival is why they developed nuclear weapons. But for them, would not giving up their nuclear weapons be the same thing?

Joseph Yun

There are not that many precedents in which countries have given up their nuclear weapons voluntarily. We've stopped many countries from becoming nuclear, but once they have nuclear weapons, it is pretty tough to convince them to abandon them. But just because this is a tough task, it does not mean we should not try. Through trying, external environments can change.

Taeshin Kwon (President, Korea Economic Research Institute)

Thank you very much for your plausible explanations. It suddenly reminds me of what I saw after October 2002 when James Kelly visited Pyongyang, Kim Gye Kwan declared North Korea as a nuclear state, indicating a complete collapse of the Geneva Agreement. January 2003, I read an article written by some professional at Stanford University, who said that all these gestures by

North Korea are part of a tactic to delay the process. They have come to the table for the Geneva Agreement and other agreements, and then after ten years, North Korea has asked all of us to recognize the state as a nuclear power. You mentioned that we should take a step-by-step, incremental process, which we have failed already at the Six Party Talks. When we have a step-by-step, long-term process, the first thing you need is trust. You cannot have trust when the other counterpart makes a promise and breaks it. I am afraid that time is not on our side. Trump can lose the presidential elections, but Kim Jong Un can stay in power for a long, long time. Trump backed away from the Iran Nuclear Talks—North Korea learned a lot from this. We are entering the same process as that of the Geneva talks. How can you explain this?

Joseph Yun

My friend Victor Cha calls North Korea “a land of bad options.” I agree with you that we’ve tried diplomacy and failed, but what is the alternative? No one will go in by force to destroy the regime. War on the Korean Peninsula is unthinkable. I think maximum pressure

One year ago, we were in danger of brinkmanship, which is why I think President Moon did a great thing by opening dialogue with North Korea. I don’t see any other options. This is a leap of faith, and I am still undecided: Is Kim Jong Un sincere in saying that he will pursue a path for economic benefits for the North Korean people? Is he sincere with his claim that he desires reconciliation with South Korea and the international community? I do not know, but it certainly feels different. Kim Jong Un seems different from his father or grandfather. I still believe that it is a hypothesis worth testing.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Why do you think Kim Jong Un is different?

Joseph Yun

I think he is different in the sense that he is much more serious about economic reform. It may be that the reform and marketization of North Korea's economy has progressed to the extent that he cannot hold back anymore. It may be that the information that goes into North Korea has led North Koreans to have more expectations of what their life should be like. It may be that Kim Jong Un is a more benevolent ruler that has control of everything. Now that does not mean that I believe he is willing to denuclearize, but it means that he is willing to pursue a path that is different from that of his father or grandfather. Again, we need to test that out.

Julia Oh, National Bureau of Asian Research

During your lecture, you mentioned that North Korea considers a variety of things as “hostile intent” of the US, such as statements on religious freedom and NGOs. I believe these statements are characteristic of the US as a nation. You also mentioned a lot of policy options regarding denuclearization, but on the human rights issue, what are the steps that we can take, in light of the current political environment?

Joseph Yun

This is a very important question. What role should human rights play in dealing with North Korea? As a negotiator, I would rather have human rights play no role, because you know they are going to reject. But then you would not be representing the values and fundamental importance of human rights for the U.S., South Korea, and the international community. Hence, you always have to juggle it up. The Trump administration, in contrast to any other previous administration, has made human rights less of an agenda with North Korea. Nonetheless, this has

been the case in many different negotiations. In the end, this is going to become an issue because what North Korea wants is a peace treaty with the U.S. that has to be ratified by Congress. In any ratification process, Congress will insist human rights as a key part of the agreement with North Korea. Whether negotiators like it or not, whether negotiators value expediency, human rights is going to be an important factor. There will never be a proper normalization of relations between North Korea and the U.S. without addressing the issue of human rights.

Sohn Ji-Ae

In this instance, do you see a better opportunity to deal with human rights than before?

Joseph Yun

No, you cannot deal with the human rights issue. It has to be dealt via a separate forum, not on the same platform as the issue of denuclearization. I always believed human rights issues are part of a multilateral agenda. It should be dealt by the UN Security Council, Human Rights Commission, and other multilateral bodies. Otherwise, the bilateral agenda becomes too burdened.

Sohn Ji-Ae

To use any kind of leverage for North Korea to deal with any kind of human rights issue, normalization has to come into play.

Joseph Yun

The reason why I say that human rights issues need to be covered by a multilateral agenda is that human rights refer to a variety of rights. Mostly, the U.S. is interested in political rights—freedom of speech and freedom of movement, but there are other rights—freedom from hunger, shelter rights, education rights, women’s rights. This is why there has to be a multilateral body to make progress. If you insist solely on political rights, it is not going to work.

김금선 (아시아뉴스)

무엇을 주고 받을 것인가 라는 측면에서 질문 드리겠습니다. 지난 달 말에 독일 본사에 두고 있는 광물 에너지 다국적 기업하고 미국의 최대 곡물 회사가 극비리 방북했다는 보도가 있었습시다만, 미국은 겉으로는 대북제재를 외치면서 속으로는 북한의 지하 자원, 특히, 히토류를 선점하려고 한다라는 우려의 목소리도 있습니다. 트럼프 대통령이 굉장히 실리에 밝은 성격이라고 볼 때, 과연 북한의 지하자원이 얼마나 매력적인 것인가? 그리고 장래 대북제재를 대비해서 비핵화와 곡물, 지하자원을 주고 받을 수 있는 옵션으로 준비하고 있는 것이라고 생각하는지?

Joseph Yun

No, this was also the issue in Iraq. There were rumors that the U.S. wanted oil from Iraq. We probably spent ten times more money in that war than the worth of the oil reserves. To imagine that the U.S. is interested in the minerals in North Korea is beyond the pale. I completely do not accept that. I do think there are some companies that want to work with North Korea, but there is

no evidence that indicates U.S. government's intentions to drill for uranium, rare earth minerals, and manganese in North Korea.

Sammy Lee, Korea National Open University

Does the U.S. consider the option of using North Korea to deter China?

Joseph Yun

How much of all this is an issue between the US and China? I was in China about a month ago, engaging with Chinese experts on North Korea. They told me that they really have no issue with a reunified North Korea, as long as there are no US troops. For the Chinese, they clearly see the Korean Peninsula issues as part of a strategic competition with the US.

I also believe that China truly values denuclearization. China obviously thinks of North Korea as a neighbor, but not as a big partner worthy of having nuclear weapons. Hence they clearly do not want North Korea to possess nuclear weapons. But at the same time, they believe that what is worse than a nuclear North Korea is a North Korea that is strategically allied with the U.S. Now, how much of it is strategic competition? The US is competing with China; China is competing with the US. But ultimately, the US is a distant power. In that sense, if the South Korean people wanted the US to leave Korea, then the US is perfectly capable of withdrawing. You saw this in the Philippines in the 1970s. Ultimately, the US clearly believes that this is a matter for the South Korean people to decide. They prefer to stay on the Peninsula, but that preference is not as strong as to maintain their deployment beyond South Korea's welcome.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Someone talked about the fact that if there were better relations between the US and China, we would not be where we are now.

Joseph Yun

China believes that the North Korean nuclear crisis is something that the big powers should all solve together. In other words, this is not an issue that Japan or South Korea should be playing a role in; it should be something that the US and China should solve. This is unacceptable for the US because this is an issue that matters for American security and alliance. The Agreed Framework in 1999 was bad enough; South Koreans believed they did not play a big enough role. Excluding South Korea from the process would practically mean an end to the alliance, so this is not something that the US is prepared to do.

Haesung Kim, Consultant

You mentioned that Kim Jong Un is more serious about denuclearization compared to his father or grandfather. There are talks among the foreign policymakers that Kim Jong Un may not be able to make an independent decision without consulting China. There are rumors that China's state-owned companies have been helping North Korea develop nuclear weapons. Kim Jong Un also made a visit to Beijing three times prior to the Singapore summit. In your view, do you think that Kim Jong Un is able to make a serious decision without China's permission?

Joseph Yun

I think Kim Jong Un can. China will welcome a denuclearized North Korea, provided that their security is intact and American troops are withdrawn. But can Kim Jong Un make the decision to

denuclearize without the support of his party and military? I think this is an issue. Every ruler has to ensure that the important elements of your support base are there behind you. Whether he has that support base, I do not know. This is probably why Kim Jong Un is insisting on an end-of-war declaration and peace treaty to prove that the external threat from South Korea and the US has been reduced.

전다인, 한국외국어대학교

“New equilibrium” 과 “new normal”에 대해 말씀하셨는데, 한반도 문제의 당사자로서 북한의 진정성에 대한 의문도 있지만, 미국의 진정성에 대한 걱정도 많은 것이 사실. 미국이 “new normal”과 ICBM 폐기에 만족을 하고 제레식 무기를 폐기하지 않고 대북협상을 중단한다면, 대한민국에 큰 위협이 되지 않을까 생각합니다. 이것에 대한 미국의 입장은 정확히 어떤 것이며 대사님의 견해는 무엇인지.

Joseph Yun

My belief is that there is a huge opposition in the US to a nuclear North Korea. To me, the discrepancy between South Korea’s view and the US view is a problem. South Korea seems to believe that North Korea can be denuclearized through reconciliation. I think it works the other way around for most Americans: reconciliation is the reward for denuclearization. Reconciliation is not a tool for denuclearization; it is an end product.

Sohn Ji-Ae

But couldn't the promise for denuclearization be reconciliation?

Joseph Yun

Of course. In order to convince a carrot tastes good, you can let them taste a bit of the carrot first. But all in all, for the Americans, carrot comes at the end.

Sohn Ji-Ae

If the US concludes that they are satisfied with North Korea's dismantlement of the ICBM program and allows North Korea to keep conventional and short-to-mid-sized nuclear weapons, this may pose a huge problem for South Korea. Could you please address this concern?

Joseph Yun

This is a complicated question. If there are weapons that are threatening the U.S., that is an issue of how strong the alliance can be. This is the dilemma. If there are ICBMs that can reach the U.S., are the security guarantee, security retaliation, mutual defense compromised?

If we look at what happened in Europe during the Cold War, it shows that it does not have to be compromised. At that time, the US gave a number of European countries tactical nuclear weapons to make sure that they also can make a response. This is the trap you get into.

Song Young Eui, Foreign Legal Consultant

You mentioned the four policy options, and you concluded that the last option is the only viable option. In terms of maximum pressure, how effective are the UN and U.S. sanctions at this time? From the North Korean side, is it really hurting them? How sustainable can this “big stick” last before it falls apart? In my personal opinion, it seems that this may be the only stick available at this time.

Joseph Yun

According to my understanding, sanctions have been quite effective. You can see this effect in trade numbers with China; there is a huge decline in trade between China and North Korea. Evidence shows that China still has a lot of sanctions in place. But we must remember that sanctions naturally erode over time unless you replace them with new sanctions. Traders find ways to get around sanctions. Sanctions are not as effective today as they were a year ago; they will continue to erode. It is clearly the position of Russia and China to give more sanctions relief, so it seems they are willing to let sanctions to continue to erode. I think it is very important because sanctions relief is the highest priority item requested by North Korea. There is a distinction between sanctions lifting and sanctions relief. It is not black or white—sanctions or no sanctions. You can have partial sanctions; you can have some relief from those sanctions. This is a tool that negotiators can use. Let’s see how far they can get with that.

Sohn Ji-Ae

There have been many reports in domestic news that Washington is not happy with South Korea’s position on softening sanctions. How much do you think of that is true?

Joseph Yun

The American public in general wants to maintain as strict of a sanctions regime as possible. The US is trying to limit areas like humanitarian assistance that are not included as official sanctions. This is a tactical decision, so that when you do open, you have more tools to play with. I am personally against sanctioning humanitarian assistance. I think North Korea needs humanitarian assistance, especially in medicine.

안도순, 서울시립대학교

미국이 남한의 태도에 대해서 갖고 있는 감상. 우리 한국사람들 상당수는 미국과 북한의 협상이 잘 되기를 바랍니다. 동시에, 남한도 북한과 가능하면 좋은 관계를 유지하고 개선하기를 바랍니다. 그런데, 조금 전에 언급이 있었습시다만, 남한과 북한이 관계를 개선해서 미국과 북한 관계 개선에 도움이 되고자 하는데, 이에 대해서 미국은 반대를 하고 있지 않는가? 이에 대해 한국사람들이 불만족스럽고, 특히 금강관광과 개성공단은 핵문제가 재기되기 전부터 남북간의 관계가 이루어졌던 상황인데, 이를 다시 재개하는 것에 있어서도 미국이 계속해서 반대를 하는 것 같습니다.

남북간 관계 개선을 위해 제재를 완화 시키는 것에 대해 어떻게 생각하는지.

Joseph Yun

You are right. The lens with which Washington looks at North Korea is different from that of South Korea. I think you have to remember that for the South Korean government, North Korea is the number one issue for domestic politics. It is how Koreans define themselves. You

are progressive if you believe in reconciliation. You are conservative if you believe that this is a regime that should not survive. This is a deeply emotional and political issue.

In the US, it is not so much of a political issue. It is more of a technical issue, where you look at questions like “should they have nuclear weapons? Should they not have nuclear weapons? How much threat does North Korea’s conventional military pose? What would happen in various scenarios?” South Koreans think that North Korea is an election issue in the US, but it is not. There is not one congressional seat that will come up *because* of North Korea policy.

The two societies look at the issue is quite different.

Going back to your question on Kumkang Mountain and Kaesong, Americans see the Kaesong as a conduit for foreign currency to go into funding North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. Same goes for Kumkang Mountain. Both are seen as an “ATM.” In South Korea, these are emotional issues that signify whether there is a budding relationship with North Korea, whether peace is possible, whether this is a sign for family reunions and free travel.

Andy Kim, Seoul National University

It seems that if the status quo, currently bound by the armistice, shifts to a peace declaration, justification for UN Command and USFK presence would weaken. Many Koreans worry that this will affect the US-ROK alliance. What do you think about the current end-of-war declaration and what are the implications of this declaration to the US-ROK alliance?

Joseph Yun

If this is handled properly, it will not affect the US-ROK alliance. What does “handled properly” mean? The end-of-war declaration should have a number of elements included.

1. Statement that ends the war. Armistice arrangement should remain in effect until a peace treaty is signed.
2. Statement that reaffirms South Korea's sovereign right to negotiate, without any interference, the alliance issues, making USFK presence out of North Korea's jurisdiction.
3. Language on denuclearization that would state that North Korea will denuclearize
4. Additional agreements on conventional weapons

These four elements would make the end-of-war declaration a stand-alone document that is linked to the armistice, future peace treaty, and the sovereignty of South Korea.

Jung Hee Oh, Arirang TV

A traditional process for denuclearization would start with a country handing over a declaration of its nuclear arsenal and then receiving verification. When talking about North Korea, which is at the stage of completing its nuclear program, some people say that this process would have to proceed in a different manner. For instance, North Korea would first dismantle its key facilities, which would be verified subsequently. What is Washington's view on this new approach?

At the recent inter-Korean summit, Pyongyang offered to dismantle its Yongbyon nuclear facility in exchange for "corresponding measures" from the U.S. But still the U.S. has been very firm on maintaining its sanctions. Was the Yongbyon proposal not an attractive enough option for the U.S. to take any kind of reciprocal action?

Joseph Yun

Denuclearization is a complicated process. Denuclearization should properly start with stopping the program—“freeze.” Then it would move onto verification of that freeze. The third phase would begin the dismantlement. Then you would break it down and take it away. When does North Korea give a declaration of their nuclear inventory? As a negotiator, you want to know what they have. This is a reasonable thing to ask. For North Koreans, it seems the US has not done anything but is asking to state everything they have. Declaration of inventory, hence, will come in the middle or the end. This is what we call sequencing. How do you sequence each step? Clearly, there is no reason to worry if they are completely decided on denuclearization. If they have not made that decision, sequencing becomes a key issue. When do you begin the freeze? What do you freeze? When do you dismantle? What do you dismantle? When do you show what cards you have? This is tricky, especially when there is no trust. When there is a lack of trust, how can you trust the declaration of the nuclear inventory? This is why you need verification.

Sohn Ji-Ae

Because there is no trust, we keep hearing things that we’ve heard before, such as “the US keeps moving its goal post.”

Joseph Yun

I would not agree with that. There are so many denuclearization agreements—Six Party Talks, Agreed Framework, North-South Basic Agreement on Denuclearization. It’s not a matter of changing the goal post, but a matter of what the goal is and whether you are willing to go to that goal. You’ve agreed to that goal before, but now you are saying that you don’t want to go there anymore. It’s a very involved issue. This is why it will take a long time.

Unnamed Audience

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Joseph Yun

The problem so long has been the flip-flop of policy. This inconsistent policy from engagement to hardline and back. One or the other, there must be a predictable framework. North Korea has a predictable framework. Democracy is what it is; foreign policy changes quite a bit with a new president. I am completely sympathetic that we need a more consistent policy whether that is engagement or pressure.

Sohn Ji-Ae

The other part of his question was on the possibility of using military pressure and tactical nuclear weapons.

Joseph Yun

I personally do not believe that a more enhanced military posture, more provocation will be helpful.

김남부, 안보기술연구원

군사적으로 걱정인 것은, 북한의 핵무기가 계속해서 개발되고 있는데, 북핵이 고도화 및 정밀화 되고 생산을 계속했을 때 나중에 핵 협상이 더욱 어려워지고 더 많은 비용을 지출해야 하고, 이런 상황에서 평화공존을 어떻게 만들어 나갈 것인지에 대해 이야기를 해주시길 바랍니다.

Joseph Yun

All signs show that North Korea continues to accumulate fissile material. This is why the next step needs to be a complete freeze to prevent North Korea from producing more fissile material. Now there is a moratorium on testing; we need a moratorium on production as well.

Jaebom Kim, Korean American Association

South Korean and US media criticizes the lack of communication and coordination between the two governments. For example, when President Moon visited Europe, he made a serious diplomatic gesture to ease sanctions on North Korea, seemingly without consultation from the U.S. Is this a more serious problem in comparison to when you were in the State Department as the key negotiator on North Korea policy?

Joseph Yun

This is nothing unusual that Seoul and Washington are going at different speeds. Of course you want the two allies to move at the same speed, but sometimes this is inevitable. The remedy to this is more consultation, more coordination, and more understanding of each other's position. As a Korean American myself, this is what I want to see. Is it better or is it worse than when I was in the State Department? It was quite stressful during the Roh administration as well. I think there is also the factor of increased press coverage nowadays.