



How to Deal with North Korea: Lessons from the Iran Agreement

Sverre Lodgaard and Leon V. Sigal

Summary

The current and oft repeated pattern of responses to North Korean nuclear and missile provocations has failed to produce results. With the stakes becoming increasingly high it is time that a new approach is explored. The success to date of the deal to cap Iran's nuclear program offers clues to a different approach with North Korea. North Korea's position now is stronger than ever before – it has more bargaining chips. Conversely the threats posed by North Korea have never been greater. A negotiated settlement is the only acceptable outcome. The key will be to have a broad enough agenda for negotiations to ensure all parties see benefit: addressing the nuclear and missile issues, economic issues (removal of sanctions) and security issues (a Korean peace treaty to replace the armistice). The alternatives to negotiations are war or another nuclear weapon state with a de facto nuclear deterrent capability. Neither prospect will make any nation in the region more secure.

The Current Deadlock¹

1. North Korea tests; the United Nations Security Council convenes; the world condemns and considers more sanctions; China negotiates with the United States to dilute the sanctions; the United States discusses military countermeasures with its Asian allies – and North Ko-

rea continues its nuclear and missile programs. The same crime-and-punishment cycle is repeated over and over again.

2. Now that North Korea has successfully demonstrated its ability to launch missiles simultaneously with the accuracy and range to target all of South Korea and Japan, and tested a nuclear device capable of being delivered by missile, it is time to reconsider this approach.

3. Sanctions without negotiations have never worked in the past and there is no reason to believe they will work now. At a press conference on 23 February 2016 announcing their agreement on new UN sanctions, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State John Kerry acknowledged as much: Wang's comment that sanctions "cannot provide a fundamental solution to the Korean nuclear issue," echoed Kerry's, "repetitive punishments ... do not lead anywhere."²

4. By contrast, diplomatic give-and-take without preconditions that offers North Korea the possibility of improved security and sanctions relief has had some success in past. After the United States announced its withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Korea in September 1991, the North stopped reprocessing to extract plutonium – at a time when it possibly had no nuclear weapons at all – and did not resume until 2003 after President George W. Bush scrapped the 1994 Agreed Framework. It also conducted few test-launches of medium- or longer-range rockets in that period. North Korea again sus-

¹ This is a revised and updated version of Sverre Lodgaard, "How to deal with North Korea: Lessons from the JCPOA," NUPI Working Paper 866 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, May/June 2016). Reprinted with permission.

² Secretary of State John Kerry, Remarks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, US Department of State, Washington DC, 23 February 2016.

pended its nuclear programs and missile tests from 2007 to 2008 as it was obliged to do under the September 2005 joint statement agreed to in six-party talks, only to resume after South Korea reneged on promised energy aid.³

The Role of Sanctions

5. Some lessons can be drawn from the negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between the United States and Iran. When UN sanctions were first imposed on Iran in 2006, it had installed just a few hundred centrifuges. UN sanctions were ramped up four times and comprehensive US and EU economic and financial sanctions were imposed as well. Despite that pressure, by the time Hassan Rouhani was elected president in 2013, Iran had increased the number of centrifuges to 19,000. Clearly, sanctions did not stop the nuclear program.

6. Soon after the United States opened secret bilateral negotiations with Iran on interim steps that would facilitate a diplomatic solution, it offered two key concessions up front: first, that it would permit some uranium enrichment while not conceding the right of Iran to enrich, and second, that it would lift sanctions that had been imposed because of its nuclear activities.⁴ Iran, in response, offered concessions of its own to make an agreement possible. Then – and only then – did sanctions function the way they were meant to. For sanctions to be effective, there has to be a real possibility of relaxing them; pressure with negotiations succeeded where pure pressure had failed.

7. Of course, the case of North Korea is very different from that of Iran. Iran is much more outward oriented and engaged in international affairs. Its foreign trade was substantial. In the face of comprehensive sanctions, it had to go for greater self-reliance – often referred to as “resistance economy” – but it longed to be reintegrated and accepted by the international community as a sovereign state with its own legitimate interests. During the negotiation of the JCPOA, the comprehensive US and EU eco-

omic and financial sanctions were the main bargaining cards of the Western powers.

8. By contrast, under its founding father Kim Il Sung the North Korean regime established its *juche* doctrine of self-reliance and willingly isolated itself to avoid exposure to alien values and lifestyles that could undermine it. Economic sanctions do bite in North Korea, too, but to a much smaller extent than in the case of Iran. The reasons are historical and cultural as well as economic.

9. In North Korea, as in Iran, the UN sanctions were perhaps more important for their political than for their economic impact, projecting pariah status on the nation as a whole. Isolation was an affront to these proud nations and the derogatory treatment of North Korea, like Iran, was and is humiliating.

10. In the case of North Korea, moreover, economic and financial sanctions depend on China’s willingness, in the face of Pyongyang’s continued recalcitrance, to curtail its engagement, cutting the North’s lifeline. So far, while agreeing to some UN sanctions to accommodate Washington, China has been steadfast in its policy of engagement, protecting North Korea in order to keep the United States at a distance. Even though China’s policy towards North Korea is a legitimate subject of domestic debate, its leaders know that nothing threatens Pyongyang more than cooperation between Beijing and Washington. Whenever Washington and Beijing applied concerted pressure on Pyongyang, the North responded with nuclear tests – in 2006, 2009, 2013, and 2016 – in an effort to drive them apart. That leads the Chinese to the conclusion that negotiations are the only way forward.

11. The sanctions that the US and the EU imposed in 2011–12, which cut Iranian oil exports by half and severed its connection with the international financial system, were the first steps of a strategy leading to enticing concessions later on. A similar approach is unlikely to work in the case of North Korea, however. It would depend on an understanding with the Chinese, and that is a long shot given the lack of confidence between the US and China. China thinks the problem is not just North Korea, but the United States as well, so absent a genuine US willingness to seek a diplomatic solution, it is unlikely to put much more pressure on the North. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying called on the United States to

³ For the details of past negotiations, see Leon V. Sigal, “What Have Twenty-Five Years of Nuclear Diplomacy Achieved?” Korean Institute of National Unification (forthcoming).

⁴ Paul Richter, “Key, secret concessions opened the way for Iran nuclear deal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 July 2015; Anne Gearan and Joby Warrick, “World Powers reach nuclear deal with Iran to freeze its nuclear program,” *Washington Post*, 24 November 2013.

“earnestly work on a tangible and effective resolution,” citing a Chinese saying — “Whoever started the trouble should end it.”⁵

12. What may be done during a negotiation is another matter. If Washington shows a clear interest in negotiating a comprehensive deal, Beijing may be willing to put more pressure on Pyongyang. Then, the possibility of comprehensive sanctions relief may convince Pyongyang to go the extra mile to get an agreement.

13. The biggest difference between Iran and North Korea is the importance that Pyongyang attaches to security and an end to US enmity. While Tehran was willing to leave political and security arrangements at the margins of the negotiations, those arrangements have always been front and centre for Pyongyang. The Agreed Framework of 1994 committed the United States and North Korea to move towards normalization of political and economic relations – in other words, to end enmity. The replacement nuclear reactors were economically important to North Korea – it had been interested in light-water reactors (LWR) for a long time – but the LWRs were as much a symbol of an end to enmity: these reactors were proliferation resistant (but not proliferation proof), and no country would willingly assist an enemy in making fissile material. Similarly, the September 2005 Joint Statement committed the six parties to a denuclearized Korean peninsula in return for a peace treaty writing a formal end to the Korean War, political and economic normalization with the United States, South Korea, and Japan, and creation of a multi-lateral regional security structure.

Preconditions for Negotiations

14. Ever since the Islamic Revolution, Iran and the United States were each other’s fervent enemies. Yet they managed to start constructive negotiations without conditions on the basis of mutual respect. The result bears witness to what became a win-win negotiation: the parties got the most in the areas that mattered most to them, nuclear restraint for the United States and sanctions relief for Iran.

15. Once again, the situation with North Korea is different. It is customary to perceive of North Korea as aggressive and potentially irrational,

but since the Korean War, while it regarded the United States as its main foe, it has never been enemy number one for Washington. When Pyongyang took actions that worried Tokyo and Seoul, Washington reached out to support its allies – but with less bellicosity than it directed at Iran. In between the flare-ups, North Korea was a curiosity that the United States could afford to ignore. Often, diplomatic inaction was also due to the fact that South Korea and Japan did not want the United States to engage with North Korea.⁶ President George W. Bush lumped North Korea together with Iran and Syria in the “axis of evil,” but including North Korea was somewhat of an afterthought. The Iranian evil was clearly of a higher political order. Unwavering US support for Israel accounts for much of the difference.

16. Only recently has North Korea emerged as a direct military threat to US bases and allies in East Asia. A new consensus is forming in the US intelligence community that North Korea is able to place nuclear warheads on missiles of medium range, though dissenting voices remain. It will probably take several years for the North to mount a potent threat to the US homeland.

17. Still, freezing the weapons programs has become a matter of some urgency. Washington has tried to obtain a commitment to denuclearization – for example a suspension of nuclear and missile testing and fissile material production with monitoring – without offering anything in return, making this a precondition for negotiations. This position has now been amended to a willingness to sit down with Pyongyang without conditions, to discuss US conditions for negotiations. North Korea has proposed a suspension of nuclear testing in return for a suspension of US–South Korean military exercises, but Washington has asked it to do more. Pressuring Pyongyang to accept negotiations on US terms only assures there will be no negotiations.

18. In a sense, time is on North Korea’s side. The closer it comes to a capability to threaten US and allied assets, the more important it becomes to get a deal blocking that eventuality. This is reflected in the sequence in which the parties want to address the issues involved: while the US wants some denuclearization

⁵ Associated Press, “China says it can’t end North Korea nuclear program on its own,” *Japan Times*, 12 September 2016.

⁶ The exceptions were South Korean Presidents Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo-hyun and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

commitments first, North Korea gives priority to a peace treaty.

19. Time is of the essence for China as well. The more the North Korean programs advance and the stronger the US countermeasures, the more China is adversely affected. Any US action in relation to North Korea has an implication for China. US build-up in its vicinity – of missile defence in particular – undermines its security. In a comprehensive negotiation, China may therefore be willing to enhance its pressure on North Korea. China, the chair of the suspended six-party talks, holds that both sets of issues – denuclearization and normalization – must be addressed simultaneously, and it favours negotiations without preconditions.

20. How North Korea weighs its interests in political normalization and economic growth compared to further development of a nuclear deterrent capability is difficult to know. The only way to find out is for the US to negotiate and keep its end of the bargain and see if the North does. It is an open question whether or to what extent North Korea would accept constraints on its nuclear program while comprehensive negotiations proceed.

21. History indicates what has worked to achieve moments of progress. Careful review of the long pauses in North Korean nuclear and missile development as well as the periods of tension and calm in Korea leads to two tentative conclusions. First, the most promising periods in US–North Korea and North–South relations have occurred when Seoul and Washington acted in concert to sustain dialogue and engagement with Pyongyang – in 1991, 1999–2000 and 2007–08. Second, the most intense crises, by contrast, occurred when Pyongyang concluded that Seoul was impeding Washington's efforts to engage – in 1993–94, 2008–10 and now. And Seoul could make little progress with Pyongyang when Washington was not engaging, as in 2001–06. In short, it looks like coordinated engagement worked and coercion failed.

Probes

22. Given the collapse of past agreements, tests of the seriousness of the parties in striking a deal become all the more important, and not only for the United States. The North Koreans, too, must be reassured that the United States, South Korea and Japan are serious about moving to a fundamentally new relationship. Uni-

lateral steps will not work; restraint must be reciprocal. Iran and the United States conducted just such a probe in secret in Oman prior to Hassan Rouhani's election.⁷

23. Kim Jong Un inherited the nuclear priority from his father Kim Jong Il, but is more outspoken on the economic objective. The North's thinking appears similar to that of the big powers during the Cold War: it is cheaper to make nuclear weapons than to maintain a conventional military balance against a much stronger South Korea – the North Korean version of a "bigger bang for the buck." North Korea has the fourth largest army in the world with 700,000 active frontline personnel and 4,500,000 reserves – a formidable drain on resources. In part, a functioning nuclear deterrent may substitute for conventional forces and, therefore, free resources for civilian use.

24. That may be why Kim Jong Un has committed himself to a *byungjin* strategy of enhancing nuclear deterrence and improving people's standard of living simultaneously "under the prevailing situation."⁸ What might "under the prevailing situation" mean? It implies that Pyongyang can change its *byungjin* strategy if the United States and South Korea move away from what North Korea calls their "hostile policy." As evidence of that hostility it cites economic sanctions, a refusal to reconcile and, above all, the reluctance to negotiate a peace treaty to replace the armistice that temporarily terminated the Korean War.

25. Obviously, access to international investment and markets can also do much to raise the living standards of ordinary North Koreans. When the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union collapsed and China looked in other directions than North Korea, Kim Il Sung tried to improve relations with the United States, Japan, South Korea and others to hedge against overdependence on China, but the nuclear program got in the way. Ever since, Pyongyang has sought to end the conflict with its lifelong enemies.

26. Sanctions relief and economic normalization may not be among Kim Jong Un's most pressing concerns. After all, the North Korean economy is growing, however slowly. The leadership probably believes that it can mud-

⁷ Jeremy Jones, "Oman's Quiet Diplomacy," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 28 February 2014.

⁸ KCNA, "Report on Plenary Meeting of WPK Central Committee," 31 March 2013.

dle along while waiting for a comprehensive political settlement along the lines envisioned in the September 2005 six-party joint statement. Yet Kim's emphasis on people's standard of living would seem to pull him in the direction of encouraging foreign investment and trade. The question is to what extent, especially if foreign influences are perceived as threats to the regime's control.

Scope

27. For Washington, the Agreed Framework of 1994 was essentially a nuclear restraint deal: North Korea would receive two large LWRs while phasing out its indigenous nuclear installations. Pending completion of the reactors, North Korea would receive fuel oil. For Pyongyang, the overriding objective was to move towards political and economic normalization, that is, an end to enmity.

28. Over the years, implementation of the agreement fell behind schedule. By the time the agreement collapsed, the first LWR – which should have become operational in 2003 – was only 20 per cent finished. In 2002, the US claimed that North Korea had a secret enrichment program. Pyongyang initially denied it, but put it on the negotiating table in October 2002 only to have Washington tear up the Agreed Framework.⁹

29. In the 2003–13 period, Iran and the big powers exchanged views not only on nuclear matters, but also on regional conflicts and normalization of relations. The outline that the US caretaker in Iran, Swiss ambassador Tim Guldman, brought to Washington in the summer of 2003, covered a formidable range of contentious issues.¹⁰ Yet, when the right political constellation of governments was aligned in 2013, they agreed to a strict focus on nuclear issues to avoid overburdening the negotiations.

30. More than anything else, it was the prospect of sanctions relief that brought Iran back to the international arena as a bona fide partner. Iran could pick up from where it left when the sanctions were imposed; international business was keen to get back to a market of 78 million people; and the Rouhani government made economic reforms its top priority in or-

der to facilitate that. Not so with North Korea. Decades of self-isolation reinforced by sanctions means that there is much less international economic engagement to revive. Economic cooperation and political connectivity with other countries and international organizations have to start from scratch.

The Meaning of Normalization

31. To bring North Korea into the international community as a bona fide partner is therefore a demanding proposition. Far from coming about by itself once the sanctions are lifted, normalization is a matter of shaping something that never existed in the history of North Korea – not during the Cold War, when relations were confined to the Soviet Union, China and the communist world, and not later, once the nuclear controversy got in the way.

32. When the sanctions against Iran kicked in and international companies withdrew, the Revolutionary Guards filled much of the economic vacuum. Control of smuggling to circumvent sanctions enhanced the role of the Guards, corrupting a significant part of Iran's economy and strengthening its political influence as well. To facilitate access for international business, the Rouhani government has made the fight against corruption a top priority.

33. The North Korean political and economic system is uniquely impenetrable to international companies; tough sanctions may have enhanced the vested interests in continued isolation there, too; and smuggling and corruption thrive at the nexus between the growing private sector and old state companies. In its present state, the country does not offer much of economic interest to others, and those who are attracted to it are easily deterred by the spectre of unpredictability that surrounds its secretive dictatorship. However difficult Iran may be, the problems in North Korea are of an entirely different order.

Interim Accords or an All-encompassing Agreement

34. The Interim Agreement with Iran – the Joint Plan of Action of November 2013 – defined the ultimate objective of the talks. At the end of the road, Iran would be treated like all other non-nuclear weapons state members of the NPT in good standing. The JCPOA spells out the road-map towards that objective. Since the

⁹ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown, 2011), pp. 161–62.

¹⁰ Trita Parsi, *A Single Roll of the Dice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

parties had little or no confidence in each other, the agreement describes the nuclear constraints and the sanctions relief in great detail.

35. The statement of principles that was agreed at the six-party talks in 2005 was in many respects a reprise of the 1994 agreement to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. It ruled out both weapons and fuel cycle facilities. The parties undertook to respect each other's sovereignty and to normalize relations, promoting economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment. Furthermore, they agreed to negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean peninsula, replacing the armistice agreement with a peace treaty and regional security arrangements. The scope of the undertaking was all-encompassing.

36. The parties also agreed to implement their consensus in a phased manner, in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action," as well as a framework for follow-on actions to implement the 2005 Joint Statement of Principles. Concretely, twelve initial implementing steps were agreed in 2007. In two follow-up accords, the United States agreed to take North Korea off the list of states supporting terrorism, provide energy aid and engage in talks to normalize relations. North Korea committed to shut down and disable its Yongbyon nuclear facilities, thereby making them more difficult to restart, and to submit a list of its nuclear-related activities. When the agreement broke down at the end of 2008, eleven of the twelve steps had been implemented.

37. The approach to North Korea was different from that to Iran. The goals were laid out in the September 2005 Joint Statement – like the Interim Agreement with Iran – but while the JCPOA is a done deal to be implemented on a specified time scale, without further negotiations, the approach to North Korea envisaged a series of interim agreements to be negotiated sequentially, step by step, on the basis of reciprocity, in an agreed framework including all the main issues to be resolved.

Resumption of Negotiations

38. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran very much expanded its enrichment capability. When Rouhani was elected and negotiations gained speed, that capability became an important bargaining chip. Keeping some capability served as a point of pride and a

hedge against US noncompliance. Similarly, during more than seven years with no negotiations or agreements, North Korea has strengthened its bargaining position – and its deterrent – by improving its nuclear and missile capabilities. It will also want to keep some capability as a hedge.

39. To entice the North Koreans to a deal, the big powers may increase both sticks and carrots: the sticks if China, at some stage, would be ready to threaten to drop its policy of engagement and sheltering; the carrots, if South Korea can be persuaded, the offer to negotiate the entire gamut of outstanding issues – sanctions relief, economic assistance, normalization and a peace treaty. To entice the North Koreans to denuclearize it will be necessary to communicate in no uncertain terms the readiness for a comprehensive deal. Similar to the case of Iran, it is only when such a reciprocal deal becomes a realistic prospect that North Korea might be persuaded to accept the necessary nuclear and missile limitations to make it happen.¹¹

40. The United States wants North Korea to take steps to denuclearize first. North Korea, in response, wants to negotiate a peace treaty before denuclearizing. Neither position is negotiable. The posturing over the sequence in which the issues should be addressed is a clear sign of deadlock. Out of the public gaze, probes may reveal a way forward. In such a context, and on condition that the negotiations would be conducted along the parallel and reciprocal lines advocated by China, North Korea may offer some initial concessions, like a halt in nuclear and missile testing and fissile material production. Or it may not: there is no way to know for sure before a probe has been tried. And the North's refusal to put its weapons on the negotiating table is certain to be a major political obstacle.

41. Reciprocal steps could lead to a suspension of the North's plutonium and enrichment programs and a moratorium on nuclear and mis-

¹¹ That is the conclusion of two recent reports, *A Sharper Choice on North Korea* by the Council on Foreign Relations co-chaired by Admiral Mike Mullin, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Sam Nunn, former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and *Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia: The North Korean Nuclear Issue and the Way Ahead*, co-sponsored by the Hoover Institution and the US-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and co-chaired by former Secretary of State George Shultz and former Secretary of Defense William Perry.

sile tests, including satellite launches. Yet the chances of persuading North Korea to go beyond another temporary freeze to dismantle its nuclear and missile programs are slim without firm commitments from Washington and Seoul to reduce the tempo and size of their annual joint exercises and to reconcile with Pyongyang by moving towards political and economic normalization and initiating a peace process to formally end the Korean War.

42. To be meaningful, a peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice agreement must ensure a change of military deployments and military exercises away from today's threatening postures. The borders at sea, which were imposed unilaterally by the United States in 1953 to keep South Korean forces from moving north, should be clearly delineated. Such arrangements would need to be embodied in a set of legally binding international agreements.

43. Why is a peace process in US and South Korean interests now that North Korea is nuclear-armed? Because the very steps that each side takes in Korea to bolster deterrence increase the risk of deadly clashes. Incidents like the North's sinking of the *Cheonan* in March 2010 in retaliation for the November 2009 shooting up of a North Korean navy vessel, a November 2010 artillery exchange in the contested waters off Korea's west coast as well as the August 2015 exchange of fire across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) show that deterrence alone will not avert deadly clashes. And both sides' rhetoric bodes ill for the future.

44. So do their military plans. South Korea's so-called "Kill Chain" contemplates detecting preparations of missile launches from the North and striking the launch sites before the missiles are launched. The Korean Air Missile Defense would then attempt to shoot down in mid-flight any missiles that are launched. A so-called Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation Plan would strike command-and-control and leadership targets in the North with missiles and air raids. As the chairman of the South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff strategic planning directorate told reporters at a briefing on 9 September, "If there is any sign of the use of nuclear weapons from North Korea, we will make a preemptive strike against the North's leadership in close cooperation with the U.S."¹²

¹² Choi Kyong-ae and Kim Soo-yeon, "N. Korea Conducts 5th Nuclear Test," Yonhap, 9 September 2016, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2016/09/09/25/0401000000AEN20160909002555315F.html>

The North, too, seems to be planning to preempt such preemptive strikes with nuclear weapons. The two sides may go over the brink if tensions rise on the peninsula.

45. One way to reduce the risk of further clashes is a peace process in Korea – not prior to or after but in parallel with denuclearization. For Pyongyang, this process would also be a long-sought manifestation of reconciliation — an end to enmity — with Washington and Seoul. As long as the United States and South Korea remain its foes, North Korea will feel threatened and want to build up its nuclear deterrent to counter that threat.

46. North Korea's security might also benefit from regional security arrangements, currently lacking in Northeast Asia. One was envisioned in the September 2005 six-party joint statement, which committed them "to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia" and specifically "to explore ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia." Another is a nuclear-weapon-free zone, along the lines proposed by Morton Halperin.¹³ South Korea, Japan and North Korea would commit themselves in a legally binding treaty to abstain from the manufacture, testing or deployment of nuclear weapons and to refuse to allow nuclear weapons to be stored on their territory. They might also agree to restrictions on reprocessing and perhaps to the creation of common fuel cycle facilities inspected by a joint trilateral commission.

47. To get negotiations underway will require reciprocal pre-steps. A Korean peace process could then be pursued alongside renewed negotiations to rein in the North's nuclear and missile programs and three other processes envisioned in the 19 September 2005 six-party joint statement: political normalization, deeper economic engagement and security cooperation in the region.

War

48. The alternative to diplomacy is war, which could escalate from a deadly clash on the Korean peninsula and the stated determination by both sides to preempt threatened nuclear use. In 1994, the two countries came uncomfortably close to military conflict – before former US

¹³ Morton H. Halperin, "A Proposal for a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in Northeast Asia," NAPSNet Special Reports, 3 January 2012.

president Jimmy Carter went to Pyongyang and broke the ice for the Agreed Framework.

49. Pressure is mounting to stop the North Korean build-up before it is too late. Action, that must be taken before North Korea acquires the capability to launch nuclear retaliation against US bases in the region, can no longer be ignored and preemptive strikes and crisis instability become the order of the day. North Korea is not quite there yet: it will take time to deploy miniature warheads on reliable missiles.

50. The near future is a period of opportunity for North Korea. A new administration is coming to power in the US, so for the coming months, Washington will be hard put to launch a high-risk war. In 2017, furthermore, South Korea will have a presidential election, and South Korean consent is crucial for any decision to wage war against the North. In 2003, the EU3 (France, Germany and the UK) launched a diplomatic initiative to avert war with Iran. Now that many voices in Washington are echoing South Korean calls to subvert or force the collapse of the Kim regime, whatever the risks, it is high time to give diplomacy another chance on the Korean peninsula.

51. The alternatives to negotiations are war or another nuclear weapon state with a de facto nuclear deterrent capability. Neither prospect will make any nation in the region more secure.

The Authors

SVERRE LODGAARD is Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

LEON V. SIGAL is Director of the Northeast Asia Cooperative Security Project at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York.

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Funding Support

APLN gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Nuclear Threat Initiative, Washington DC.

Contact Us

APLN, East Asia Foundation
4F, 116 Pirundae-ro
Jongno-gu, Seoul 03535
Republic of Korea
Email: apl@keaf.org
Tel: +82 2 325 2604-6