

Comprehensive Peace and Security Zone in Korea and Northeast Asia

Peter HAYES

Director of The Nautilus Institute

Peter HAYES is Honorary Professor, Center for International Security Studies, Sydney University, Australia and Director, Nautilus Institute in Berkeley, California. He works at the nexus of security, environment and energy policy problems. Best known for innovative cooperative engagement strategies in North Korea, he has developed techniques at Nautilus Institute for seeking near-term solutions to global security and sustainability problems and applied them in East Asia, Australia, and South Asia. Peter has worked for many international organizations including UN Development Programme, Asian Development Bank, and Global Environment Facility. He was founding director of the Environment Liaison Centre in Kenya in 1975.

Edited by DOH Jong Yoon (Research Fellow, Jeju Peace Institute)

Distributed by Hyeun Jung CHOI (Research Coordinator, Jeju Peace Institute)

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The road that leads to Korean peninsula denuclearization is relatively well mapped. However structured, however it is phased, the specific steps that must be taken are well known.¹⁾ Some, such as John Bolton, argue that denuclearization may be achieved rapidly - in one or two years.²⁾ Others have suggested it may take as long as a decade.³⁾ My view is that it is somewhere in-between, with irreversible steps that would make reconstituting a nuclear arsenal in the DPRK extremely challenging possible in one year with verification; but a complete denuclearization including a return to good standing with the IAEA and re-entry into the NTP, at minimum, five years, or more likely longer.

Elsewhere,⁴⁾ I have argued that the rate, pace, and sequencing of DPRK denuclearization is

1) Morton Halperin, Peter Hayes, Thomas Pickering, Leon Sigal, "GENERAL ROADMAP AND WORK PLAN FOR NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY WITH NORTH KOREA", NAPSNet Special Reports, April 10,

2018, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/general-roadmap-and-work-plan-for-nuclear-diplomacy-with-north-korea/>

2) M. Vazquez, "Bolton says there's a one-year plan for North Korea to denuclearize, stays mum on WaPo report," CNN, July 2018 at <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/01/politics/john-bolton-north-korea-nuclear-weapons/index.html> Bolton also suggested before becoming National Security Advisor to President Trump, perhaps flippantly, that DPRK nuclear weapons be transferred to Oak Ridge in Tennessee. Of course, this would be dangerous and incredibly irresponsible. Only North Korean technicians in North Korea should dismantle North Korean warheads. J. Lind, "North Korea's Nukes Should Be Tennessee Bound: Bolton," Patch, May 15, 2018, at:

<https://patch.com/tennessee/knoxville/north-koreas-nukes-should-be-tennessee-bound-bolton>

3) Siegfried Hecker, Robert Carlin, and Elliot Serbin, North Korea's Denuclearization: Status and Prospects, CISAC, Stanford University, April 2019, at: https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/april_2019_dprk_report_v3.pdf

4) P. Hayes, "ENDING THE KOREAN WAR AND DENUCLEARIZING THE KOREAN PENINSULA: NO BULLETS, NO BOMBS NEEDED," Paper to Panel on Peace Building and Provision for Denuclearization of Korean Peninsula, Nuclear Weapon-free Future of the North-East Asia Nagasaki Peace Hall, at 6th Nagasaki Global Citizens Assembly for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, November 16, 2018.

inextricably linked with that of the inter-Korean peacebuilding and operational arms control and disarmament process. At this stage, these steps mostly amount to creating the time and space for denuclearization and peacemaking summitry to take place without disruptive loss of control and clashes along the DMZ between the two Koreas, and these steps amount to restoring the original Armistice. However, deepening and expanding these measures to reconfigure, redeploy, and even dismantle conventional offensive forces would address directly the conflict and reduce the tension that nuclear threats made by nuclear-armed states party to the Korea conflict are intended to address, whether through deterrence, compellence, or reassurance. If this process can keep abreast or ahead of the rate and magnitude of denuclearization, it will reduce hostility in a way that is conducive to nuclear disarmament and peacemaking in the Korean peninsula. It is, therefore, the most fundamental process that is now underway and is new to Korea.

Still invisible to most within the latter is the prospective transformation of the current role of UN Command from sole focus on maintaining the readiness and military capabilities of UNC and Combined Forces Command forces, to also in facilitating trilateral, collaborative steps involving the three militaries such MIA recovery, removal of guard posts, reconfiguring the Joint Security Area, demining, ensuring Kim Jong Un's personal safety when he crosses the MDL, and other measures under consideration.

UN Command's newly active and enhanced role prefigures that US Forces Korea may shift from being a solely partisan deterrent force in Korea to becoming a pivot deterrent, one that provides reassurance to both Koreas that neither will attack the other; and that facilitates communication, cooperation, and collaboration between UNC, UNC allies, and the two Korean military forces to reconfigure their respective forces, and to employ them in constructive ways to support peacemaking and the formation of trust between political and military commanders, rather than preparing for war and ultimately, mutual annihilation.⁵⁾

Thus, in Korea itself, denuclearization on the one hand, and the military dimension of inter-Korean conflict resolution on the other, will move in tandem, with the latter calibrated carefully with respect to the former, but with small steps on one front making the task easier on the other.

Ultimately, as is explained well by Chaesung Chun,⁶⁾ there are limits on how far and fast this process can go without addressing the impact that Korea, by virtue of its location at the intersection

5) MORTON HALPERIN, PETER HAYES, THOMAS PICKERING, LEON SIGAL, PHILIP YUN, "FROM ENEMIES TO SECURITY PARTNERS: PATHWAYS TO DENUCLEARIZATION IN KOREA", NAPSNet Policy Forum, July 06, 2018,

<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/from-enemies-to-security-partners-pathways-to-denuclearization-in-korea/>

6) Chaesung Chun, "On the Way to the Third US-North Korea Summit: South Korea's Diplomatic Task for 2019," East Asia Institute paper, May 20, 2019, in Korean, and in English here: http://www.eai.or.kr/main/english/publication_01_view.asp?intSeq=10014&board=eng_report

of the great powers in East Asia, has on great power competition; and the continued vulnerability of the Korean peninsula to instabilities and insecurities created by the great powers that afflict Koreans irrespective of what they do or say.

In fact, the threat of nuclear war arising from the nuclear weapons states' policies and deployed nuclear forces in this region is far greater than that posed by North Korea's relatively tiny nuclear force. Russia's redeployment of ballistic missile-firing submarines into the region, based in Kamchatka and deployed into the open ocean, its testing of long-range ballistic missiles for nuclear warheads to Kamchatka, its basing and operation of strategic bombers in the Far East, its deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in the Far East, and its modernization of its nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) system, all pose a threat to the other nuclear great powers and to the non-nuclear states in the region.

The United States remains forward-deployed with submarines carrying nuclear-armed long-range missiles, operating far outside US territorial waters; with US and allied anti-submarine forces operating in the air, on land (supported by signals intelligence, maritime and underwater intelligence systems and bases), and at sea across the entire region; with strategic bombers flying into and across the region from their home bases in the United States; with missile tests into the region; with ballistic missile defense tests and deployments in the region; and with modernizing NC3 systems in the region, and with its allies, especially with Australia and Japan.

China too is accelerating its nuclear force expansion and modernization, albeit from a relatively small base compared to the global and regional deployments of the United States and Russia. It has added many new intermediate-range nuclear missiles, strategic bombers, and may soon deploy ballistic missile-firing submarines accompanied by its own anti-submarine warfare force. It is also deploying missile defenses, anti-satellite capabilities, and modernized NC3 systems including early introduction of artificial intelligence and quantum technologies into NC3.

In many ways, these great power nuclear forces operate as if they are in worlds of their own, oblivious to the fact that each holds the other's fate in the palms of their hands, and unconcerned that by virtue of their own nuclear deployments, they rely on their nuclear adversary to protect them against acting on their own worst impulses.

In what Paul Bracken terms the Asian Pentapolar great power security system that consists of China, Russia, the United States, Japan, and India, instability today does not arise from bilateral shifts in relative throw-weight or missile accuracy or numbers, but from imbalances of power in new nuclear coalitions employing mobile missiles, missile defenses, anti-satellite systems, and new, disruptive technologies already introduced into the modernization of legacy NC3 systems. This pentapolar system

is far more complex than the bipolar Cold War threat system. It is far more complex than the Cold War. As Bracken states, “Whole new kinds of emergent system behavior are developing, driven by the extension of nuclear arms to more countries and to new domains of conflict.”⁷⁾

During the Cold War, the two key nuclear-armed states, the United States and the former Soviet Union, learned from crisis and control failures that skirted with first use on how to avoid nuclear war, leading to common vocabulary, rules of the road, and eventually to arms control treaties that are now unraveling.

“Learning on the job” this time around, with new technologies, and with no less than 35 states owning, using, or relying upon nuclear weapons is a far more dangerous process than was the Cold War that gained stability rooted in the “delicate” balance of terror. Today, there is much more instability and little balance in the flux of international relations laden with the nuclear threat to rely on it as a foundation of a security system.

Even when it is denuclearized, the Korean Peninsula will not be isolated, an island in the midst of these great power dynamics. To survive, it must use its agile diplomacy and locational leverage to find ways to ameliorate these risks, to create time and space in those places where the great powers might collide, bringing nuclear threat and weapons into play, to avoid nuclear threat mongering and risk-taking; and strive to create a regional, not just a bilateral framework that builds on the inter-Korean peace and denuclearization processes to curb the use of nuclear threat by the great powers.⁸⁾ One such scheme - a nuclear weapons-free zone in the region, buttressed by other comprehensive security measures at a regional level, is an important option to explore, although it may be better framed as a comprehensive regional security zone that incorporates the key elements of a nuclear weapons-free zone, rather than a standard multilateral nuclear weapons-free zone. It's fair to say that we all know now the necessary if not sufficient six elements⁹⁾ of a comprehensive

7) Paul Bracken, “NC3 IN A MULTIPOLAR NUCLEAR WORLD: BIG STRUCTURES AND LARGE PROCESSES”, NAPSNet Special Reports, May 14, 2019, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/nc3-in-a-multipolar-nuclear-world-big-structures-and-large-processes/>

8) Thomas Graham, “REDUCING NUCLEAR DANGERS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA: BILATERAL VERSUS MULTILATERAL APPROACHES”, NAPSNet Special Reports, April 08, 2019, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/reducing-nuclear-dangers-on-the-korean-peninsula-bilateral-versus-multilateral-approaches>

9) These are:

1. Termination of the state of war This is clearly a major objective of North Korea. This section of the treaty should be adhered to by the armistice nations and by South Korea. It should provide for the normalization of relations while providing support for the eventual unification of the Peninsula. The agreement should provide for opening the border between the North and South and the pulling back of military forces in the demilitarized zone. The territorial disputes between the North and South, including at sea, should either be settled or the two parties should commit to a peaceful resolution of the disputes.
2. Creation of a permanent council on security: The treaty should transform the Six-Party talks into a permanent council and support organization to monitor the provisions of the treaty and to provide a forum to deal with future security problems in the region. In addition to the six parties to the treaty, other states from the region could be invited to join as full participants or observers. The treaty might take the form of a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Northeast Asia, leaving the “peace treaty” that terminates the Korean War

security zone, first spelled out by Mort Halperin,¹⁰⁾ and updated since.¹¹⁾

In conclusion, the Korean gift to the great powers may be the creation of a comprehensive regional security zone brought into being to manage the denuclearization of the Peninsula, but requiring along the way that the nuclear great powers commit to a binding framework of negative security assurances and limiting of the use of nuclear threat against the region, and from within or around the region against each other, thereby reducing the role played by nuclear weapons in great power relations and clearing the way to address non-nuclear urgent conventional and non-traditional insecurity in the region.



Armistice to a side agreement, or simply to national declarations or bilateral peace treaties.

3. Mutual declaration of no hostile intent: This is a key objective of North Korea, which put great stock in getting such a statement from US President Bill Clinton's administration. It was flummoxed when the administration of President George W. Bush simply withdrew it and when President Barack Obama's administration continued this policy. To be credible, this commitment must be embodied in the treaty and affect all the parties' relations with each other.
4. Provisions of assistance for nuclear and other energy: The right of all parties to the treaty to have access to necessary sources of energy including nuclear power will need to be affirmed. Any limitations on North Korea will need to apply equally to the other non-nuclear parties to the treaty. A new multilateral framework might be appropriate to deal with the fuel cycle. North Korea will also want assurances that its energy needs will be subsidized. Beyond a general commitment this will probably need to be negotiated as a separate agreement.
5. Termination of sanctions/response to violations of the treaty: The parties to the treaty will need to commit to refrain from the use of sanctions on any other party to the treaty and to remove them from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. The parties would reserve the right to collectively impose sanctions on any state that violates its commitments under the treaty.
6. A nuclear weapons-free zone: The treaty would contain a chapter that would create a nuclear weapons-free zone in Northeast Asia, tailored to the specific circumstances of the region.

10) Morton H. Halperin, "A Proposal for a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in Northeast Asia", NAPSNet Special Reports, January 03, 2012, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/a-proposal-for-a-nuclear-weapons-free-zone-in-northeast-asia/>

11) Morton Halperin, Peter Hayes, Leon Sigal, "A KOREAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS-FREE ZONE TREATY AND NUCLEAR EXTENDED DETERRENCE: OPTIONS FOR DENUCLEARIZING THE KOREAN PENINSULA", NAPSNet Special Reports, April 12, 2018, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/a-korean-nuclear-weapons-free-zone-treaty-and-nuclear-extended-deterrence-options-for-denuclearizing-the-korean-peninsula/>