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Solving North Korean missile crisis

Abstract

The Article examines the North Korean missile crisis situation. It starts with providing a background of North Korean nuclear program and identifying primary drivers of North Korea's continued interest in weapons of mass destruction. The article analyses hypothetical solutions like military action and the ineffectiveness of the economic sanctions. The three solutions to North Korean case start with a plan to prepare a policy of regime transition, and are followed with an explanation why making Pyongyang feel more secure and helping to improve its country economy are crucial to achieving American goal, which is at least freezing its country nuclear weapons program.

Keywords: North Korea, the United States, nuclear threat, economic sanctions, military solution, regime transition, improving North Korean economy, diplomacy

1. Introduction

The time when only two superpowers, the United States and Russia, had nuclear weapons is over. The number of countries that are in possession of atomic weapons continues to grow, including France, Great Britain, India, Pakistan and others. In 2006, a ninth country joined the nuclear club – North Korea. Today, it has nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles which can reach South Korea, Japan and even the United States. Some people like Donald Trump, who refer to Kim as a “madman with nukes” (Nakamura & Gellman 2017), argue that Pyongyang poses a significant threat to the international community. Is Kim Jong Un, who represents a regime that oppresses the North Korean people, more likely to use nuclear weapons to

manifest his power to his opponents than other democratic leaders? Maybe he only wants to protect his country from the United States, which has violated the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement and since the 1960s has stored a range of weapons from anti-aircraft missiles and land mines to tactical bombs and surface-to-surface missiles in South Korea (Pincus 2018). Donald Trump has enough military arsenal close to North Korean borders to really unleash “fire and fury as the world has never seen” (Baker 2017).

Regardless of whether Kim Jong Un’s actions are justified or not, there is a crisis in the Korean Peninsula. If not stopped, this crisis could more likely lead to the escalation of a conflict that neither sides want. What has been done so far in order to prevent Kim Jung Un from developing the nuclear arsenal? The international community led by the United States has mainly focused on two solutions: imposing economic sanctions and putting military pressure on North Korea.

The current situation shows that the harsh economic sanctions did not improve the situation but actually made it worse. They have encouraged Kim Jong Un to “sprint toward the completion of a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile” (Delury 2017). Under Kim Jong Un alone, more than eighty missile tests have been undertaken (Sang-Hun 2017), “including three intercontinental ballistic missile tests and the detonation of a thermonuclear bomb in September 2017” (Borger 2018). Sanctions have not achieved their stated purpose, which was slowing down or halting the North Korean nuclear program. An international security expert, professor Bo Ram Kwon from the University of North Carolina, stated that sanctions were not as effective as expected (Kwon 2016, pp. 139–161).

Using military force by the US through actions such as airstrikes could most likely lead to the destruction of the capital of South Korea – Seoul, and trigger a war in a highly populated region. Therefore, in order to achieve peace with North Korea, the United States should, as John Delury (associate professor of Chinese Studies at Yonsei University) puts it, “stop looking for ways to stifle North Korea’s economy and undermine Kim Jong Un’s regime and start finding ways to make Pyongyang feel more secure” (Delury 2017).

Before looking at the specific solutions to this argument, one should explain why we have to deal with the North Korean case, which is the possession of nuclear arsenal to begin with, and what are the primary drivers of North Korea’s continued interest in weapons of mass destruction? There are three opinions on that matter. First two represent two opposite groups of scientists; “Doves and Hawks.” The “Doves,” believe

that North Korea holds to its nuclear arsenal because it is “threatened militarily, isolated politically, and ailing economically” (Anderson 2017, p. 1). At the opposite the “Hawks,” argue that the North’s nuclear program is powered by “psychological proclivities, domestic political incentives, extortionary motives, and revisionist intentions” (ibid.). The “Hawks” believe that the problem is not only the leader – Kim Jong Un, his personality and country regime, but “the nature of the country.” For the “Hawks,” “the problem is not the US or South Korean foreign policy, the problem is North Korea” (ibid.).

In addition, there is also a third theory, stating that “the problem is not fundamentally one of personality, nor is it one of policy – the primary problem is of power and position” (ibid., p. 2). North Korea shares its peninsula with the most powerful country in the world – the United States – that explains North Korean nuclear behavior. “However, it is not the threatening nature of the U.S. foreign policy, as the doves might suggest, but the raw fact of the U.S.’s tremendous power and its proximity that motivates the North’s nuclear intentions” (ibid.). The Hawks on the other hand are right expressing that Kim will not abandon WMD’s, but they “overlook the centrality of the position of the United States on the Peninsula in leading to this outcome” (ibid., p. 17). The conclusion driven from the third theory perspective is simple: Donald Trump must accept its opponent Kim Jong Un as a leader of the nuclear weapon state if he wants to sustain his country military position on the Korean Peninsula.

The fear of the U.S. attack explains why Kim believes he needs a sufficient nuclear weapon to protect. He says that North Korea’s nuclear weapons are a “powerful deterrent firmly safeguarding the peace and security in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia” (Pearson 2017). Kim does not want to die like the Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi or the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, both of whom gave up their nuclear programs only to be attacked later by the United States (Sagan 2017). “The North Korean nuclear arsenal is not a bargaining chip. It is a potent deterrent designed to prevent a U.S attack or disrupt one that does occur by destroying U.S. air bases and ports through pre-emption, if possible, but in retaliation if necessary” (ibid.). In addition, there are premises that Kim may have ordered army generals to launch all available weapons of mass destruction at the enemy if he is killed (ibid.). If that is the case, it should be a signal to U.S. leaders that any even “surgical,” attacks to either eliminate the leader, whom Trump calls “madman with nuclear weapons” (Nakamura & Gellman 2017) or to damage North Korean nuclear storage facilities would not end the nuclear threat.

2. There is no military solution

If the U.S. would decide to use military tools in order to destroy North Korea's nuclear infrastructure, any strike would be preventative rather than pre-emptive (Litwak 2017, p. 9). International law is very clear and strict when it comes to the use of force, allowing for pre-emptive military action only in the face of a truly imminent threat. For example, in 2003 when George W. Bush started a war with Iraq, it was preventive, because Saddam Hussein was not an imminent threat to the United States. Current situation with North Korea does not legally allow the United States to use military force, because it does not meet the requirements of international law. In addition, there are at least two arguments, which suggest that there is no military solution to the North Korean crisis.

Firstly, it is impossible from a military standpoint to destroy every North Korean missile and nuclear weapon simultaneously. To give a better example, Korean situation is much different from the one in 1981, when Israel faced a threat from Iraq and precisely destroyed a single target, the Osiraq reactor – Tammuz 1. In North Korea there are multiple targets, and some of their locations are not known. North Korean weapons of mass destruction program includes many sites, which vary from reactors, enrichment facilities, warhead storages and stockpile locations to airfields, command-and-control centers, and other facilities. In addition, even if in some lucky scenario the United States destroyed the entire nuclear infrastructure, it would not deprive North Korea of know-how and experience (Anderson 2017). Finally, if Donald Trump decided to use military, the United States and its allies such as South Korea and Japan would face the prospect of nuclear retaliation.

Secondly, American missile defense systems, such as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense or THAAD will fail if North Korea fires multiple missiles at one target. And that is the reason, why North Korea has been practicing launching not one, but several missiles simultaneously. In the case of a nuclear attack, most likely some North Korean nuclear-armed missiles would reach the US territory (Sagan 2017). If that happened the potential fatalities would be very high.

The nuclear weapons scholar Alex Wellerstein created a NUKEMAP to calculate how many civilians would die in a nuclear attack. For example, 100-kiloton nuclear bomb which was used by the North Korea during its sixth nuclear test if detonated, could kill around 440,000 South Korean people in a matter of seconds. Secondary effects could easily bring a number

of dead close to one million. While analyzing the possible casualties of a nuclear strike, one needs to take into consideration the danger of preemption and the consequence of it. Clear statement relating to a possibility of a war caused by the fear of a surprise attack was made in 2013. General Jeong Seung-jo, the chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that: "if there is a clear intent that North Korea is about to use a nuclear weapon, we will eliminate it first even at the risk of a war ...an attack against the North trying to use nuclear weapons does not require consultation with the United States and it is the right of self-defense" (ibid.).

It is also important to consider additional arguments, which are a major constraint on the use of a military strike. First one is the danger of unacceptable collateral damage – either to the environment or to the civilian population. When Israelis were attacking a chemical weapons sites (Iraq 1981, Syria 2007), they were not full of fissile material. Intelligence reports show that most of the nuclear targets in North Korea, such as the Yongbyon nuclear facility, are active sites with radioactive materials. Yongbyon is very close to the capital of North Korea, the city of Pyongyang. Even with the advanced precision of military air strikes the potential risk of collateral damage remains very high. Second argument describes the possibility of the inadvertent escalation, which could lead to an all-out war in the region with the engagement of superpowers such as China and Russia. It is rather important to acknowledge, that administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barrack Obama withdrew from the military option against North Korea, partly, because South Koreans were very concerned with the risk of escalation the conflict. The United States has decided to pursue a non-military approach like economic sanctions, which so far has not accomplished their goal – end North Korean nuclear threat.

3. Why sanctions on North Korea won't work

The United Nations, the United States and the European Union have been imposing economic sanctions on North Korea since 2006 to encourage the regime to stop its nuclear program. Over more than a decade, despite significant growth in the number of sanctions, North Korea continues to work on its nuclear program.

Sanctions on North Korea do not work, because they are not being implemented rigorously. Implementation highly depends on the commitment of North Korean most important trading partners, China and Russia,

who both joined in the Security Council's unanimous July 27, 2017 vote penalizing their neighbor. "The new measures prohibit all exports of North Korean coal, iron, iron ore, lead ore and seafood. They put new restrictions on North Korean's Foreign Trade Bank, forbid the country to increase the number of workers sent abroad and strengthen oversight of North Korean shipping" (Perlez & Gladstone 2017). Despite such clear new policies, everyday experience indicates that the new rules are not being followed by China and Russia and both are violating sanctions. Russia is doing so for three reasons. First, because it has a different definition than the US of an effective sanctions policy. Second, "Russian President Vladimir Putin wants the political benefits of resisting U.S. led sanctions policies toward North Korea" (Ramani 2018). Distinguished Asia-Pacific security expert Artyom Lukin, adds that it is also because Russia wants to "preserve its historical alliance with North Korea" (*ibid.*). How exactly are sanctions being violated by Russia? Mainly through illegally exporting oil to the country its neighbor and by hiring many North Korean construction workers at various construction projects. "The U.S. State Department approximates that around 20,000 North Koreans are sent – most, forcibly – to work in Russia each year for Russian companies (some estimates say the number is as high as 50,000) (Thoburn 2017). For example, North Korean workers participated in the building of the newly opened Zenit Arena in St. Petersburg and repairing the Moscow stadium for the 2018 World Cup (*ibid.*). Furthermore, there are many small North Korean-owned businesses across Russia ranging from restaurants and travel agencies to transport and home-maintenance companies (Sharkow 2019). Moreover, to help Russian businesses trade with trade with North Korean, the port of Nakhodka received a significant support from the Russian government, becoming the hub for transporting North Korean coal. European security reports show that in 2017 alone North Korea shipped coal at least three times to Russia's Nakhodka. In addition, Russia has aided North Korea in other ways: "in 2014, it forgave 90% of the nearly \$11 billion in debt that it (and the Soviet Union before it) was owed by North Korea. The remaining portion of the debt was to be repaid to Russia by deposits into an account that could then be used to grow Russian-North Korean ties and trade. To avoid the difficulties that western sanctions have placed on payments and financial transfers to North Korea, the two countries have an arrangement by which Russia pays Pyongyang in rubles" (Thoburn 2017).

Russia is a major player in the North Korea nuclear crisis. "It can help nudge Pyongyang toward strategic restraint, and help defuse tensions in

the meantime, by offering it new economic prospects" (Trenin 2017). Although Russia is not directly affected by North Korea's nuclear ambitions, it has an interest in helping to de-escalate the current crisis. The City of Vladivostok, located quite near several North Korean nuclear and missile sites, is a strategic and very important site on the Russian map, because it hosts the Pacific Fleet and is a gateway to the Asia-Pacific region. "Any malfunction or other mishap with North Korea's nuclear tests or missile launches could mean contamination in Russia itself" (ibid.). The Russian government also wants to limit further development of American missile-defense systems in Japan and South Korea. Russian's government officials say that North Korea will not denuclearize and that sanctions, no matter how strict, will not stop it from developing the nuclear program. They are opposed to cutting off oil supplies to North Korea. In October 2017, during an economic summit conference in Vladivostok, President Vladimir Putin said that stopping oil exports to the country would instead hurt ordinary North Koreans by disturbing hospitals and other civilian facilities (Sang-Hun 2017). He added that North Koreans will "eat grass" before they give up nuclear weapons, because they see it as the key to their very survival" (Trenin 2017).

There is also another key player in the North Korean crisis, China, which wants to avoid the collapse of North Korea and helps the regime even if it has not stopped its nuclear program. "One piece of evidence for this is the firm request from the Chinese authorities to South Korea and the United States not to attempt to disturb the stability of North Korea after Kim Jong-Il's death. Furthermore, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated in January 2012 that China would deliver food aid to North Korea and urged other countries to join in this effort" (Byung-Yeon & Roland 2012, p. 512).

The Chinese historically North Korea's best trading partners, are also violating sanctions. For example, North Korean seafood – crab, lobster, shrimp, shellfish – is sold directly to many Chinese restaurant and hotels. Most of the Korean distributors are army personnel. The same can be said about metal trade from North Korea to China. The North's iron ore exports, "have dwindled in the past several years" (Perlez & Gladstone 2017), but smuggling of coal still occurs on a large scale. Economists claim that the revenue to the state from seafood is not as high as that from the metals trade. In addition, many Chinese banks and corporations do business with North Korea despite being banned from doing so. For 2017, Chinese exports to the DPRK rose 8.3% to \$3.34 billion, the highest since 2014. Despite

clear evidence of breaking the rules, the U.S. Treasury Department wants to give China a chance to enforce the new United Nations sanctions and is hesitant to alienate Beijing by immediately imposing sanctions on Chinese organizations. As a result of "The penalties that came into force on Sept. 5 last year (2017) banned countries from buying coal, iron ore, lead, lead ore and seafood from North Korea" (Chen & Woo 2018). China's imports from North Korea plunged 81.6% year-on-year in December to their lowest level of \$54.34 million since at least the start of 2014 (*ibid.*). In November 2017, there were no reports of North Korean imports of iron ore, coal or lead. The most recent findings from the beginning of 2018 indicate that China still remains North Korea's largest trading partner, however trade has fallen: "Trade between China and North Korea totaled US\$215.97 million in January, down 52% from the year-earlier period and 31% month on month, final trade numbers from the General Administration of Customs showed on Friday. China's exports to North Korea totaled US\$168.88 million in January compared with US\$257.73 million in December, while imports from North Korea were US\$47.09 million versus US\$54.68 million in December" (Zhou 2018).

In addition, to Russia and China there is a third country, South Korea, that also violates the economic sanctions imposed on North Korea. Currently, many South Korean firms do business unofficially with their northern neighbor. "These firms are on the verge of collapse because of the current economics actions unless they hide their true identity to disguise themselves as Chinese businesses. These business transactions are effective in transforming North Korean culture and the society, exposing them to a market economy. Future North Korean entrepreneurs will be nurtured through these business transactions" (*ibid.*).

Since evidence shows that economic sanctions are not working, what should be done? In my opinion, sanctions should not be ended all at once, but rather gradually and partially: "Washington could lift them on sectors such as coal and oil, which affect the basic needs of the North Korean economy, while maintaining those directed at nuclear and missile programs. Over time, more economic engagement could yield additional benefits in slowly opening up North Korea" (Fuchs 2017).

Even though there is evidence that shows that economic sanctions have to date not done to North Korea and have not forced the regime to reduce its nuclear capacity, one ought to acknowledge one historical example where economic sanctions did contribute to limits in a country's nuclear program. This is the Iranian case, in which "sanctions – including

secondary sanctions – clearly moved Tehran toward negotiations” (Haggard 2016, p. 940). In 2002 the international community headed by the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany became highly concerned about newly discovered evidence that the possessed a nuclear weapons development program at Natanz. In order to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state that threatens its enemies, especially Israel, the United Nations imposed comprehensive sanctions, such as an arms embargo, travel bans, financial sanctions and cargo inspections. In 2005 after talks with Iran failed, EU members joined the US and imposed stronger energy and financial sector sanctions. However, the real difference was made by the secondary sanctions imposed by the US in January 2012 on Iran’s banking sector that were designed to hit directly the Central Bank and all business connected to it. “Since Iran’s major oil importers work with the Central Bank, this prohibited Iran’s export of oil. Also, in January 2012, the EU imposed sanctions that banned the import of Iranian oil and insurance of Iranian tankers. This made it difficult for states such as South Korea and Singapore to buy and transport Iranian oil” (Kwon 2016, p. 143). Those secondary sanctions were the ones that finally forced Iran to sit at the negotiating table. They were effective because Iran, as one of the world’s biggest oil suppliers, was heavily dependent on the world economy via trade and investment. Additionally, Iran was likely to be affected by sanctions because the Iranian economy “was already suffering from the backlash of economic mismanagement under President Ahmadinejad and low global energy prices” (ibid.).

There are two main reasons why sanctions worked in the Iranian case but will not be as effective in North Korea. First, the North Korea economy is built on a self-sufficiency principle and does not depend heavily on income from one crucial source such oil and as a result is more flexible and more resistant to sanctions. Second, “the West demonstrated unprecedented levels of orchestrated commitment toward imposing comprehensive sanctions on Iran to halt its nuclear weapons development program” (ibid.), which was and still is not the case with North Korea where some countries such as China are much less involved in imposing sanctions, because it has strong political and economic ties with North Korea.

The key to restoring peace and stability to the region is to convince Kim Jong Un that he already holds the deterrent he needs, and that increasing his nuclear arsenal would be counterproductive. To accomplish that goal Donald Trump needs to offer Mr. Kim new economic prospects to help improve North Korea’s economy.

4. A policy of regime transition

The process of helping to improve the North Korean economy and making Pyongyang feel more secure should start with a policy of regime transition. This is not regime change, where a new dictatorship takes power. But who is to say that a follower of Kim Jong Un would be better than the current leader? Therefore, one ought to focus on the goal of a changed regime headed by Kim Jong Un. Col. James M. Minnich (2018), a senior military professor at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, says a changed regime can result from “a policy of consistent, prolonged engagement that engenders a transformation from within by resolute exposures from without.” That kind of strategy was implemented by the American government in South Korea, where its long consistent presence and engagement helped to it become a country it is right now, a strong American ally. It was also by the US towards North Korea before 2000 with official meetings between DPRK dignitaries by first Bill Clinton and soon after with Madeleine Albright. Unfortunately, the more recent presidencies of both George W. Bush and Barack Obama did not continue the approach. Bush practiced a “less than hospitable approach toward North Korea’s Kim Jong Il,” while Obama strongly believed in a “policy of strategic patience, which was an unsuccessful attempt to pressure Pyongyang to denuclearize through U.S. led economic sanctions” (ibid.). As of today, we experience a situation on the Korean Peninsula in which American interests, abolition of a nuclear weapons program, are not the same as North Korea’s. What needs to be done by the American government is to implement a process of dynamic policy actions seeking regime transition that would eventually lead to a resolution of the North Korean missile crisis. Those actions should start with security assurances and the reestablishment of relations between the United States and North Korea and with economic policies that to help improve DPRK economy through cooperative prosperity and nonnuclear energy provision (ibid.).

5. Making Pyongyang feel more secure

In order to proceed with plans toward North Korea that return security to the region, diplomacy must first be established. Making Kim Jong un feel more secure must start with dialogue. For a long period of time Kim was not ready to talk. Michael Fuchs, a Senior Fellow at the Center

for American Progress states that: "North Korea may not be interested in talking until it feels assured that it has what it needs for deterrence – namely, the ability to place a nuclear warhead on an intercontinental ballistic missile that could hit the continental United States (as of this writing, such a capability may or may not exist). Yet Washington must convey that it is ready to talk anytime and anywhere, without preconditions and with the full backing of the president" (*ibid.*).

The most recent meetings between Kim and Western representatives prove that Kim finally is ready to talk. The first meeting took place in Pyongyang on March 5, 2018. It might be a good indication that finally the leader of North Korea feels secure enough to begin negotiations with the West.

Following that, on April 27, 2018, Kim Jong Un, himself crossed into Panmunjom to meet personally South Korean President Moon Jae-in. Issues regarding peace and prosperity topped the agenda. The two leaders talked mainly about nuclear weapons and about reestablishing relations between the two Koreas through industrial cooperation, humanitarian aid and cultural exchange. They also spent some time discussing the topic of connecting separated families, who could not see each other for many years due to the Korean crisis.

A historic meeting took place in Singapore on June 12, 2018. It brought Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump together. Never before had leaders of those two nations met face to face. The success of talks was partly determined because Kim had been able to restore good relations with South Korea. That allowed the American president and the North Korean leader to focus on the most important issue – stopping the DPRK's nuclear weapons program. One ought to recognize that a year ago both leaders were exchanging personal insults and threatening war. To see Trump and Kim smiling, shaking hands and talking about cooperation was a success. Itself, and a step forward, and reduced the risk of war. However, reactions after the summit were mostly negative. Newspapers, Democrats and even some Republicans were dissatisfied, saying out loud that the meeting was more symbolic and lacked substance, because nothing concrete was decided, and no written commitment with deadlines and a definition of denuclearization was signed. However, those critics are forgetting that the goal of the summit was to bring the two feuding nations closer and open the door to negotiations – and that certainly has been accomplished, making it historic. Now, Kim and Trump must step back and allow the diplomats do their job.

The goal of diplomacy should be to stop North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Siegfried Hecker, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, specifies these goals: "first, no new weapons (freezing North Korean production of plutonium and enriched uranium); second, no testing of weapons or ballistic missiles; and third, no exports of nuclear technology or weapons to state or non-state entities. A freeze would preclude the additional testing that North Korea still needs to master miniaturization and reliable long-range missiles" (Litwak 2017, p. 7). All six parties should be involved in talks: North Korea and the United States, along with China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea, but not directly and not at once. The main diplomatic work would have to be done bilaterally between the US and North Korea. It seems logical that after the agreement between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un on freezing North Korean nuclear program is accomplished, the parties could move to the next step and that is making Pyongyang feel more secure.

In order to proceed with that, Donald Trump with his colleagues should prepare a package of security guarantees and political incentives, along with practical means to verify Kim's compliance. Trump should propose substantive concession to Kim, well beyond food aid, and suggest convening four-power talks with China, North Korea, South Korea, and the United States to negotiate and sign a treaty formally ending the Korean War, as Pyongyang has long demanded (Delury 2017). It is positive to note that South Korea confirmed on April 18 2018, that "it had been in talks with American and North Korean officials about negotiating a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War after more than 60 years, as the United States and its ally try to establish a basis for persuading the North to give up its nuclear weapons" (Sang-Hun 2017).

Establishing a constructive dialogue between Kim and Trump should go along with establishing liaison offices in Washington and Pyongyang. Those actions could help re-establish diplomatic relations between the two conflict-ridden countries and through direct negotiations discover what steps Kim is ready to take and which ones will have to be postponed. Those high-level talks should tackle the case of launching North Korean satellites, which the U.S. believes are simply ballistic missile tests. Trump might suggest to the Koreans that Russia launch the satellites for them.

There are many political leaders, who are in favor of dialogue with North Koreans. One is Vladimir Putin, who has said, "we should not act out of emotions and push North Korea into a dead end... we must act with calm and avoid steps that could raise tensions" (ibid.). During a joint news conference

in Vladivostok with President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, Putin clearly stated, “without political and diplomatic tools, it is impossible to make headway in the current situation; to be more precise, it is impossible” (ibid.). It is hopeful that after a long period of rather “cold relations,” diplomatic actions are finally taking place. The personal visit of then CIA director and now Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, to North Korea to meet with Kim Jong Un and prepare a scenario for high-level talks between Trump and Kim is a positive indication that the process of resolving North Korean crisis is starting to head along the right path.

Simultaneous with diplomatic actions, the United States must halt the major military exercises it holds with South Korea, as it did in 1994, 1995 and 1996. Historical evidence shows that halting the exercises did not slow the North Korean nuclear program from slowing down, but now, more than two decades later, ending the exercises will have a greater impact on North Korean’s nuclear program than in the mid-1990s. Most significantly nowadays, Kim Jong un possesses much more military power than he had in the past and the science of military technology has greatly improved. “Many exercises already take place on computers and can continue, and altering the real-life exercises would do nothing to weaken the strongest component of U.S. deterrence: the United States’ military presence in South Korea and its pledge to defend the country against nuclear attack” (Fuchs 2017). The United States and its allies acknowledge that, given the stronger military position of North Korea today, they should change their strategy from aggression to diplomacy to Pyongyang feel more secure.

The same applies to the North Korean regime that should not only stop launching missiles over the heads of South Korean and Japanese people, but certainly ought to remove its heavy artillery located very close to South Korea’s border. Kim Jong Un cannot persuade achieve the goal of “making himself secure” through constantly threatening its main adversaries; the United States and South Korean are threatened enough, if they weren’t, we would not have “North Korean Missile Crisis.”

6. Improving North Korean economy

The talks between the US and North Korea have taken place at the highest possible level. They have relaxed tensions and created an opening for further negotiation, which should eventually lead Kim Jong Un and

Donald Trump to making a deal: “helping Kim plot a path of prosperity by integrating North Korea’s economy into the region” (Delury 2017). When preparing a plan that could help to improve the North Korean economy, one ought to focus on three areas that seem to have the most potential: tourism, natural resources and agriculture.

North Korea is a secret state, a country which is not easily accessible to tourists. Most tourists are citizens of China, Russia and Japan, whose citizens do not have to apply for visas to enter North Korea. I believe that changing policies with regards to foreign travel from highly restrictive to more open could turn North Korea from a country completely closed to the international community into one that is open and willing to show its interesting culture and landscape. The country’s economy could benefit from it, because western foreigners visiting would see it as an attractive opportunity with regards to the favorable exchange rate.

North Korea is one of the biggest producers of fresh fruit in the world, but its agriculture is in terrible condition due to two factors. First, agricultural business was highly dependent on the former Soviet Union; its collapse contributed to cutting North Korea off from fairly inexpensive Russian fuel that had been used by North Korean farmers. Secondly, the country’s soil has been impoverished due to its very abusive cultivation practices. Those two factors contributed to the famine of 1994–1998 that killed over two million North Korean people. I believe that with significant help from the international community to help modernize DPRK agricultural machines and teach modern ways to cultivate the soil, North Korea could restore its agriculture. When that is accomplished North Korea could take advantage of its very good geopolitical location on the Korean Peninsula and benefit from exporting agricultural goods to neighboring countries. North Korea’s location at the crossroads of Northeast Asia is a great, natural asset that should not be ignored, but taken advantage of through encouraging businesses in China’s northeastern provinces and the Russian Far East to ship their goods to Rason, North Korea’s ice-free port. International financial institutions such as, the World Bank or International Monetary Fund could find ways to stabilize the North Korean currency and provide development assistance. Certainly, North Korea would have a chance to become an attractive manufacturing land for many international corporations, given not only low wages, but more significantly the country’s disciplined and educated workforce.

Finally, one should not forget the country’s rich natural resources, which include coal and iron ore, precious metals, and rare earths.

Currently, North Korea cannot benefit from their possession due to economic sanctions. If the United States together with United Nations decided to lift sanctions, attracting foreign partners interested in those goods would be just a matter of time and would quickly and significantly could improve the North Korean economy.

Improving the North Korean economy in the above three areas can only take place if its government makes significant changes in economic policies that would eventually lead to an economic transition. There are three possible economic scenarios. The first is the collapse scenario, in which the young and inexperienced leader Kim is replaced by someone else following leadership fights; this is the least likely scenario. The second scenario is a Chinese-style scenario, where Kim will remain in power and will decide to follow the example of Deng Xiaoping in China to carry out successful economic reforms (Byung-Yeon & Roland 2012, p. 529). Those reforms should include decollectivization of agriculture, the encouragement of entry by small and medium enterprises into the market and the establishment of a manufacturing base aimed at exports (*ibid.*, p. 530). Decollectivization can take place through redistributing land to people and giving out property rights, as has occurred in Vietnam. Encouraging business openings will require access to credit and securing rights for private businesses. The establishment of a manufacturing zone for exports is very important in any transition strategy, because it “would provide a major source of export revenue for North Korea and give the opportunity to many workers to earn relatively high incomes” (*ibid.*, p. 532). The last scenario is the one where Kim Jong Un changes nothing or very little: this is rather hard to imagine observing his current open-minded diplomatic activity and historical trips to China and South Korea. Both demonstrate his willingness to cooperate and do business as opposed to isolate.

The question that must be answered is whether the North Korean regime will be able to successfully introduce a market economy? The examples of China and Vietnam indicate that it is possible. Significant processes with country's economic policies might require the support of government officials. They will need to be convinced that changing to a market economy will not deprive them of money and prestige. One incentive could be allowing those bureaucrats to work part-time in private business or setting up a bonus program dependent on tax revenues collected. Allowing the above increases the danger of developing a monopoly, but without backing for market reforms from workers within the state apparatus, the process of implementing the economic policies will be less effective (*ibid.*).

To recapitulate, solving the North Korean missile crisis cannot be achieved through military strikes or imposing harsh economic sanctions, but through making North Korea feel more secure and helping its economy to expand. Neither of those goals can be accomplished without restoring diplomacy between the United States and North Korea. The recent meetings between Kim Jong un and the leaders of China, South Korea and, most significantly, the United States give hope that resolving the North Korean crisis is possible and that diplomacy will be the key instrument in that process. It is important to emphasize that in all those cases Kim travelled abroad to meet the leaders. That fact alone showed his openness to dialogue. Another proof that he wants to come to an agreement is his unwillingness to express his opinion publicly on issues such as the US-led attack on Syria or the nomination of John Bolton, who is known for his rather harsh approach towards North Korea and belief in hard power rather than soft-power politics, as National Security Adviser. Additionally, from the moment Trump has agreed to meet, the regime has stopped calling American an "enemy" and itself a "strong nuclear power." Peter Ward, an expert on North Korea from the Seoul National University says that those behaviors are not coincidental (Słabisz 2018).

There are also sceptics who believe that Kim is not ready to abandon his nuclear program on which he has spent a lot of money, and that the diplomacy he is lately showing is nothing, but a trick. They believe that Donald Trump needs to be very careful and that he needs to pass a very difficult test, which is to guess Kim's real intentions. One of those critics is professor Lee Sung-yoon from Tufts University, who argues that Kim is playing around, luring Trump into his ambush with no intentions of giving away his nukes (ibid.). If he is right, the outcome of resolving North Korean missile crisis between Donald Trump and Kim Jong will heavily depend on leadership skills of the two, rather than on the surrounding environment, which could mean the role of other countries involved in North Korean crisis.

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