

Check against delivery

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Science and Technology Commission
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Chère Présidente de commission Maria Martens, chers Parlementaires, n'étant pas représentant du gouvernement français vous me permettez de m'adresser à vous en anglais afin de faciliter notre interaction.

Dear Chairperson Maria Martens, dear Parliamentarians, please let me first thank the Science and Technology Committee and more broadly the NATO Parliamentary Assembly for the opportunity to address the North Korean nuclear challenge in such a timely event.

Over the last few days, Korea watchers may have felt like in a rollercoaster. Insults and threats were exchanged across the Pacific Ocean before President Trump decided to cancel the planned summit in Singapore with Chairman Kim, and that it should be followed by a trilateral summit.

Yesterday, Chairman Kim and President Moon met for the second time and emphasized the need to maintain the momentum, hinting that the summit could be rescheduled.

Recent developments in the Korean Peninsula should be welcomed. Indeed, after a year marked by a rare verbal and military escalation between the United States of America (USA) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the latter seems to eventually be heading to the right direction.

Yet, we should nurture a very cautious optimism instead of a blissful optimism.

If the direction is right, the DPRK still has a long journey before reaching the shared goal of the international community: its complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization.

This cautious optimism should be kept for three main reasons: historic precedents of failed commitments, the radicalization of the position of the DPRK on its nuclear and ballistic programs, and the current DPRK negotiation policy.

The first reason for cautiousness is the number of historic precedents of failed commitments.

Eleven years ago, optimism also prevailed. Few months after the DPRK first nuclear test in October 2006, the DPRK had also engaged into a diplomatic offensive.

In 2007, an Action Plan had been reached within the framework of the Six Party Talks, the IAEA Director had visited Pyongyang followed by American, Russian and Chinese experts, an agreement was reached on a Disablement Plan of the Yongbyon nuclear facilities of which the cooling tower had just been destroyed, and the DPRK had agreed to a “complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs”.

Meanwhile, many also expected the Second inter-Korean summit held in Pyongyang in October 2007 to eventually lead to a peace regime in the Peninsula and unprecedented economic cooperation. It never happened.

Yet, the DPRK failed to respect its 2007 commitment, just like the DPRK had failed to respect its previous initial commitments with the ROK in 1992, or with the USA in 1994.

The nuclear crisis has been going on since and has reached new heights last year.

The second reason for cautiousness is the radicalization of the DPRK’s position on its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, especially under the leadership of Chairman Kim.

Primo, the DPRK went as far as to institutionalize these weapons, revising the Constitution in 2012 to present the country as a "nuclear-weapon state" and later adopting a national strategy in 2013 aiming at "carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously”.

Deuxio, and last year alone, Chairman Kim ordered more ballistic missiles tests than his father during his sixteen years of leadership, bringing the total number of tests since he came to power to more than 80. Launch locations have been multiplied, from 2 to more than 15. North Korea has also launched simultaneously missiles, or launched missiles at night, to mimic the conditions units would have to operate them under a war.

North Korea is training several missile units for war rather than just testing technical specificities of missiles anymore, something indispensable to have a credible deterrence.

Tertio, the young leader mapped out as early as 2013 technical priorities that should be followed: improving miniaturization, making the weapons lighter, diversifying them, and increasing their precision.

The four nuclear tests conducted between 2013 and 2017 are said by the regime to have met the objectives. It was further completed with the successful test on an ICBM that could theoretically cover the whole US mainland but also most of NATO allied countries, last November.

Since, Chairman Kim Jong-un has announced it had “finally realized the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force”. That political more than technical statement unlocked the DPRK new diplomatic offensive, its announcement that it will freeze nuclear and long range missile testing, and dismantle the Punggye-ri nuclear test site.

But before focusing on current events, let me insist that November declaration fits in the DPRK’s survival strategy that aims at increasing regime security from both external and internal threats, both strengthening deterrence and reinforcing the regime’s legitimacy,

The external dimension of that strategy relates to the regime security from outside threats. Nuclear weapons contribute to ease the North Korean regime’s concerns of what has been labeled, for decades, as U.S. “hostile policy” and “nuclear threats”.

Yet, unlike the too-often comparison with Libya and Iraq, the DPRK already had major deterrence capacities, holding Seoul, an urban area of 20 million people, hostage of its conventional and chemical assets, limiting de facto the likeliness of military intervention. That deterrence dimension is not enough to understand the DPRK strategy.

The internal dimension of that strategy, even more important, relates to the regime security from inside threats. Indeed, nuclear weapons are political weapons that are an unmatched source of legitimacy.

First, they consolidate the hereditary system since they are presented as inherited by Kim Jong-un from its father and grand-father.

Second, they increase his authority as the protector of the Korean nation who brought security to its people.

Third, they legitimize the decades-old sacrifices of the population being one of the rare successes of which the North Korean regime can boast about.

Fourth, they strengthen internal cohesion and stimulate national morale presenting the country as a great power despite international sanctions.

Fifth but not least, they materialize the *Juche* ideology standing for Korea's independence, a key to the DPRK's domestic legitimacy.

Juche is a nationalistic quest of political independence (Jaju), which involves an autonomous economy (Jalib) and self-defensive capacities (Jauj). Nuclear weapons symbolize North Korea's autonomy and independence after what the propaganda presents as centuries of foreign influence from China and decades of foreign occupation from Japan.

This internal dimension makes their abandonment even more difficult since they are no longer possessed by the regime, but have evolved as a part of its identity.

To abandon them in the short term would mean for the regime to question the rationality of its former policies which would eventually weaken the regime.

It also means any successful strategy to denuclearize the regime will have to convince it that its own security, in both its military but mostly political dimension, will be assured.

A point repeated yesterday by Chairman Kim during the surprise meeting with President Moon.

Negotiations are still ongoing between the DPRK and the USA are that is obviously a positive development. Few hours ago, a USA negotiation team just crossed the MDL to attend negotiations with their DPRK counterparts.

The third reason for cautiousness is that Chairman Kim Jong-un has entered a new diplomatic offensive sequence that fits its interests.

First, the DPRK has already maximized its domestic political gains from the previous testing campaign and no longer needs to test since capacities are presented as "complete".

It can freeze its testing campaign, and even dismantle its nuclear test site what was done few days ago, without compromising internally.

Second, the DPRK favors a stable environment in which the likeliness of military conflicts, either preventive strikes or military incidents escalating, is further reduced.

Third, by further negotiating the DPRK can improve relations with its two key neighbors, South Korea and China and potentially initiate cooperation in terms of infrastructures building, both transportation and electricity production.

Fourth, the DPRK needs to avoid any additional economic sanctions and gain some time to adapt its economy to existing sanctions.

Fifth, the development of long range missiles increase the DPRK leverages in future negotiations that may focus, initially, in addressing the nuclear threat to the United States.

Sixth, by focusing on long range missiles and keeping short range missiles, the DPRK could try to drive a wedge between the US and its regional allies, mostly Japan.

Chairman Kim has many reasons to pursue negotiations with the US and try to keep a summit with President Trump. Recent events do not contradict that analysis.

Recent North Korean statements considered as "hostile and full of anger" by President Trump, are nevertheless moderate with a clear goal: to try to divide within the White House by criticizing the national security adviser, Ambassador Bolton, or more precisely the political line he represents.

To simplify, the line of Secretary of State Pompeo, in charge of negotiations and who met Kim Jong-un twice, aims at an initial agreement, with reciprocal concessions ultimately leading to a more comprehensive, step-by-step agreement.

The line of National Security Adviser Bolton, a maximalist one, aims at obtaining the full dismantlement of nuclear, ballistic and even chemical capabilities in the very short term and only after to accept some potential concessions.

This Bolton line is unacceptable for Pyongyang.

That is main reason why North Korean officials criticized National Security Adviser Bolton and Vice-President Pence for referring to the "Libyan model", making sure never to criticize President Trump.

Response to President Trump's letter, mixing openness and flattery, also emphasize that the Pompeo line and the "Trump formula", instead of the Bolton line, could lead to an agreement.

The same stance was reaffirmed yesterday during the surprise inter-Korean summit.

For these three reasons, cautious optimism instead of blissful optimism should prevail and will be key to pragmatically address the North Korea's nuclear issue and improve the security of all NATO allied countries.

Let be realistic, denuclearization will not be achieved overnight. It is both a long-term process and our common objective.

In the short term, if stability can be further improved while advancing on the denuclearization path, this is indeed a great achievement, and the North Korean nuclear issue should be addressed through diplomatic means first.

Meanwhile, President Moon reminded us in Berlin, last July that "the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is the agreed demand of the international community and is the absolute condition for peace on the Korean Peninsula".

Indeed, peace and denuclearization go together and there will be no permanent peace and stability without denuclearization.

A freeze of nuclear and ballistic testing is only a very initial step. It is unfortunately a reversible action and the DPRK should prove its intentions signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Furthermore, it should be followed as soon as possible by a freeze of the nuclear and ballistic programs under the supervision of the international community.

Eventually, then the dismantlement of every nuclear and ballistic order to reach a comprehensive, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization.

The DPRK is challenging the unity of the international community and failing to address that challenge would only weaken the credibility of the international community.

Cooperation among NATO allied countries and with our partners will be key to make sure United Nations Security Council resolutions are respected and its sanctions fully and further implemented, and to make sure the international non-proliferation regime is protected.

Specifically, cooperation with the Republic of Korea will be key and can take place within the framework on the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program the Alliance renewed with the country last November.

As a conclusion, cautious optimism, and I repeat once again cautious, should prevail and to paraphrase Chairman Kim Jong-un last Friday, we should “not repeat the unfortunate history of unfulfilled promises”.

Indeed, we should make sure promises will be fulfilled by all sides, especially by the DPRK.

Thank you for your attention. I am now more than willing to answer the questions you may have.