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Contributors

John Mueller is a political scientist and Senior Research Scientist at the Mershon Center at Ohio State Universtiy. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington, DC. Among his books is *Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al-Qaeda*. He is currently working on a book entitled, Embracing Threatlessness: The Case for Complacency and Appeasement. His areas of interest are international relations, security studies, terrorism and counterterrorism, and U.S. foreign policy.

E-mail: 135@polisci.osu.edu

Yuan-kang Wang is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Western Michigan University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago, and was an International Security Fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (2001-2002) and a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution's Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies (2005-2006).Dr. Wang's research examines the nexus between international relations theory and historical China.He is author of Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics (Columbia University Press, 2011), which debunks the myth of Confucian pacifism in Chinese grand strategy, use of force, and war aims.He has published journal articles on security issues related to China, the United States, and Taiwan. His recent publications include book chapters on the myth of Chinese exceptionalism (2015), the historical legacy of Chinese security policy (2015), power and the use for force in Ming China (2018), rethinking US security commitment to Taiwan (2018), and international order and change in East Asian history (forthcoming in 2019).

E-mail: wang@wmich.edu

David Hundt is an associate professor of International Relations at Deakin University, Melbourne. He received his PhD from the University of Queensland, St Lucia, in 2005. HIs recent publications include "Elite opinion and the 'Belt and Road' debate in South Korea", Pacific Affairs (2019, with Sueyoung Kim), and "The politics of conditional citizenship in South Korea: An analysis of the print media", Journal of Contemporary Asia (2019, with Jessica Walton & Elisha Soojeong Lee). His main areas of interest are the international relations and political economy of East Asia, with a special focus on Korea. Since 2018, David Has been Editor-in-Chief of Asian Studies Review.

E-mail: david.hundt@deakin.edu.au

Won Gon Park is a professor of International Studies at Handong Global University. He received M.A. in International Politics from Boston College and Ph.D in Diplomacy from Seoul National University. He is a member of advisory committee for ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is a visiting scholar for Asan Institute for Policy Studies. He recently published following articles; "Roadmap for Future ROK-US Alliance" (2018), "Inter-Korean Summit and DPRK-US Summit: Issue of Denuclearization" (2018), "Trump Administration's Security and Defense Strategy" (2017), "North Korean Nuclear Development and US" (2017), "Interpretation of Trump Administration's North Korea Policy: Maximum Pressure and Engagement" (2017), "Credible Intimidation: Trump Administration's Policy toward North Korea" (2017) and others.

E-mail: wonpark@handong.edu

Jaeho Hwang is a professor of Division of International Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) in Seoul, Korea. He was a member of advisory board for the National Security Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the LSE. He has been a visiting fellow/professor at the Brookings Institution, National Institute for Defense Studies, Keio University, Beijing University, China Institute of International Studies, China Foreign Relations University, University of Leeds, University of Melbourne, and National Chengchi University. Before joining HUFS in 2010, he served as a research fellow at the Center for Security and Strategy in the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses. His areas of expertise include Chinese foreign policy and Sino-South Korean relations as well as diplomatic and security issues in Northeast Asia.

E-mail: jaeho@hufs.ac.kr

Eunjung Lim is an associate professor at Division of International Studies, Kongju National University (KNU). Her areas of specialization include international cooperation, comparative and global governance, and energy (especially nuclear) and climate change policies of East Asian countries. Before joining the KNU faculty, Dr. Lim taught as an Assistant Professor at Ritsumeikan University. She also taught at several universities in the United States and Korea, including Johns Hopkins University, Yonsei University, and Korea University. She has been a researcher and a visiting fellow at privileged academic institutes including the Center for Contemporary Korean Studies at Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies at the University of Tokyo, the Institute of Japanese Studies at Seoul National University, the Institute of Japan Studies at Kookmin University, and Institute of Energy Economics, Japan. She earned a B.A. from the University of Tokyo, an M.I.A. from Columbia University and a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

E-mail: ej-lim@kongju.ac.kr

Jiyoung Kim is a professor at Institute for Unification Education, the Ministry of Unification. Previously, he worked as a researcher of center for International Studies at Seoul National University. He specialized in the dynamics of inter-state relations in Northeast Asia in terms of foreign policy, which are based on discourse analysis. He used to teach Politics in China and Politics in North Korea at the department of Politics and Diplomacy at Incheon University. He has recently conducted research projects on Rok's Middle Power Response to China's North Korean policy in the post-Cold War and Unification Strategy in a New age of Northeast Asia. The latest publication is The Reconstruction of Chinese Diplomatic Discourses in the ROK in Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies.

E-mail: mr75ying@gmail.com

Sangtu Ko is professor of Area Studies and Director of Center for Advanced Research in Integrated Future Society at Yonsei University. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science at Free University of Berlin. He has served as Chair of Research Committee(RC42) in International Political Science Association, Director of Yonsei-SERI EU Center, and President of Korean Association of Slavic Studies. His main research interest is comparative and regional politics and specifically European politics. His academic papers have published in Asia Europe Journal, International Peacekeeping, Pacific Focus, and Issues & Studies, among others

E-mail: stko@yonsei.ac.kr

Antiproliferation Policy as a Hindrance to Resolving Korea : Some Policy Proposals*

John Mueller

Abstract

Although alarmed antiproliferation efforts have proved to be exceedingly costly, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the consequences of nuclear proliferation itself have been substantially benign: those who have acquired the weapons have "used" them simply to stoke their egos or to deter real or imagined threats.

It therefore doesn't really matter much whether North Korea has nuclear weapons or not. However, the obsession about proliferation potentially stands in the way of an extremely important development.

It is entirely possible (but not certain) that Korea is at a historic turning point: because North Korean leader Kim Jong-un seems to be genuine about wanting to see his country become developed, there is a good prospect of forging a potentially permanent normalization of relations on the peninsula. This would markedly reduce the prospect of armed conflict there while finally relieving the perpetual suffering of the North Korean people.

Accordingly, policy should involve backburnering the nuclear issue, actively exploring the possibilities for normalization, relaxing or removing the sanctions, letting South Korea take the lead, and waiting.

Key Words: *Nuclear proliferation, Korea, Kim Jong-un, Threat inflation, Sanctions*

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Introduction

Just about everyone, including the whole of the foreign policy establishment, has for decades taken it as a central article of faith that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is an overwhelming danger and that all possible measures, including war, must be taken to keep it from happening.

When China, impelled primarily by incessant threats from the United States, began building a bomb, US President John Kennedy very seriously considered bombing Chinese nuclear facilities.[1)]1 He was heard to declare that "A Chinese nuclear test is likely to be historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960s,"[2)] and his director of the Central Intelligence Agency soberly prophesied that, with that event, nuclear war would become "almost inevitable."[3)] As it turned out, however, the US essentially did nothing, and over time China's foreign and domestic policy eventually mellowed very substantially and the existence of its arsenal has proved to be of little historical consequence. Actually, it turned out that "historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960s" stemmed not from China's nuclear weapons, but from Kennedy's tragically misguided decision to begin to send American troops in substantial numbers to Vietnam largely to confront the Chinese threat that he came to believe lurked there.[4)]

Declamations like Kennedy's very much continue to this day.[5)] If Iran or North Korea were to get a nuclear weapon, we have been repeatedly told, the result will be a proliferation cascade (or epidemic, chain, wave, avalanche), and the result of that would be a nuclear war or, in the words of the esteemed, and imaginative, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, "the beginning of the end of our civilization."[6)]

The first section of this paper examines this widely-held proposition, concluding that it is faulty. Like the notion accepted in 1950 that World War III was pretty much inevitable,[7)] the notion that nuclear weapons proliferation is a major problem has

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1) John Mueller, *Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al-Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 95-97 (Kennedy), 144 (China's perception of threat).

2) William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle'," *International Security*, Winter 2000/01, p. 61.

3) Francis J. Gavin, "Blasts from the Past: Proliferation Lessons from the 1960s," *International Security*, Winter 2004/05, p. 104.

4) For the importance of fear of an expansive China on U.S. decision making over Vietnam, see John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), pp. 168-73, 177-81.

5) For a litany, see Mueller, *Atomic Obsession*, pp. 89-95.

6) Quoted, Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 7.

7) In 1950, notes historian John Lewis Gaddis, "no one" among foreign policy decisionmakers anticipated "that there would be no World War" over the next half century and that the United States and the USSR, "soon to have tens of thousands of thermonuclear weapons pointed at one

been very substantially overwrought. Indeed, insofar as nuclear proliferation is a response to perceived threat, it follows that one way to reduce the likelihood that countries would go nuclear is a simple one: stop threatening them. However, while nuclear weapons have killed no one since 1945, efforts to keep nuclear weapons from proliferating have led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

In the second section, the paper argues that the obsession about proliferation potentially stands today in the way of an extremely important historical development. Because North Korean leader Kim Jong-un seems to be genuine about wanting to see his country become developed, there is a good (but not certain) prospect of forging a potentially permanent normalization of relations on the peninsula. This would markedly reduce the prospect of armed conflict there while finally relieving the perpetual suffering of the North Korean people.

Accordingly, policy should involve backburnering the nuclear issue, actively exploring the possibilities for normalization, relaxing or removing the sanctions, letting South Korea take the lead, and waiting.

Nuclear proliferation

Contrary to decades of fear, the consequences of such proliferation that has taken place have been substantially benign. At the same time, however, alarmed efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons have proved to be very costly, leading to a large number of deaths.

The benign consequences of proliferation

Despite decades of dire warnings about the consequences of proliferation, those who have acquired the weapons have "used" them simply to stoke their egos or to deter real or imagined threats.[8] For the most part, they have quietly kept the weapons in storage and haven't even found much benefit in rattling them from time to time.

It is sometimes said that proliferation has had little consequence because the only countries to possess nuclear weapons have had rational leaders.[9] But nuclear

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another, would agree tacitly never to use any of them." John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2011), p. 403.

8) Although there are conceivable conditions under which nuclear weapons could serve a deterrent function, it is questionable whether they have yet ever done so. In particular, it is far from clear that nuclear weapons are what kept the Cold War from becoming a hot one. Indeed, each leak from the archives suggests that the Soviet Union never seriously considered any sort of direct military aggression against the United States or Europe. As historian Vojtech Mastny puts it, "The strategy of nuclear deterrence [was] irrelevant to deterring a major war that the enemy did not wish to launch in the first place." Vojtech Mastny, "Introduction," in Vojtech Mastny, Sven G. Holtsmark, and Andreas Wenger, eds., *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat Perceptions in the East and West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

weapons have proliferated to large, important countries run by unchallenged monsters who, at the time they acquired the bombs, were certifiably deranged. Thus, when he got his bomb, the Soviet Union's Stalin had been plotting to "transform nature" by planting lots of trees and was given to wandering around the Kremlin mumbling that he could no longer trust anyone, not even himself.[10] And when China got its bomb, its leader, Mao Zedong, had recently launched an addled campaign to remake his society that created a famine killing tens of millions.[11] Yet neither country used its nuclear weapons for anything other than deterrence and ego-boosting, and China has built far fewer of the weapons than it could afford to.

Moreover, the rate at which new countries have obtained the weapons has almost always been wildly off the mark. It was in 1960, for example, that presidential candidate John Kennedy insisted that there might be "ten, fifteen, twenty" countries with a nuclear capacity by 1964.[12] However, although dozens of technologically capable countries have considered obtaining nuclear arsenals, very few have done so. A key reason for this is that the possession of such expensive armaments actually conveys in almost all cases rather little advantage to the possessor. In the main, they are difficult to obtain, militarily useless, a spectacular waste of time, money, and scientific talent, distasteful, and likely to rile the neighbors.[13] Moreover, the weapons have also been exceedingly difficult to obtain for administratively dysfunctional countries.[14]

Nor have the weapons proven to be crucial status—or virility—symbols. Pakistan and Russia do probably garner more attention that they would if they did not have nuclear weapons. But how much more status would Japan have if it possessed nuclear weapons? Would anybody pay a great deal more attention to Britain or France if their arsenals held 5,000 nuclear weapons, or would anybody pay much less if they had none? Did China need nuclear weapons to impress the world with its economic growth? Or with its Olympics?

Proliferation alarmists may occasionally grant that countries principally obtain a nuclear arsenal to counter real or perceived threats, but many go on to argue that the newly nuclear country will then use its nuclear weapons to "dominate" the area. That argument was repeatedly trotted out with dramatic urgency before 2003 for the

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9) Scott D. Sagan, "Armed and Dangerous: When Dictators Get the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2018, pp. 35-43.

10) Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday*, p. 123.

11) Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958?1962* (New York: Walker, 2010).

12) Sidney Kraus, ed., *The Great Debates: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press,1962), p. 394.

13) For an extended discussion, see Mueller, *Atomic Obsession*, ch. 18.

14) Jacques E.C. Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

dangers supposedly posed by Saddam Hussein, and it is now being applied to Iran. Exactly how that domination business is to be carried out is never made clear. But the notion, apparently, is that should an atomic country rattle the occasional rocket, other countries in the area, suitably intimidated, would supinely bow to its demands. Far more likely, any threatened states will make common cause with each other and with other concerned countries against the threatening neighbor—rather in the way they coalesced into an alliance of convenience to oppose Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.[15)]

The destructive consequences of antiproliferation policy

Although the consequences of nuclear proliferation have proved to be substantially benign, the same cannot be said for those of the nuclear antiproliferation quest. Indeed, efforts to keep "rogue states" from obtaining nuclear weapons have caused far more deaths than have been inflicted by all nuclear (or even all "weapons of mass destruction") weapons in all of history.

In the Presidential campaign of 2008, candidate Barack Obama repeatedly announced that he would "do everything in [his] power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon?everything."[16)] And his opponent, John McCain, insisted that Iran must be kept from obtaining a nuclear weapon "at all costs."[17)] Neither bothered to tally what "everything" might entail and what the costs might be.

The war against Saddam Hussein in Iraq has shown what the consequences of such thinking could be. It was substantially sold as a militarized antiproliferation effort required to keep his pathetic regime from developing nuclear and other presumably threatening weapons and to prevent him from palming off some of these to eager and congenial terrorists.[18)] Thus President George W. Bush pointedly and prominently warned that "The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons," and "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."[19)] Karl Rove, one of

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15) See also Stephen M. Walt, "Containing Rogues and Renegades: Coalition Strategies and Counterproliferation," in Victor A. Utgoff, ed., *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Interests, and World Order* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 191-226.

16) Barack Obama, Remarks at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's Annual Policy Conference, Washington, DC, June 4, 2008, available at www.nytimes.com/2008/06/04/us/politics/ 04text-obama-aipac.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

17) Tim Reid and Tom Baldwin, "Nuclear Iran Must Be Stopped at All Costs, Says McCain," *Times (London)*, January 26, 2006.

18) John Mueller, *War and Ideas: Selected Essays* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 151-152.

19) Not permit: Mitchell B. Reiss, "The Nuclear Tipping Point: Prospects for a World of Many Nuclear Weapons States." In *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, ed. Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn and Mitchell B. Reiss (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p. 11. Mushroom: George W. Bush,

Bush's top political advisers, acknowledged in 2008 that, absent the belief that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD, "I suspect that the administration's course of action would have been to work to find more creative ways to constrain him like in the 90s."[20] Although Democrats have derided the war as "unnecessary," the bulk of them only came to that conclusion after the United States was unable to find either nuclear weapons or weapons programs in Iraq.[21] Even knowing about the resulting bloodshed in Iraq, many of them continue essentially to say that their support of the war would have been justified if the intelligence about Saddam's programs had been accurate.

War supporters argued that a nuclear Iraq would use its weapons to "hold his neighbors hostage." It is far from clear, however, what Saddam Hussein, presiding over a deeply resentful population and an unreliable army (fearing overthrow, he was wary about issuing his army bullets and would not allow it within 30 miles of Baghdad with heavy equipment), could have done with a tiny number of bombs against his neighbors and their massively armed well-wishers.[22] He was fully containable and deterrable.[23]

Moreover, the devastation of Iraq in the service of limiting proliferation did not begin with the war in 2003. For the previous thirteen years, that country had suffered under economic sanctions visited upon it by both Democratic and Republican administrations that were designed to force Saddam from office (and, effectively, from life since he had no viable sanctuary elsewhere) and to keep the country from developing weapons, particularly nuclear ones.

Deaths in the nonproliferation war against Iraq have run well over two hundred thousand—greater than those inflicted at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.[24] There is nothing wrong with making nonproliferation a high priority—indeed, it would do a favor to dissuaded countries by saving them a lot of money and pointless effort. However, it should be topped with a somewhat higher one: avoiding policies

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Address to the Nation, October 7, 2002.

20) Sam Stein, "Rove: We Wouldn't Have Invaded Iraq If We Knew the Truth about WMDs," Huffington Post, December 2, 2008, available at www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/02/rove-we-wouldnt- have-inva_n_147923.html.

21) Jacob Weisberg, "How Did I Get Iraq Wrong?" Slate.com. 2008 www.slate.com/id/2187105/ Hillary Rodman Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), pp. 136-37.

22) Bullets: James Fallows, "Why Iraq Has No Army," *Atlantic,* December 2005, p. 72. Equipment: Maggie O'Kane, "Saddam Wields Terror–and Feigns Respect," *Guardian*, November 24, 1998.

23) John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "Iraq: An Unnecessary War," *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2003, pp. 50-59. John Mueller, "Should We Invade Iraq?" *Reason*, January 2003.

24) "Casualties of the Iraq War," *Wikipedia,* available at *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Iraq_War*. The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Total Casualties," Atomic Archive, available at www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp10.shtml.

that can lead to the deaths of tens or hundreds of thousands of people under the obsessive sway of worst case scenario fantasies. Nuclear proliferation, while not particularly desirable, is unlikely to prove to be a major danger, and extreme antiproliferation policies need careful reconsideration. They can generate costs far higher than those likely to be inflicted by the potential (and often essentially imaginary) problems they seek to address.

The case of North Korea

Since World War II, then, none of the handful of countries with nuclear weapons has "used" them for anything other than ego-stoking and deterrence. North Korea seems highly likely to follow the same approach. Thus, the hysteria its nuclear program has inspired is simply not justified.

North Korea's nuclear program

North Korea sports perhaps the most pathetic, insecure, and contemptible regime in the world, and survival is about the only thing it has proved to be good at. It surely knows that launching a nuclear bomb somewhere against a set of enemies that possess tens of thousands is a really terrible idea, and it does continually insist that its nuclear program is entirely for "defensive" purposes. Moreover, if its goal were to commit self-destructive mayhem, it has long possessed the capacity to do so. With the artillery it has amassed in its south, it could pulverize much of South Korea, including its capital city, Seoul.[25)]

North Korea's ego-stoking has, of course, already started.[26)] And the threat it needs to deter has not been difficult for it to identify. Since the 1950s, the United States has, at times, actively schemed to take out the regime. The costly alarmist perspective on atomic proliferation was evident, for example, in policies advocated toward North Korea in the 1990s. The Clinton administration, alarmed by concerns about a North Korean nuclear weapon, moved to impose deep economic sanctions to make the isolated country even poorer (insofar as that was possible). And in the next years, when floods and bad weather exacerbated the economic disaster that had been inflicted upon the country by its rulers, there were efforts to deny the existence of a famine (in which over a million people perished) for fear that a politics-free response to a humanitarian disaster would undercut efforts to use food aid to wring diplomatic

25) Mark Bowden, "How to Deal with North Korea," *Atlantic*, July/August 2017, available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/07/the-worst-problem-on-earth/528717/

26) See, for example, Jean H. Lee, "Nuclear Weapons and Their Pride of Place in North Korea," wilsoncenter.org, August 6, 2019, available at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/nuclear-weapons-and-their-pride-place-north-korea

concessions on the nuclear issue from North Korea.[27]

The current phase of hysteria over North Korea occurred shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. At that point, President George W. Bush announced that America's "responsibility to history" was now to "rid the world of evil"—rather outdoing God who once tried with that flood of His.[28] Then, a few months later, Bush specified in a major speech that, while evil could presumably be found everywhere, a special "axis of evil" existed, and it lurked, in this order, in North Korea, Iran, and Iraq.[29] As Bush geared up to attack number three in early 2003, North Korea announced that it would be withdrawing from the Nuclear NonProliferation Treaty, and it conducted its first nuclear test in 2006.

Kim Jong-un and the present situation

It seems entirely possible that Korea is at one of the most important turning points in its history. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has long held a two track policy. The first is to guarantee security with its nuclear weapons and missile program designed in particular to deter the distant United States.[30] And the second, is to generate economic development perhaps with the experience of China, Vietnam, or even Singapore in mind—countries where economic development has occurred without toppling the regime.

Kim seems increasingly to be comfortable with progress on the first goal-even at times to declaring it to have been "perfected."[31] There has been some progress on the second goal as well—mostly, it appears, in the growing presence of private markets that at one time would have been closed down by the regime[32]. As Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland point out, much of the progress has been de facto rather than de jure, but it is nonetheless real.[33]

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27) Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 147-148, 318.

28) available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0VQH8hODlo

29) available at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html

30) This would require that the missile actually completes the trip and that the warhead actually detonates, neither of which is all that likely given the country's technological prowess: 88 percent of the flight tests of some of its missiles have failed (5 to 10 percent is normal). Bowden, "How to Deal with North Korea."

31) Sagan, "Armed and Dangerous," p. 36.

32) Victor Cha and Lisa Collins, "The Markets: Private Economy and Capitalism in North Korea?" csis.org, August 26, 2018, available at https://beyondparallel.csis.org/markets-private- economy-capitalism-north-korea/

33) Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Hard Target: Sanctions, Inducements, and the Case of North Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), pp. 227, 234-239. See also Justin V. Hastings, *A Most Enterprising Country: North Korea in the Global Economy* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 178-183; Chung Min Lee, *The Hermit King: The Dangerous Game of Kim Jong Un* (New York: All Points Books, 2019).

Although Kim seems to be serious about economic development, there could, of course, be setbacks whether caused by his capricious ruling methods, opposition within the party, or fears of setting in motion developments that could go too far, dangerously weakening Communist party control. And there is a danger, as Haggard and Noland suggest, that "a truly reformed North Korea would be pulled into South Korea's orbit," an outcome the North might "regard as unacceptable."[34] However, the direction so far is distinctly positive, and judicious efforts by, in particular, South Korea, to nudge it along could lead to a much more relaxed atmosphere and to a highly-desirable normalization of relations on the peninsula.

This does not mean that unification is in the offing. The economic and cultural divergence of the two Koreas over the last seven decades has been extensive, and the notion that they could or should be unified at any time soon is at best romantic and at worst dangerous. The unification of the two Germanys was a remarkably difficult and costly process even though those two entities were far less different from each other than the two Koreas have grown to be today. A much better model might be found in the peaceful and mutually-advantageous coexistence of Germany and Austria—two separate countries that share a common language, history, and cultural heritage. It is very sensible for the South to expand economic and social contacts with the North, and to seek family reunifications. But a conscious drive for unification would be unwise for the South and threatening to the North.

It seems likely that there is at least a 60 percent chance that a permanent normalization would eventually result. And, of course, if the effort fails, no one is much worse off than they are now. Accordingly, it seems well worth a concentrated effort.

Policy suggestions

Decades of experience with the (remarkably slow) proliferation of nuclear weapons suggest, then, that it doesn't really matter whether North Korea has them or not. Moreover, it seems that the time may well be ripe for very substantial progress toward normalization on the peninsula—a development that could become permanent. These two propositions suggest a set of policy proposals.

1. Backburner the nuclear issue while actively exploring the possibilities for normalization

For progress to take place on normalization, it is vital that the nuclear weapons issue be detached from the consideration. In a recent talk, Lee Jong-kook, South Korea's Consul General in Chicago said, "Substantial progress depends on the

34) Haggard and Noland, *Hard Target,* p. 237.

success of the denuclearization negotiations."[35] If this remains true, progress will be slow or non-existent because, as argued above, North Korea at present thinks it vitally needs the weapons for security. Moreover, North Korea's wariness about negotiating away its nuclear capacity can only have been enhanced by the experience of Libya's dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, who cut a deal with the Americans to do that in 2003. When Qaddafi was confronted with an insurrection in 2011, the Obama administration militarily intervened, speeding his downfall and brutal execution.[36]

In the long run, the nuclear issue could be revived, and there might eventually be progress on dealing with it. But this would happen only if the North feels secure, and a general normalization of relations on the peninsula seems clearly to be a prerequisite for that.

In addition, it does not seem to be wise for South Korea to develop nuclear weapons. With war on the peninsula a low probability, a nuclear weapons program by South Korea would only excite desperation in the North (and hysteria in the United States) and could push things dramatically in the wrong direction.

2. Relax or remove the sanctions

The sanctions on North Korea are designed in considerable part to force the regime to cut back, or even cut off, its nuclear program. Nicholas Eberstadt recently hailed what he provocatively calls "the sanctions noose" in the *New York Times*: "Earlier this year the United Nations warned that a drought and crop shortfalls were exposing as many as 10 million North Koreans, about 40 percent of the country's population, to 'severe food shortages.' As sanctions cut off the oxygen in the tent, these trends can be expected to worsen. And when the North Korean government starts running out of currency reserves and strategic stockpiles of food and energy, the crisis will no longer be possible to conceal."[37]

Given the current state of tensions and distrust, the removal of North Korea's nuclear arsenal is essentially a nonstarter for the North, and the sanctions seem to be having little or no effect except to make the North Korean people even more miserable.[38] Particularly since the end of the Cold War, famines and food shortages have led to stunted growth and potentially to brain damage in the people affected.[39]

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35) Lee Jong-kook, talk at Ohio State University, March 21, 2019.

36) Paul R. Pillar, "The Terrorist Consequences of the Libyan Intervention," nationalinterest.org, March 23, 2011. available at http://nationalinterest.org/blog/paul-pillar/the-terrorist-consequences-the-libyan-intervention-5064

37) Nicholas Eberstadt, "Kim Jong-un's Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Year," *New York Times*, August 15, 2019.

38) See also Doug Bandow, "Trump's Remarkable Diplomatic Efforts in North Korea," nationalinterest.org, April 14, 2019; Justin V. Hastings, *A Most Enterprising Country*, p. 178.

39) Richard Knight, "Are North Koreans really three inches shorter than South Koreans?" BBC News Magazine, April 23, 2012, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17774210. Arijeta

Whatever its defects, the North Korean leadership does seem to know how to hang on to control. The efforts by the United States in the 1990s to seek to exacerbate suffering in hopes that the regime would topple proved to be severely, and tragically, misguided.[40] Some force may yet topple it, but efforts from the outside to hasten this development are likely to be futile, harmful, and even counterproductive. There is no way to aid the people of the North without also essentially aiding their leaders, and outsiders should be prepared to grasp this unfortunate reality. Indeed, note Haggard and Noland, efforts at engagement are likely to work best when they "directly pay off the leadership and its core supporters."[41]

Whatever happens, the regime is likely to remain in control while passing on any negative consequences to its people.[42] In addition, the sanctions include a set of secondary sanctions on other countries that hamper efforts in the South to reach out to the North at this crucial time. The sanctions, then, are doubly foolish.

3. Let South Korea take the lead

For decades the United States has been utterly obsessed by the North Korean nuclear arsenal, and it has embraced extreme, even hysterical, worst-cast-fantasies about what the North Koreans might do with such weapons. In the process, it has adopted an intensely hostile and threatening posture that only increases the North's frightened desire to have nuclear weapons and the systems to deliver them.

Some Americans have even declared that a war on the Korean peninsula—which, of course, would mostly kill Koreans—would be preferable to letting the North pursue a nuclear weapons program.[43] With friends like that, South Korea scarcely needs enemies.

Indeed, it may well be time for South Korea fully to take charge of its own destiny. It is not at all clear that Korea needs American forces for deterrence since the North Koreans are unlikely to attack under almost any conceivable circumstance. At present, North Korea is a friendless, pathetic, insecure, fuel-short, fifteenth-rate entity, and is in no position to launch a sustained military adventure. Its 1950 attack

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Lajka, "North Korean food shortages leave generations stunted," CBS News, November 19, 2018, available at https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-korea-famine-food-shortages-stunting-generations/

40) Mueller, *Atomic Obsession*, pp. 135-137.

41) Haggard and Noland, *Hard Target*, p. 7.

42) Hastings, *A Most Enterprising Country*. Haggard and Noland, Hard Target.

43) For example: Richard Perle interview for Frontline, PBS, conducted March 27, 2003, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim/interviews/perle.html; Graham T. Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism*: *The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 2004), pp. 165-71; Uri Friedman, "Lindsey Graham Reveals the Dark Calculus of Striking North Korea," theatlantic.com, August 1, 2017, available at https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/lindsey-graham-north-korea/535578/

could not have happened without support from Communist China and the Soviet Union, and that sort of outside support will not be forthcoming in the future—quite the contrary. Moreover, even with that support, North Korea's 1950 invasion failed in a few months, and it had to be rescued by China. And even if North Korea were to attack, the world community—including the United States—is very likely quickly and forcefully to rally behind South Korea even as they did for alliance-free Kuwait when it was attacked by Iraq in 1990.

At any rate, it would be sensible for South Korea to take the lead in the normalization process, not the United States. And, should the Korean problem becomes less and less of a military one, South Korea might consider reducing its expensive military forces and holding fewer military exercises, something that would almost certainly help to reduce tensions with the North even further. Obviously, there would be something of a risk to this, but, given North Korea's feeble friendlessness, it is not likely to be a great one.

4. Wait

Historically, Korea has been a relatively poor country, and in the twentieth century it experienced Japanese occupation, the destruction and turmoil of World War II, the Korean War, and the misguided policies and corruption of some of its early leaders after 1945. The progress South Korea has made in the last few decades accordingly approaches the miraculous. And it is its economic development (including the way it survived and productively learned from the 1997 economic crisis) and its democratic stability, not its military capacity, that causes people and nations around the world to pay attention to it. Today, international status flows primarily from economic success; South Korea, in consequence, is likely to be ever more appreciated.

And it is overwhelmingly apparent that history is on the side of democratic, capitalistic South Korea while the North is a bizarre, sometimes almost comical, relic (or caricature) of a bygone era. Korea has a very long history, and its sheer duration could be taken to suggest that there is no need to take risks or act impetuously to speed up historical processes, especially when they are almost inevitably going to work to South Korea's long-term benefit. Although there are no guarantees of success, the opportunity seems real and should be pursued. What is most required is not persistent alarm about nuclear weapons, but gradually moving toward normalization through hard work at negotiating and expanding contacts while applying as well a judicious, watchful patience.

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