



To: President Donald J. Trump

From: The Atlantic Council

Date: June 27, 2017

Re: **Eliminating the Growing Threat Posed by North Korean Nuclear Weapons**

BACKGROUND: THE THREAT

- The policies of the last three US presidents that were designed to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons have failed. Despite twenty-five years of consistent US policies focused on multilateral dialogue and an ever-improving US-Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) alliance, the North Korean nuclear threat to the region and to the US homeland is accelerating.
- The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) is projected to develop by the early 2020s an operational Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), which may become part of a robust land-, air-, and sea-based nuclear arsenal, including Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) that could be launched from North Korean submarines operating in the Pacific Ocean in that time frame.
- Not only would such a capability enable the DPRK to target the entire United States with nuclear weapons, but with such a nuclear "shield," the North could be emboldened to pursue a much more aggressive foreign policy. This could include increasingly dangerous provocations and the sale of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) to other nations and terrorist groups for much-needed cash.
- Those who claim that deterrence will hold even when the DPRK has such an arsenal are counting on three dubious assumptions:
 1. That the DPRK leadership will share the same concepts of deterrence dynamics as US leaders;
 2. That nuclear stability will hold during a crisis; and
 3. That the DPRK's national security decision-making process is necessarily rational and effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS: "HIGH-PRESSURE CONTAINMENT"

- Due to the grave risks that a North Korea with an operational ICBM would entail for US security interests, continuing to pursue status quo policies is not an option. Time is against us.
- The foremost goal of a new policy of "High-Pressure Containment" would be to convince the DPRK leadership that, unless it halts its nuclear weapons programs and restarts diplomacy to then eliminate them, it will have neither a viable economy nor future. This policy requires seven steps.
 1. **Work with China and others to escalate sanctions.** Step up efforts to end North Korean access to the international financial system and all sources of hard currency. Launch new five-party efforts to enforce United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and coordinate policies broadly.
 2. **Work closely with Seoul and Tokyo to develop trilateral military posture enhancements focused on countering the growing North Korean threat.** These should include greatly increased missile defenses; increased Special Operations Forces deployments; and redeployment of US bombers to the region. These robust enhancements will put pressure on China to do more.
 3. **Push the envelope with China.** Test China's new willingness to rein in North Korea and press for joint enforcement of sanctions and more transparency on their border trade with North Korea. After a sixth nuclear test, press for a full UNSC ban on coal exports and press China to significantly cut back oil shipments. Sanctions will only work if China is willing to enforce them.

- o Beijing understands that North Korea will either be a source of cooperation or confrontation in US-China relations. Chinese President Xi Jinping wants more stable US-China relations and increasingly sees North Korea more as a liability than an asset. This understanding could be used to stimulate much more intensive Chinese efforts vis-à-vis North Korea to help achieve our goals.
4. **Significantly step up US cyber reconnaissance and offensive activities.** Constrain, disrupt, and disable North Korea's nuclear weapons-related research, programs, manufacturing, and services.
 5. **Issue a new declaratory policy to North Korea.** It should include "The Three No's":
 - o No use of WMDs or it will result in the assured destruction of North Korea and reunification under Seoul's auspices.
 - o No export of nuclear equipment or fissile material or it will be intercepted by any means possible; in such a scenario, the United States will retaliate in a form and manner of its choosing.
 - o No missile or missile test aimed toward the ROK, Japan, or the United States in violation of UNSC resolutions or the United States reserves the right to shoot down or pre-empt the action.
 6. **Develop ongoing back- and front-channel communications.** The intel-to-intel channel could be initiated through the United States and ROK, respectively, with DPRK intelligence contacts to quietly clarify and emphasize US positions and to probe a North Korean moratorium on nuclear tests, missile tests, and fissile material production. In addition, and in active consultation with our ROK counterparts, we also should offer to reopen the regular US-DPRK dialogue conducted by the State Department and the DPRK "New York Channel" or at higher levels.
 - o Make clear that the US is open to dialogue based on the September 2005 Agreed Statement, which is comprehensive and links denuclearization to energy and economic aid, US-DPRK normalization, security guarantees, and a peace treaty. As North Korea walked away from that agreement, they must demonstrate sincerity (e.g., a moratorium on missile and nuclear testing) and willingness to put their nuclear weapons program back on the table to enable restarting of the Six-Party Talks.
 - o The new Moon ROK government should pursue a similar approach, but might be advised to avoid "sunshine" policy measures that provide direct economic benefits. Instead focus on "people-to-people" cultural, sports, and educational exchanges, expanded divided family visits, and North-South mail, telecommunications, train, and air links.
 7. **Institute an "active measures" influence campaign.** Distribute information in North Korea and work to improve human rights. Significantly enhance rewards for defectors.
 - Finally, a clear and consistent messaging campaign is essential to garner US public support and to signal our unambiguous policy to our allies and adversaries. That includes knowing when to be silent.

