

COUNCIL *on*  
FOREIGN  
RELATIONS

# North Korea, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Regional Security in Northeast Asia

## The North Korean Nuclear Threat: Evaluating Its Twenty-Year Evolution

Speakers: Stephen W. Bosworth, Dean Emeritus, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University; Special Representative for North Korea Policy, U.S. Department of State, and Han Sung-Joo, Professor Emeritus, Korea University; Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea  
Presenter: Richard C. Bush III, Director, Center for East Asia Policy Studies, and Senior Fellow, John L. Thornton China Center, Brookings Institution  
April 24, 2014



BUSH: ... to chair this meeting today on the North Korea issue 20 years on. It was 20 years ago this spring that it was a really bad time to be a specialist on the Korean peninsula, because we were inching towards war with North Korea. Former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry writes in a book he did call “Preventive Diplomacy,” that during that time, there was serious and intensive review and revision of our war plans, because North Korea seemed on the brink of breaking out of nuclear restraints.

North Korea was warning that it would turn Seoul into a sea of flames. And Secretary Perry writes, “We were on the brink of war that might involve the use of weapons of mass destruction.”

And it’s a useful time to look back, to see where we’ve been, what the nature of the North Korean nuclear threat is today, and what we might do about it. To examine these issues, we have two outstanding specialists and practitioners; Steve Bosworth, who is at Harvard University, and Ambassador Han Sung-Joo is Professor Emeritus at Korea University.

Each of these gentlemen has served his country with distinction, both in government and in the academy. They have thought about these issues for a long, long time. And I think they will provide us an outstanding perspective.

You have their bios in front of you. And so I don’t need to go through the details. I think you’d rather listen to them than to me.

What we’re going to do today is first, Ambassador Bosworth, Ambassador Han and I will have a little conversation about some framing issues. And then we’ll open it up for your contributions.

So to start off with, was there a point in this odyssey when the outcome we had today became inevitable? Or were there some inflection points where we could have achieved an outcome that’s much different and much better? Steve?

BOSWORTH: Well, first I would like to thank the council, and to thank you, Richard, for the opportunity to be here. I was just thinking to myself, you said 20 years ago. And it was 19 years ago, almost to the day, that I first met Dr. Han, who was then foreign minister, or recently-retired foreign minister. I’m not quite sure which.

But I was in Korea with my good friend and colleague, Choi Young-Jin. And we were coming from the Korean Energy Development Organization in New York to take a sounding in Seoul as to where we might be going with that enterprise.

I think there have been a number of inflection points. This is not a Shakespearean tragedy destined to end in a certain way. I think at various points there was the opportunity – and I hope there will still be the opportunity – to gain some degree of control over what seems all too frequently to be a kind of inexorable descent.

I would point out that it has not always been as grim. From 1994 to 2002, we know that the North Koreans did not produce plutonium. Now, they were doing other things undoubtedly

that we wouldn't have liked. But they did not produce plutonium. And they did not start new plutonium production facilities.

I also happen to think that in the year 2000 to 2001, there was an opportunity to, I think at least modestly, set a new direction in the relationship, and in North Korea's course. And here, I fear that the U.S. domestic political time table got very much in the way. And that was the period from – the transition from President Clinton to President George W. Bush.

And even since 2001, there have been opportunities which, for various reasons, either because of our domestic politics, or our concerns about other events in the region, or because of North Korea's own intransigence, we were not able to take advantage of those. But I don't think it's Shakespearean in its ultimate course.

Sung-Joo, what's your perspective on the question of inevitability?

HAN: Well, actually, I'll let you on that Richard posed that question before we came here, and I thought about it. Of course, there are people who say we should have used more sticks or more carrots. But looking back, over the past 20 years, I think, if I'm a little provocative here, there were two major occasions where we probably would have, and should have done things differently.

And one is back in 1992, when the IAEA found out that there was a discrepancy between the amount of plutonium that the North Koreans reported and the amount that the IAEA and the international community suspected that they had produced.

We insisted on what's known as "special inspection," which put the North Koreans into a corner, and gave them the need, as well as the opportunity, to get out of the NPT system and the safeguard agreement that they subsequently signed. And that started the whole thing, which ended with the Geneva agreed framework.

Now, if we had not put the North Koreans to a corner, and continued with the inspection arrangements of the IAEA monitors and the cameras, and all that, it was not necessary to have the negotiation that led to the Geneva agreement. So in this case, in the interest of probing the past, we sacrificed the control of the present.

So I think we could have done differently. We probably should have done differently in this case. And when the time came for North Korea to get the main bulk of the light water reactors and ultimately dismantle their – all their nuclear facilities, then the opportunity came to the North Koreans with A.Q. Khan, and all, to develop uranium enrichment to a highly enriched uranium program.

Now, the second case I would mention is in 2002, when we had enough of a reason that they were getting into this uranium enrichment program. We – well, in this case, particularly the Bush Administration, pushed for scrutinizing or having North Korea admit that they have this program, and – which ultimately led to the dismantlement, not of the North Korean nuclear facilities, but of the Geneva Agreed Framework.

And in this case, it was sacrificing the present in favor of preventing the future prospect of North Korea engaging in the UEP. And so if we had kept the Geneva Agreed Framework, and dealt with the HEU issue in a different way, I think we most probably would have come out with a different outcome.

BUSH: Thank you very much. Thinking about the present now, I wonder if you could elaborate on what each of you thinks is the nature of North Korea's threat today, nuclear and otherwise, and who is threatened? Is it South Korea, Japan, the United States, China, all of the above? Sung-Joo, do you want to talk about that a little bit?

HAN: I think it's actually everybody that is threatened, including North Korea itself, and China. If you put them in any rank order, I think the country, the party that is most threatened is South Korea. Not only by the prospect of North Korea actually using the nuclear weapons, but also because what it does to the opportunities for North Korea to engage in provocative actions, the possibility of accidents, especially because much of this program is secret, and there's no opportunity to ensure nuclear security or safety with the program and facilities, what it does to the military balance in general, or what it does to the possibility of a military conflict, and so on.

Next to South Korea, I think it is North Korea. And then comes Japan, because of the proximity, because of the presence of the U.S. military personnel and facilities there, and China itself, with the proximity; not only with the weapons' capability, but also the fallout that might come from whatever might happen in North Korea with its nuclear facilities.

And then in medium to long term the United States, of course. And so probably Russia is the country which is I think also threatened, but not – probably the least so, among the six parties. But everybody is threatened.

BUSH: Steve, do you want to amplify on that?

BOSWORTH: Well, I agree very much with what Sung-Joo just said. I think the threat is such that we all share in the threat. To be more – to elaborate just briefly on that, I think what possession of a credible nuclear-weapons program gives North Korea is an even greater ability, capacity than they now have to act with impunity, vis-à-vis South Korea, vis-à-vis the U.S.

The things that they have done over the last 40 years, for which, in most cases, we've found a way to, I wouldn't say punish, but at least make that not cost-free. If they have a credible nuclear-weapons program – and I am persuaded they do – I think that changes the balance in Northeast Asia in a very alarming way.

The other casualty of course is the global non-proliferation regime, which for the United States in particular, has been a cornerstone of our foreign policy for half a century or more, and which has been, if you look at what's happened over that period of time, remarkably successful. There's leakage, and things happen that we would wish didn't happen, but nuclear weapons have not become sort of the household acquisition of very many countries in the world.

And I fear that North Korea's example is not a constructive one in that regard. I am somewhat puzzled and bemused by the fact that in U.S. foreign policy, and in the foreign policies of most of our partners and friends, the prospect that Iran might acquire nuclear weapons has become sort of the number-one alarm – fire alarm in the world. Whereas, North Korea, we know has nuclear weapons.

And we kind of proceed, I wouldn't say with indifference. We express a lot of outrage about it. But we don't seem to do much. So I find that bemusing, to say the least.

BUSH: I wonder if there's another casualty here, and that's the U.S. policy of extended deterrence, vis-à-vis Japan and Korea if North Korea has a proven ability to hit the United States with nuclear weapons.

BOSWORTH: Well, of course, the Soviet Union had the same ability during the Cold War. And we managed to find a way to make extended deterrence credible. I believe we could make extended deterrence credible in the case of Northeast Asia if we had to. And we may have to, given what's been going on.

I do worry about the pressures on other countries in the region, as I know the Chinese worry about that, that if North Korea goes nuclear, and seems to be getting away with it, so to speak, internal political debates in, say, Japan, and conceivably in some future existence in South Korea, could change in a way in which the possible option to go nuclear would no longer be as unthinkable as it is now.

So I think it does change that potential tone of that discussion.

BUSH: Sung-Joo, you want to comment on this, what South Korea might do if it was clear that North Korea could hit the United States, and therefore, perhaps call our commitment to South Korea into question?

HAN: Well, I don't really think that the commitment or idea of extended deterrence, especially vis-à-vis Japan, but also vis-à-vis South Korea, would be very much affected by North Korea's ability to hit the United States.

Even with the capability, the U.S. is much more defensible, than either Japan or South Korea, from the North Korean nuclear attack, partly because of the technical capability, technological capability, and the distance involved. And so I don't think it's simply a wishful thinking that that would be the case.

Clearly, there'll be a debate in South Korea as to what we should do under those circumstances if there's the slightest sign of the United States weakening its commitment. But I don't think it will ever come to a point where South Korea will actually decide that they will have to do something by way of nuclear route.

BUSH: Thank you. So we have a situation that is somewhat dangerous, highly frustrating, because we haven't been able to take advantage of the opportunities, puzzling, as Steve said, and bemusing. So what do we do about it?

Is there any chance that at this late date, we could actually get a mutually-acceptable negotiated solution? Does the United States and Japan and South Korea just have to accommodate to an emerging reality? Or should we think about some kind of containment? Steve?

BOSWORTH: Well, I think we are containing at the moment. If you look at our basic options, none of them are very encouraging or attractive. As you suggest, there is the option, which we may be moving toward, simply accepting North Korea as a nuclear-weapon state, de facto, if not de jure, and we never formally declare that.

But if they have nuclear weapons, and we're not doing anything about it, it seems to me that that's something you can't just rule out. You find some people who talk about the need for either regime change in North Korea, or a forceful military response.

If I could figure out some way to make that happen, without putting 25 million South Koreans in grave danger, I would be all for it. But I've not been able to come up with that. So I think on any political or moral basis, the notion that somehow there's a military response here, is just not right.

There is a school of thought in the United States, and I know elsewhere, which argues that China should just take care of this problem. This is – they're North Korea's ally, and North Korea's very dependent upon them for certain material benefits. So why don't they just do something about it?

And in part, that's sort of where the U.S. has been over the last couple of administrations, having spent more late nights than I want to recount, talking to senior Chinese officials about this. I don't have a high level of confidence they're going to do that.

Their dilemma's even worse than ours, because they don't – definitely do not want China to become a nuclear-weapon state...

BUSH: North Korea.

BOSWORTH: ... or North Korea to become a nuclear-weapon state. China, we can't do much about.

But on the other hand, they don't want North Korea to collapse. They don't want to have to deal with a unified Korean Peninsula, which they assume would be under South Korean sway, if you will, with a military relationship with the United States. That's, from their point of view, is a decidedly negative change in the so-called correlation of forces. And they don't see a lot of middle ground between them.

What they end up doing is advocating that the U.S. and other countries engage with North Korea. Now we tried to do that. We tried to do that many times. And I – again, having worked through all of the possible alternatives to it, I think we have, in the end, no choice but to try it again.

**You find some people who talk about the need for either regime change in North Korea, or a forceful military response. If I could figure out some way to make that happen, without putting 25 million South Koreans in grave danger, I would be all for it. But I've not been able to come up with that."**



And I think, while we're unlikely, to say the least, to get North Korea to unilaterally capitulate on its nuclear weapons program before we sit down to talk to them about it – which is the view of some Americans – I do think that as in the so-called Leap Day Agreement, which for reasons I still don't completely understand, fell apart quickly, I think there is the opportunity to at least slow down the North Korean nuclear program through freezes on testing, freezes on other things, including the production of plutonium, and conceivably, something in the area of uranium enrichment.

Those are very tough things to bring about. But I sort of am of the view that there are three things that are fundamental to us in dealing with North Korea as it is, not as we would like it to be, but as it is. And this is not original with me. Sig Hecker and other people have argued this, that we should be – we should be working toward North Korea not having any more nukes, and North Korea not having any better nukes, and doing something about our concerns about North Korean export of nuclear material, the so-called Three No's.

And I think that is difficult to achieve, but not impossible. And that is, for me, a place to start. And then you move on over that, after that. And getting them to agree to give up their nuclear-weapons program, I don't see happening in the near or medium term. And in the long term, who knows.

And as people have said, if you don't try, you never will succeed. But I advocate that only because I don't see any more attractive alternative.

BUSH: Sung-Joo, do you disagree?

HAN: No, I don't disagree at all. I'm going to respond to your...

BUSH: Please. No, yes, please.

HAN: ... question.

BUSH: That was a way of asking you to respond to my question.

HAN: This is really a good opportunity to look ahead by looking back, which is the title of one of the sections in the book, "Going Critical," actually. Obviously, I don't have any magic bullet to solve the North Korean nuclear problem.

But if I can dwell in some generalities, I think I can offer some principles or guidelines in our policymaking. And I came up with six, seven of them.



And here it goes. One, we should not sacrifice the present for the sake of the past, or the future as I mentioned earlier. Secondly, I think pragmatic and strategic goals are more important than principles or ideologies. And in both cases of 1992 and 2002, those who pursued or pushed North Korea very hard were more in favor of principles than the practical results at that time.

Even now, those people who are opposed to adjusting this precondition of concrete actions by North Korea before coming to the six-party talks, they say we're sending them the wrong message, it's against our principles, and so on. I think that is something that may not be a very productive way of doing things.

Third, I think if we're not going to get a surrender document, which we cannot at this point, give and take is very important. And so, as in the case of the Geneva Accord, I think it's important to give them the stake, to implement an agreement when it's signed, or even to sign the agreement.

It is important to integrate both carrots and sticks, and of course, to use them. And to specifically answer your question, I think negotiated arrangement is better than other options, including sanctions.

And six, I would say half a loaf is certainly better than no loaf at all. So, I mean, even as you go ultimately for CVID, in order to get there, you have to settle for some less-than-perfectly satisfactory goals.

And finally, we have to always remember that in order to reverse your course, you have to stop at some point. When you drive an automobile, you can't suddenly go back – backward. So it is important that we seek to stop the increase in North Korean nuclear arsenal, nuclear capabilities, before actually reducing and dismantling them.

BUSH: Thank you both for your insights and your wisdom. The floor is now open. I should have said before that this is an on-the-record session. So none of the usual constraints are present.

BOSWORTH: Other than our inability to articulate.

BUSH: Couple of guidelines. Once I call on you, please wait for the mike. Identify yourself and your institution, and then please keep your question concise.

OK, I see a question back there, center right.

**“I think pragmatic and strategic goals are more important than principles or ideologies.”  
—Han Sung-Joo**



QUESTION: Michael Krapovick, the Stimson Center. Could you both give us your assessment of North Korea’s new leader and the stability of his regime?

BOSWORTH: He’s your neighbor, Sung-Joo.

HAN: Well, there are basically two assessments. One is that – did you say North Korea or the leader? The leader, Kim Jong-un, is his own man. He is in fairly good control. There are others who think that he exhibits more vulnerability and weakness than control and power.

And naturally, I would go somewhere in between, probably on the side of more to his vulnerability and weakness, and the fact that he might be more acting and – acting in several meanings, acting his role to the tune decided by others. But he is on the way to become his own person.

And initially, the execution of his uncle-in-law is an indication of his – more – his sense of insecurity and his weakness than his strength. But that might contribute to consolidating his power ultimately.

BUSH: Steve, any additions?

BOSWORTH: Not too much. I think one of the disadvantages of not having virtually any contact with the North Koreans at all is that we know very little about how they are being run at present. I think there is always a tendency, in the U.S. in particular, but outside North Korea generally, to assume that somehow this one person is the decision-maker in the North Korean structure.

I have never been convinced that all of these senior generals and party officials, and others, with deep personal stakes in the continuity of the regime, are going to give all authority to a 30-year-old person with virtually no real-world experience.

So I tend to think that there is a more collective form of decision-making in North Korea about which, quite frankly, we seem to know very little. And I think as time goes on, we will see perhaps more coherence.

I think the execution was not a sign of either weakness nor strength on the part of Kim Jong-un. I think it was a sign that there were people within the upper reaches of the regime who didn't like Jang Song Thaek, and thought he was taking too much of the cream off the milk. And that in the end is what undid him.

But I have no real way of knowing. And I'm always, again, bemused by people who can tell me with great certainty what North Korea is doing and why, because I don't think we really know very much, and never have.

BUSH: OK, next. Right here.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mike Billington. I'm with the Executive Intelligence Review, Lyndon LaRouche.

You've both mentioned the importance of carrots, and of course, the general framework had very strong carrots with the nuclear plant, and food, and potentially the rail development. And there is such an approach going on now between South Korea, and Russia, and China.

In fact, Park Geun-hye sent the head of Korea Rail up to the North while Obama's coming to discuss with Russia, and potentially with China also, building rail connections. Potentially the oil connections would be with that. And yet, Obama and the neoconservatives here seem to have no interest in such an engagement, as you called it, at that level.

BUSH: Is there a question, Mike?

QUESTION: Yes, well, that's it. I mean, there seems to be nothing like that coming from the United States. Don't we need the U.S. to be engaged in this process of discussing the rail and other development that's already taking place?

BOSWORTH: Maybe not. I mean, I've thought for a long time that one of the many keys to this situation is a consensus position in South Korea as to how they would like to see it turn out. And, frankly, the divisions within the South Korean polity have always been, as they

have been within the American polity, a major obstacle to effective action, vis-à-vis North Korea.

So if this is ultimately designed to produce a new form of engagement, in this case, economic engagement, I would think we have no objection to that. But I may be mistaken.

BUSH: Sung-Joo, do you have any comment?

HAN: Well, it's just – wrote an article in Korea on the occasion of President Obama's visit to Korea. And I was suggesting that the U.S. actually consider adjusting or modifying the precondition for six-party talks. There's no guarantee, of course, that six-party talks would solve the problem in any fundamental way. But it certainly would be better, and a good start to resume it.

And so I don't know about any big formula or initiative. But the Obama Administration, President Obama, started out with the very forward taking posture, and then decided – right now on a very stiff mood. And I think it has to be relaxed somewhat.

BUSH: OK. Over here.

QUESTION: Tom Davis with the Spectrum Group. Ambassador Bosworth, I would have to put myself among those Americans that you described as kind of having the general feeling, "Why don't the Chinese just fix this," I think as you put it.

But would you elaborate a little bit more on what the calculation that you perceive they go through is? It just kind of seems from the American prism that they would be better off with a major trading partner, unified South Korea, than they would with a potentially enormously troublesome nuclear-armed and unpredictable North Korea.

BOSWORTH: Sure. I guess I become more and more reluctant with the advance of age to try to explain to other countries what their national interests really are. I think this is particularly true in the case of China. I don't know China at all well enough to be able to tell Chinese, who have spent their lives deciding what their national interests are, how they should behave vis-à-vis North Korea.

I can point out to them the advantages and disadvantages of various courses of action. But in the end, only they can make that decision. And I think they simply, on their periphery, they have many, many countries on their periphery. And they don't like to see change in any case, and particularly, not change on the Korean Peninsula.

So I don't know if this is ever going to be reassessed, or what they might do. But my strong judgment at the moment is that they may apply a little bit more pressure on North Korea here, and a little bit more there. And they may certainly want to give us the impression that they, in the interest of a better relationship with the U.S. in regional harmony, are prepared to do a lot of stuff.

But so far, I haven't seen much evidence that there is much follow-through to that. So they – as I said, they don't like the decision they're faced with; a nuclear-weapons state on the one hand, or a unified Korea on the other.

And they're looking for some middle ground. And so far, they've not been able to find one which meets the ultimate objective of causing North Korea to give up its nuclear-weapons state.

BUSH: Scott Herald right here?

QUESTION: Thank you, Richard. Scott Herald of the Rand Corporation. Ambassador Han and Ambassador Bosworth, I wonder if you could put the North Korean nuclear issue in the broader context of security threats that North Korea poses to its neighbors in the region, including its chemical and biological weapons programs, including its cyber and unmanned systems programs, and its conventional strike capabilities.

There are other areas that North Korea poses risks and challenges, and the nuclear one obviously gets the most attention. But are there any prospects for enhancing our engagement with North Korea in other domains? For example, in the aftermath of the Syrian use of chemical weapons, we managed to get some forward progress there.

Is there any prospect for using that to begin a relationship with North Korea in a different domain, or to put pressure on them to come forward and make progress in some other area?

HAN: Well, clearly, there's a need to address these other issues, not only chemical, biological weapons, but missiles as well. But at the same time, I don't think it's advisable to mix the nuclear issue with these other issues. It will only make the issue more complicated and difficult beyond the one we have, which is already very much complicated.

And so the other issues are very important, and have serious security implications. But we have to deal with them separately.

BOSWORTH: I very much agree with that. I would simply come back to something I at least indicated earlier. And that is all these other things are important, and we should be trying, along with our partners in the region, to deal with them, but to deal with them vis-à-vis a

nuclear-weapons state, North Korea, is much more difficult than dealing with them without North Korea having nuclear weapons. It raises the level, makes it that much more complicated.

BUSH: Saw a hand over here. Yes, Scott Snyder.

QUESTION: Scott Snyder. I'm here at the Council on Foreign Relations. As you all know, in the last couple of weeks, the North Koreans have threatened to conduct a new form of nuclear tests. And earlier this week, the South Korean foreign minister said a fourth North Korean nuclear test would be a game-changer.

I recall last year in the context of post-third North Korean nuclear test, in a moment of frankness, Susan Rice said that we're going to go through the usual drill at the U.N. Which one will it be this time after a fourth nuclear test? Do you think that the international community will treat it as a game-changer, or do you think we'll be going through the usual drill?

BOSWORTH: Well, everybody's quiet. I – first of all, I don't know if there's going to be a fourth nuclear test or not. I would suspect, yes, at some point. When, I have no idea. Maybe next week, maybe next year. I don't know.

My inclination would be to say it'll be the usual drill, because I don't sense that anyone has made the sort of strategic decisions that would be required to do anything other than the usual drill in response to a North Korean nuclear test.

HAN: North Koreans have the habit of bluffing and blustering, but at the same time, they usually do what they announce that they would do, maybe not exactly in the same way that they project, but they will. So we don't know when it will be, but they will probably follow through on that warning that they gave already.

There are, of course, speculations. And from their own point of view, there are pluses and minuses of what they would do, partly in their relations with China. So somebody in North Korea, or some group, is thinking about the strategic and tactical implications of whatever they do. And they obviously have some kind of a roadmap which they're going to follow through.

So – but the problem is that short of complete turnaround by China, even though China is gradually inching toward putting more pressure on North Korea, I think a reaction at the U.N. or other collective reaction, collective or individual reaction, would not be much more than the usual drill, not that we have other options.

Let me just make one comment about the test. We put – place enormous importance to the fact of testing. We think as if it is by testing, North Korea comes to have this big nuclear weapon they did not have before, or something. But that tends to mislead ourselves to think that by preventing them from the fourth test, we have achieved a great deal to check their nuclear development. And I think there's a danger in putting too much emphasis on it.

BUSH: To follow up on the question of game-changer versus sort of same-old-drill, is there perhaps a perverse value in North Korea's testing either missiles or nuclear devices, in that it sort of leads China step by step to conclude that their strategy's not working, that the North Koreans are playing them, and they need to consider some other approach, one that sort of punishes North Korea more than it's already done so, and does so in a more significant way?

BOSWORTH: Maybe. I don't see much evidence that we've concluded that we in the U.S. – because we continue to warn against the test. If we wholeheartedly endorse that in the interest of open diplomacy, we should be urging them on, more tests.

BUSH: Jessica Mathews?

QUESTION: Thank you. Jessica Mathews, Carnegie Endowment. Sometimes bargaining chips, if they never get spent, presumably have very little value. Has there ever been a time in your opinions when it would have made sense for the United States to say, “Yes, the war is over,” or is there such a time in the foreseeable future?

BOSWORTH: Is that for... either or both of us...

My own personal view is that at some point, if we can reach – where sort of the point we were at in 2005 with the joint statement that came out of the early workings of the six-party talks, that yes, we should say, “We don't want you to have nuclear weapons, and you've sort of agreed that you won't have.”

We need a peace regime to replace the armistice. Yes, let's work on that. We need diplomatic relations between all countries concerned. And some countries need energy and economic assistance. So let's work on that agenda.

We've never been able to work out the problem of sequencing. I don't know many people in the U.S. who would argue that we shouldn't move toward an end of the war, which has now been going on for more than half a century.

But when to do that is a big question. And how do you sequence that with meaningful North Korean commitments on denuclearization? And the six-party talks really broke down, in my

judgment, over the inability of the participants to come up with a sequence of actions and events that all parties would agree to.

Clearly, the North Koreans want to move denuclearization to the back of the train. We want to make it the leading issue on the train. And this is not without some possibility of compromise on all sides.

But I continue to think that you're not going to reach – we're not going to reach a compromise on any of those issues if we're not talking to them. And I think we have to talk to them.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE) So my question assumed or suggested “give without get,” in the hopes of changing a now pretty-well broken process.

BOSWORTH: Well, “give without get,” at the same time, I mean, physical capabilities in North Korea being what they are, they can barely carry on negotiations on one set of these issues, much less all of them simultaneously. I'm not sure the U.S. is any better off, quite frankly.

So you have to have some agreement on when you give and when you get. And I think, yes, within reasonable bounds, it's probably in our long-term interest to give something more – in the shorter term, and get something a little later on.

This is the dilemma that Kim Dae-jung worked his way through when he was trying to engage with the North Koreans, and came up with this formulation of “give before getting,” in effect, and do the easy stuff first, and push the hard stuff off until the end. Well, South Korean politics being what it was, that didn't prove to be sustainable in the longer term. And we have the same dilemmas.

BUSH: Sung-Joo, any comments?

HAN: I think this unilateral concession, so to speak, “give,” would make sense if there is a willingness on both sides to give and take ultimately.

And if that – if they cannot engage on negotiated settlement, negotiated give and take, because of the lack of trust or lack of habit of doing that, in this case, I don't think that this is the case as it was previously between the United States and the Soviet Union. I think there was some willingness to mutually give and take, mostly in the form of reducing their nuclear weapons, for example.



But in this particular sense, North Koreans feel that they need nuclear weapons, that they want to use all kinds of excuses and opportunities to keep doing that. And so unfortunately, unilateral concession, or “give,” will not be reciprocated. And so that is a formula that we have to think about very carefully.

BOSWORTH: Just to add one thing to my answer to Jessica’s very sensible and insightful question. I continue – I believe strongly that by focusing as exclusively on the nuclear issue as we are now, we’re ignoring, as has been suggested by Sung-Joo and others, we’re ignoring long-term considerations that are of great importance.

I come back to the question that was raised about railways between South Korea, North Korea, Russia, et cetera. And there was an allusion in there to the flow of natural gas, perhaps, along the Korean Peninsula.

My view is that in the longer term, starting now, the best way to deal with North Korea is not to focus just on their nuclear capability, although that is obviously a grave concern, but to focus on what I think is the underlying problem of great seriousness, which is the inherent weakness of North Korea. And as long as they are as weak as they are, and perceive that they’re as weak as they are, in their calculus, the only way of dealing with that is to be able to pose a threat to the other countries in the region.

And my answer to that would be, all right, let’s tie them in to a meaningful network of regional economic engagements. And energy – given my experience on the Korean Peninsula organization, and dealing with our efforts to build nuclear plants there, energy is probably the most pressing economic need that the North Koreans face.

And if you could tie them in through their own self-interest into a network of involving the flow of natural gas down from Russia into the Korean Peninsula, I think the benefits from that in the medium and longer term could be quite substantial, because it would give them a stake in stability. And now they really don’t have a stake in stability. They get most when they just threaten to raise the roof.

BUSH: Jonathan Pollock?

QUESTION: Yes, Jonathan Pollock from Brookings. This is directed primarily at Sung-Joo, but either can address it. I think Steve’s last comments about trying to think about North Korea’s future in a wider context are very, very relevant.

In this aspect, Sung-Joo, I’d be very interested in your thoughts about the very dynamic quality now of the China–ROK relationship. After all, Madam Park has had a state visit to

Beijing after her visit to the United States. Kim Jong-un has not made any travel plans of which we are aware.

China now does in excess of \$250 billion a year in trade with your country, which is about more than 40 times that that they do with North Korea. The trends over time are even more in those directions.

Beyond this, the fact that the Chinese, in my judgment at least, by dint of what they have not done, have in some sense distanced themselves, in some measure politically from North Korea. The fact that the international department of the party, which used to have the primary responsibility here, does not anymore.

The only visitors from China to North Korea that we are aware of over a period of time now have been foreign ministry officials, and with all due respect to diplomats. It's not the most...

BOSWORTH: We agree.

QUESTION: Yes, right. So my question – and I see Richard waving his hands – is there some other story? Is there a different dynamic here, particularly as we looked about how China weighs its longer-term interests in Korea vis-à-vis both Pyongyang and Seoul?

HAN: I think the Chinese are talking among themselves. They're thinking about this issue. And as you know, they're allowing meetings, for example, in Beijing, to talk about the future of Asia in a euphemistic way.

And so both in the person of Xi Jinping, and within the leadership, there is a soul-searching of what to do with North Korea, as opposed to until now, when China always had the clear thought of keeping North Korea afloat beyond all other issues.

And so we have a little bit of opening there. In that regard, this evolving relationship between South Korea and China is a positive thing for everybody, not only South Korea itself, but including the United States as well.

BOSWORTH: Not really anything to add to what I said earlier, no.

BUSH: OK. We have time for one more brief question. Right over here.

QUESTION: Lloyd Hankegon Spalding. Picking up Ambassador Bosworth's comment earlier about North Korea being in fact a de facto nuclear state, have we developed an arrangement with them as a pragmatic matter, as we did with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, to guard against false launches?

BOSWORTH: It would be some magical solution if we had, because I'm not aware. We don't talk to them.

BUSH: It does raise an interesting question – have the Chinese talked to them about it?

BOSWORTH: Well, one would hope, but...

BUSH: I think we've come to the end of our time. Thank you very much for your attention. Thank you for your questions. Please join me in thanking Steve Bosworth and Han Sung-Joo.



## Media Links



Audio

<http://www.cfr.org/arms-control-disarmament-and-nonproliferation/north-korea-nuclear-diplomacy-regional-security-northeast-asia/p32852>



Video

<http://www.cfr.org/arms-control-disarmament-and-nonproliferation/north-korea-nuclear-diplomacy-regional-security-northeast-asia/p32844>

More on... [North Korea](#), [Regional Security](#), [Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation](#)