

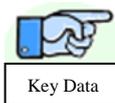
▶ Chapter 1

# A Proposal for a Policy of Flexible Containment

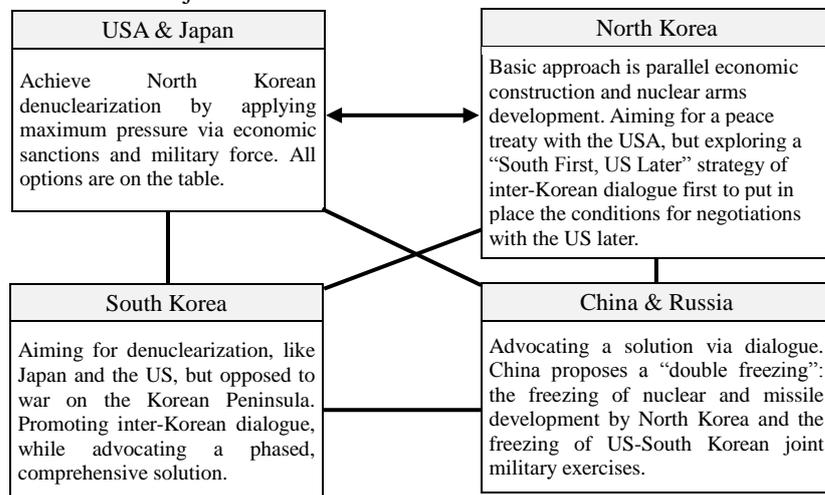
## —Beyond the Policy of Maximum Pressure

[Key Points]

- The military option offers the only possibility of achieving the denuclearization of North Korea within the short term. However, even if that were technically feasible, the risk of failure could not be reduced to zero. Moreover, the toll in the case of failure would be too high for anyone to be able to bear the responsibility for it. This is the inconvenient truth for Japan, the USA, and South Korea.
- There is also an inconvenient truth for North Korea. Even if it perfects a nuclear missile capable of reaching the US mainland, prolonged military pressure and economic blockades would cause economic activities to stagnate and the maintenance of the regime could not be guaranteed. Without some kind of agreement between the US and North Korea over the denuclearization issue, its survival cannot be guaranteed.
- The key points of the policy of flexible containment are as follows: (1) The sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council will be rigorously maintained until North Korea completely renounces nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. However, (2) if North Korea freezes its development, testing, and deployment, and accepts international monitoring, the US and South Korea will curb aggressive military maneuvers and relax economic sanctions correspondingly. (3) Inter-Korean reconciliation, exchange, and cooperation will not be impeded.



Stances of Major Countries on the North Korean Nuclear and Missile Issues



## 1. Introduction

The Korean Peninsula situation is complex and fluid. Currently, the Trump administration's policy of maximum pressure is squaring off against the Kim Jong-un regime's "South First, US Later" policy. However, Chairman Kim Jong-un sent not only the president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea, Kim Yong-nam, but also his own younger sister, Kim Yo-jong, as special envoys to attend the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, and also requested that President Moon Jae-in visit Pyongyang at the earliest possible opportunity. This perhaps suggests that US military pressure and international economic sanctions are having a quite substantial effect. Following the agreement to hold an inter-Korean summit meeting, moves aimed at holding a US-North Korean summit meeting also began, but this should probably be regarded as an escalation in political horse-trading. North Korea's policy of brinkmanship and the emergence of President Trump on the political stage means that the Korean Peninsula could face a major turning point comparable with that seen at the end of the Cold War or at the time of the Iraq War.

While North Korea's policy of brinkmanship is approaching its end, its "South First, US Later" policy has only just begun. Will peaceful foreign relations on the part of North Korea, including the freezing of its development and deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, result in inter-Korean coexistence and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula? Could ignoring the regional mechanism of inter-Korean dialogue not place excessive pressure on North Korea, resulting in unnecessary tension and catastrophic outcomes? Is there potential for China and Russia to play some kind of role? Is there any possibility that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe could build on his close relationship to President Trump to achieve a breakthrough in Japanese-North Korean relations and resolve the abductions issue, similar to the way in which Prime Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi's close relationship with President Bush laid the foundations for the Japanese premier's North Korean diplomacy? However, a tense stalemate could become prolonged. Are there no appropriate policies that can bring peace and prosperity to this region, like transforming a landscape of bare concrete buildings into a beautiful garden?

## 2. The Nuclear Armaments of a Divided Nation——Local Origins

As the 1980s drew to a close, the end of the Cold War saw North Korea facing defeat in the contest of regimes with South Korea. Having accomplished economic development and democratization, South Korea hosted the Olympics in Seoul in 1988 and shifted its northern diplomacy up a gear. President Roh Tae-woo first established diplomatic relations with the

countries of Eastern Europe, followed by the Soviet Union and China. On the other hand, confronted by economic collapse and the fall of the socialist camp, President Kim Il-sung attempted to normalize diplomatic relations with Japan, but failed. Amid rumors about the disintegration of the regime, Kim Il-sung's successor, Secretary Kim Jong-il, succeeded in concluding the Agreed Framework with the Clinton administration, ultimately agreeing to suspend North Korea's nuclear program. The agreement dealt with a long-term denuclearization process, under which, over a period of 10 years, North Korea's graphite-moderated reactors would be replaced with light water reactors and relations between the US and North Korea would be normalized. However, the nuclear agreement between the US and North Korea collapsed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks that followed the launch of the Bush administration. Criticized as part of the "axis of evil," North Korea forged ahead with its nuclear development program while the Iraq War was getting underway. To put it another way, Kim Jong-il once again staked the survival of the North Korean regime on the development of nuclear weapons and missiles.

Thereafter, during the 20 years or so of Kim Jong-il's reign as supreme leader, North Korea continued to develop nuclear weapons and missiles at the cost of its people's standard of living, with hundreds of thousands of North Koreans dying of starvation. In this sense, North Korea's nuclear development was undoubtedly a survival strategy. In order of importance, Kim Jong-il's priorities were (1) his own safety, (2) the maintenance of the regime, (3) national security, and (4) purity of ideology. The development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles was his last resort for achieving those objectives. The failures of Iraq and Libya were no less than an example of what not to do, from which North Korea needed to learn. However, the nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles that North Korea was trying to acquire were intended as a deterrent against attack by other countries, rather than to bolster its own ability to wage war, and were a tool for securing both domestic solidarity and diplomatic negotiations. In fact, another of North Korea's goals has been the normalization of diplomatic relations with major countries, as demonstrated by the history of its negotiations with Japan and the US, along with the Six-Party Talks involving Japan, the US, China, Russia, and North and South Korea. Even now, it is not only establishing a deterrent by perfecting a nuclear missile capable of reaching the US mainland, but also urging the US president to enter negotiations aimed at concluding a peace treaty.

However, despite the fact that its nuclear missile system is comparatively small and rudimentary, one must acknowledge North Korea's nuclear armaments as a serious threat to neighboring countries, including Japan, the USA, and South Korea. This is because, unlike the nuclear arsenals of major countries such as the US, Russia, and China, which have been built up in a stable way based on the theory of mutual deterrence, the situation on the Korean Peninsula is constantly

unstable and regional conflict there has involved impulsive acts, including efforts to unify the peninsula by force, military provocation, low-intensity conflict, guerrilla struggle, and terrorism. In addition, rapid advances in developing a means of delivery make the threat posed by nuclear weapons a severe one. For Japan, the Korean War in the 1950s was no more than “a fire on the opposite shore” — a problem that did not concern it — but now, mainland Japan is within range not only of North Korea’s old Rodong missiles, but also its new Scud-ER and Pukkuksong-2 missiles. Incredibly, the North Korean political regime poses a threat to South Korea and Japan, as it demonstrates more resilience than that of East Germany. To put it another way, the source of the threat is not a Cold War-era power struggle between superpowers, but the division of the Korean Peninsula by the US and the Soviet Union, and localized conflicts left over after the Cold War. It will likely be impossible to achieve regional denuclearization without resolving these issues.

On the other hand, in contrast to North Korea’s persistent and ongoing efforts to acquire nuclear armaments, the policies of those seeking to prevent it from doing so have lacked consistency and have not been terribly effective. Above all, the policies of President Bush were lacking in consistency. The initial policy of “blackmail” eventually developed into the multilateralism of the Six-Party Talks, resulting in the September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks, which committed North Korea to denuclearization. However, financial sanctions were imposed on North Korea immediately afterwards, on the grounds of money laundering, rendering implementation of the Six-Party Talks Joint Statement impossible. Despite this, once North Korea conducted the first nuclear test in October the following year, the Bush administration embarked upon direct negotiations with North Korea and lifted not only the financial sanctions, but also the designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism. In contrast, throughout its eight years in power, the Obama administration consistently maintained a policy of “strategic patience,” refusing to engage in dialogue unless North Korea demonstrated the willingness to undertake denuclearization. While President Obama dealt with the four nuclear tests during his time in office by means of economic sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, this did not discourage North Korea in its strong resolve to develop these weapons. In fact, it actually gave North Korea enough time to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

Moreover, China also made North Korea’s nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development possible, as it has supported the country’s survival because it regards North Korea as a buffer zone for its own safety. At the time of the Korean War, China entered the war to prevent the US military from advancing into North Korea, but both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping consistently supported the “independent and peaceful unification” of the Korean Peninsula; supporting, in other words, “federal unification.” However, China attaches the greatest importance to the peace and stability of

the Korean Peninsula. At present, denuclearization — the second of the three principles of the Korean Peninsula ((1) peace and stability, (2) denuclearization, and (3) a solution through dialogue and consultation) — should probably be understood as denuclearization for the purpose of peace and stability. In fact, the UN Security Council resolution (2270) concerning the fourth nuclear test, on January 6, 2016, was not actually adopted until March 2. China was not only cautious about the deployment of the state-of-the-art Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile system at a US military base in South Korea, which it regarded as evidence of the US-South Korea security framework being strengthened, but it was also not all that positive about economic sanctions which could prompt North Korea's destabilization. China's attitude changed in 2017, after the Trump administration came to power and a US-China summit meeting took place that April.

### 3. North Korea's Policy of Brinkmanship——Combining Technological Innovation With Military Provocation

During the last year of the Obama administration and the first year of the Trump administration, North Korea undertook intensive testing of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, in an attempt to achieve a technological breakthrough that would lead to the completion of an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) and an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of carrying a nuclear weapon. Accordingly, the first year saw two nuclear tests and test firing of SLBM and Scud-ER missiles, followed in the second year by test firing of the Pukkuksong-2, Hwasong-12, Hwasong-14, and Hwasong-15, as well as North Korea's sixth nuclear test. However, what was even more astonishing was that North Korea pursued a kind of brinkmanship or “blackmail by the weaker party” at precisely the same time as it was engaging in this technological innovation and military provocation. Above all, in August and September 2017, the Trump administration's severe backlash brought about a critical situation. To put it another way, the ratcheting up of North Korea's policy of brinkmanship gave the rest of the world a shock. This had undoubtedly been a long time in the making and was systematically implemented over a period of two years.

Looking back, the first sign of this series of critical moments surfaced on October 30, 2015. This was the date on which the decision by the Politburo of the Workers' Party of Korea to hold the party's Seventh Congress at the beginning of May the following year was announced. Furthermore, on December 10, Kim Jong-un was reported to have stated that North Korea had become “a powerful nuclear weapons state ready to detonate a self-reliant A-bomb and H-bomb to reliably defend its sovereignty and the dignity of the nation.” As if putting this announcement into effect,

North Korea carried out its fourth nuclear test on January 6, 2016, and launched a “satellite” using an improved version of the Taepodong-2 rocket on February 7. However, at the time, these actions were thought to be something akin to firing a salute to mark the forthcoming Congress of the Workers' Party on May 6-9.

It was after the party congress that the North Korean nuclear missile threat actually escalated. Most notably, North Korea successfully test fired an SLBM for the first time on August 24, while on September 5 it launched three mobile Scud-ER missiles (with a range of about 1,000 km) almost simultaneously, and then conducted its fifth nuclear test on September 9. North Korea announced that the objective of the nuclear test was to develop smaller, lighter, and diversified nuclear warheads. At any event, this was probably designed to expose the fact that the Obama administration’s policy of strategic patience had failed and prompt a policy shift by the next US administration. Attention also focused on the fact that North Korean authorities singled out the Blue House, South Korean government institutions, US military bases in the Asia-Pacific region, and the US mainland as targets of a missile attack. This is because US military bases in western Japan, such as Sasebo and Iwakuni, are within range of the test-fired Scud-ER. As Prime Minister Abe pointed out, this placed the threat in a different dimension, as far as Japan was concerned. In his September 23 speech to the UN General Assembly, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho disclosed North Korea’s intention to develop fully-fledged IRBMs and ICBMs, stating that his country “will continue to take measures to strengthen its national nuclear armed forces in both quantity and quality.”

However, in the sense of a policy of brinkmanship, it was after the Trump administration’s inauguration that North Korea’s nuclear tests and ballistic missile test firing entered a new phase and began to be perceived as obvious military provocation. The first target of this was the first Japan–US summit meeting between President Trump and Prime Minister Abe, which took place in Palm Beach, Florida, on February 11, 2017 (February 12 Japan time). Timing it to coincide with this summit, North Korea fired a Pukkuksong-2 — an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) with an estimated range of approximately 2,500 km — on a lofted trajectory at about 07:55 on the 12th (local time) from a location close to Kusong in North Pyongan Province. Launched from a caterpillar-type vehicle, the missile reached an altitude of approximately 550 km and flew for about 500 km before falling into the Sea of Japan. Its new missile was a mobile ballistic missile based on its submarine-launched SLBM, using solid fuel to enable its deployment on land. This finally brought mainland Japan in range of North Korea’s ballistic missiles, meaning that it can target all US military bases in Japan. At a hastily convened joint press conference held at a Florida resort owned by President Trump, Prime Minister Abe emphasized that the test was “absolutely

unacceptable,” while President Trump stated that “America stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100%.” It may well have been at this point that President Trump and Prime Minister Abe hardened their resolve to work together in dealing with North Korea’s policy of brinkmanship.

The development of the Hwasong-12, Hwasong-14, and Hwasong-15 missiles that appeared thereafter was in no small part due to successful “ground test of a new type of high-power engine” on March 18, during a visit to the test site by Chairman Kim Jong-un to provide guidance. North Korea called this the “March 18 Revolution.” For example, the Hwasong-12, which was launched just before 05:00 on May 14, reached an altitude of 2,100 km, and flew for 780 km or so, was an intermediate- to long-range ballistic missile with an estimated range of approximately 5,000 km, which was aimed at Andersen Air Force Base on the island of Guam. This launch took place on the opening day of an international conference in Beijing about China’s One Belt, One Road initiative. Chairman Kim Jong-un attracted attention with the remark that nuclear weapon systems will never become the eternal exclusive property of the US, expressing the belief that “the day when [North Korea] uses the similar retaliatory means will come.”

At 09:00 on July 4, the Hwasong-14 two-stage intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) was launched, reaching an altitude of approximately 2,800 km on a lofted trajectory and flying for more than 900 km. Interestingly, when Kim Jong-un said in his New Year Address on January 1 that North Korea had “entered the final stage of preparation for the test launch of [an] intercontinental ballistic missile,” President-elect Trump quickly reacted on Twitter, tweeting, “It won’t happen!” After the test, Kim Jong-un called the missile “a gift” to the US on its Independence Day, which must have irritated Trump. North Korea did not stop at testing the Hwasong-14 just the once. At about 23:42 on July 28, a Hwasong-14 was launched from northwestern North Korea, reaching an altitude of approximately 3,700 km and flying for about 1,000 km before landing in the sea off Okushiri Island in Hokkaido. With a range estimated at somewhere between 9,000 and 10,000 km or more, it was regarded as having the ability to reach the West Coast of mainland USA. On July 5, Korean Central Broadcasting reported Kim Jong-un’s statement that North Korea would not “put its nukes and ballistic rockets on the table of negotiations in any case...unless the U.S. hostile policy and nuclear threat to [North Korea] are definitely terminated.” While couched in roundabout and paradoxical language, this was likely an announcement of North Korea’s willingness to negotiate over its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

One of the objectives of these two ICBM launches was to “press the US to make a choice between ramping up pressure through antagonistic policies or negotiations with a halt in mind.” However, it goes without saying that the testing of an ICBM capable of reaching the US mainland irritated the US government significantly. In the morning of July 29, the US and South Korean

militaries conducted a joint military exercise on South Korea's east coast, reaffirming their capabilities for a "precise strike on the enemy's leadership." On the 30th, the US deployed two B-1B strategic bombers from Guam over Kyushu and South Korea, and conducted joint exercises with Japan and with South Korea. On August 5, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2371. As well as imposing a complete ban on exports of coal, iron ore, lead, and seafood from North Korea, the resolution requires UN member states to refrain from employing North Korean workers. Estimates suggest that this will cut by one-third the value of North Korea's exports, which are believed to be worth approximately \$3 billion a year.

However, the North Korean response in the wake of its successful test firing of the Hwasong-12 and Hwasong-14 was nothing less than astounding. Building on its successes with the Hwasong-12 and Hwasong-14, North Korea actually engaged in all-out military provocation in August and September 2017. A government statement on August 7 denouncing the UN Security Council resolution was followed the next day by a statement in which a Korean People's Army spokesperson said, "The KPA Strategic Force is now carefully examining the operational plan for making an enveloping fire at the areas around Guam with medium-to-long-range strategic ballistic rocket Hwasong-12." Needless to say, this measure was a backlash against the planned US-South Korean joint military exercise Ulchi-Freedom Guardian (UFG), which was due to take place on August 21–31, and was carried out in the awareness that the UN General Assembly would meet in September. This was the start of the August–September Crisis. Ultimately, North Korea did not go ahead with "enveloping fire at the areas around Guam," but did carry out its sixth nuclear test on September 3, the day before the opening of the BRICS Summit of five major emerging national economies, which China was hosting in Xiamen. The explosion was estimated to have resulted from the detonation of a hydrogen bomb with a power around 10 times (160 kt) that of the atomic bomb used in Hiroshima. On August 29 and September 15, North Korea carried out Hwasong-12 medium-to-long-range ballistic missile launch drills, in which the missiles passed through Hokkaido airspace.

Finally, at 02:48 on November 29, the Hwasong-15 two-stage ICBM was launched from the outskirts of Pyongyang. Having reached an altitude of 4475 km and covered a distance of 950 km in 53 minutes, it was estimated to be capable of reaching East Coast USA. Describing it as "capable of carrying [a] super-heavy nuclear warhead," a North Korean government statement said that it was "the most powerful weapon system that has reached the stage of completion." Chairman Kim Jong-un declared that North Korea had "accomplished the historic cause of building the state nuclear force." However, reports suggest a strong possibility that the warhead itself disintegrated at the time of reentry, so North Korea's nuclear capability is not believed to have reached the

operational deployment stage. Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un's declaration that North Korea had "accomplished the [building of] the national nuclear program" is of no small significance. Even if the development of an ICBM mounted with a nuclear warhead is 100% complete and North Korea continues its efforts to achieve operational deployment, it is questionable whether North Korea's policy of brinkmanship blending technological innovation with military provocation will be repeated. Rather than this, there is a stronger possibility that it will attempt to transition away from this policy of brinkmanship, while proactively moving forward with inter-Korean dialogue, with a view to bringing negotiations with the USA to fruition. However, as North Korea has habitually engaged in repeated military provocation, it certainly has no easy path to dialogue and negotiations, nor to economic reconstruction and economic sanctions.

#### 4. The Trump Administration's Policy of Maximum Pressure

It has already been pointed out that North Korea's focus was on the February 11, 2017 Japan-US Summit Meeting when it test fired its new Pukkuksong-2 ballistic missile. Naturally, one cannot imagine that President Trump expected such blatant military provocation beforehand. However, in his first defense policy statement, entitled "Making our Military Strong Again" and issued on January 20, the day of his inauguration as president, Trump specifically named North Korea, asserting that the US would "develop a state-of-the-art missile defense system to protect against missile-based attacks from states like Iran and North Korea." In addition, the first place he sent newly appointed Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to visit was South Korea, which was reeling in the wake of President Park Geun-hye's impeachment. Visiting South Korea on February 2, Secretary Mattis touched down at the US Air Force base in Osan on an E-4B, which is capable of serving as an airborne command post. He told South Korean defense minister Han Min-goo, "Any attack on the United States or on our allies will be defeated and any use of nuclear weapons would be met with the response that would be effective and overwhelming." Regarding the deployment of the THAAD antimissile unit at a US military base in South Korea, Mattis said, "There is no other nation that needs to be concerned about THAAD other than North Korea," countering China's objections. All of these responses by the new administration to the military provocation by North Korea that had been ongoing since the previous year demonstrated great caution.

After North Korea stirred things up with the Pukkuksong-2, President Trump began to perceive it as the nation's most immediate threat and ordered the National Security Council (NSC) to undertake a broad review of North Korea policy. The Trump administration's policy gradually became clear as the US-South Korean joint military exercises Foal Eagle (field training exercise)

and Key Resolve (command post exercise) went ahead on the largest-possible scale, starting on March 1 and March 13, respectively. Responding to North Korea's simultaneous launch of four Scud-ER missiles from Tongchang-ri on its west coast on March 6, the US Air Force began deploying a B-1B strategic bomber and F-35 stealth fighters over South Korea in the latter half of March. Visiting South Korea on March 17, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated that the Obama administration's "policy of strategic patience has ended," announcing that US policy did not rule out a military response. However, as has already been seen, this was precisely the time when North Korea succeeded in its "ground test of a new type of high-power engine" (the March 18 Revolution). In fact, two large vehicles carrying what appeared to be ICBMs attracted attention when they appeared in a military parade on April 15 to mark the 105th anniversary of the birth of President Kim Il-sung. On the other hand, during telephone talks with Prime Minister Abe on April 6, President Trump himself asserted that "all options are on the table."

However, the framework and distinctive features of the Trump administration's North Korea policy were probably only finalized through the US-China summit meeting between President Trump and President Xi Jinping on April 6 and 7. The first distinctive feature was Trump's announcement that "all options are on the table," bringing the Obama administration's policy of strategic patience to a definitive end and revealing the new administration's plan to resolve the North Korean nuclear weapon and ballistic missile issues at the earliest possible opportunity, while applying "maximum pressure." It would be fair to say that this was a point of differentiation from the Obama administration's North Korea policy. In fact, on the first day of the US-China summit meeting, the US astonished China by launching a lightning missile attack on a Syrian military facility. This likely applied psychological pressure on China, as it suggested that the US could unilaterally carry out an armed strike on North Korea. The increased effectiveness of economic sanctions achieved through the cooperation of China — North Korea's biggest trading partner — became the second feature of the Trump administration's North Korea policy. Trump asked Xi Jinping to fully implement the economic sanctions against North Korea and linked its actions in this regard to US-China trade negotiations. In urging China to take action, Trump is believed to have said that the US was prepared to act alone if China did not cooperate. On April 8, after the summit meeting had ended, the US Navy announced that it would dispatch an aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, to the Korean Peninsula from Singapore. Accordingly, rumors of an "April crisis" began to intensify in South Korea.

The Trump administration's new North Korea policy was dubbed "maximum pressure and engagement" even before its formal announcement, which finally came on April 26, in the authoritative form of a joint statement by Secretary of State Tillerson, Secretary of Defense Mattis,

and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats. Furthermore, President Trump took the unprecedented step of inviting all Senators to the White House for the briefing. The joint statement asserted that the approach “aims to pressure North Korea into dismantling its nuclear, ballistic missile, and proliferation programs by tightening economic sanctions and pursuing diplomatic measures with our Allies and regional partners” (underlining by author). While references to unilateral action or military operations by the US were curbed, the statement revealed that the goal of the engagement policy was not a freeze on nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development and deployment, but denuclearization — in other words, dismantling. On May 5, Secretary Tillerson told State Department staff “We do not seek a regime change, we do not seek a collapse of the regime, we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula, we do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th Parallel” (the “4 No’s”). However, shortly after this, on May 14, North Korea successfully test fired the Hwasong-12 medium- to long-range ballistic missile. Even after this, North Korea conducted repeated tests of missiles including the Pukkuksong-2 and surface-to-ship cruise missiles.

Amid expanding military provocation by North Korea, the Trump administration was perhaps unable to identify a means of effectively executing its new strategy at first. Or maybe it was wary that this might tip things toward the military option. At a press conference on May 19, Secretary of Defense Mattis pointed out that “if this goes to a military solution, it is going to be tragic on an unbelievable scale, and so our effort is to work with the UN, work with China, work with Japan, work with South Korea to try to find a way out of this situation.” Adopted on June 2, the US-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 2356 merely imposed a ban on overseas travel by 14 North Korean individuals and four entities, as well as freezing their assets, in order to restrict the funds available to North Korea for the development of nuclear weapons and missiles. In contrast, Security Council Resolution 2321 — which was adopted in November 2016, in the final weeks of the Obama administration’s time in office — imposed wide-ranging restrictions on coal imports from North Korea (restricting imports to no more than 7.5 million tons in volume or no more than \$400 million in value) and a complete ban on imports of metals such as silver, copper, and nickel.

However, over the course of the August–September Crisis that followed, US policy took shape as a policy of maximum pressure — specifically, a strategy of maximizing economic sanctions, while not ruling out the possibility of military action. It would be no exaggeration to describe this as a military and economic blockade of North Korea. In response to the August 8 comment by the Korean People’s Army about “enveloping fire at the areas around Guam,” President Trump immediately retorted, “North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and the fury like the world has never seen,” he warned. At the UN General

Assembly on September 19, Trump stressed, “If [the US] is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea.” Strangely, however, Trump did not rule out the possibility of dialogue with Kim Jong-un. Despite the military and economic pressure, Trump told Bloomberg News on May 1, “If it would be appropriate for me to meet with [Kim Jong-un], I would absolutely, I would be honored to do it...[w]e have breaking news.” On November 12, he tweeted, “I try so hard to be his (Kim Jong-un’s) friend – and maybe someday that will happen!” and later said, “Strange things happen in life.”

On the other hand, as has already been seen, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions including a complete ban on North Korean exports of commodities including coal, iron ore, and seafood in response to the two Hwasong-14 ballistic missile tests in July. In addition, North Korea’s sixth nuclear test, on September 3, was answered on September 11 with the adoption of Resolution 2375, which imposed even tighter sanctions from 2018, including limiting the supply of refined petroleum products (such as gasoline and kerosene) to North Korea to 2 million barrels and banning North Korean exports of textile products. Moreover, member states were prohibited from offering new work opportunities to North Korean workers overseas. This was a prelude to imposing even more stringent sanctions in response to the Hwasong-15 ballistic missile test launch on November 29. UN Security Council Resolution 2397 adopted on December 22 limited exports of refined petroleum products to North Korea to no more than 500,000 barrels per year from 2018, as well as prohibiting imports of foods, machinery, electrical instruments, and timber from North Korea and imposing a complete ban on exports of industrial machinery and transportation vehicles to the country. It also obliged member states to repatriate North Korean workers within two years. Furthermore, member states were authorized to seize, inspect, and impound any vessel suspected of violating the resolution. All that remained was the supply of crude oil from China. This was the main content of the maximum pressure applied to North Korea.

Resolution Name and Date of Adoption	Key Points of Sanctions Imposed
Security Council Resolution 2375 September 11, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banned the supply of crude oil to North Korea in excess of the amount supplied in the period of 12 months prior to the resolution’s adoption</li> <li>• Restricted the supply of refined petroleum products to 2 million barrels per year and banned the supply of condensates and natural gas liquids</li>   <li>• Banned imports of textile products from North Korea</li> <li>• Prohibited member states from granting work permits to North Korean nationals, in principle</li> <li>• Banned the formation of joint ventures with North Korean entities and individuals, and ordered the closure of existing joint ventures</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated additional subjects of asset freezing and travel bans (1 individual, 3 entities)</li> </ul>
<p>Security Council Resolution 2397</p> <p>December 22, 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restricted the supply of crude oil to North Korea to 4 million barrels or 525,000 tons</li> <li>• Restricted the supply of refined petroleum products to 500,000 barrels per year</li> <li>• Extended the scope of import and export bans, prohibiting the import of goods such as agricultural products, machinery, and electrical equipment from North Korea</li> <li>• Called for the repatriation of all North Korean nationals working overseas within 24 months of the resolution’s adoption</li> <li>• Targeted 16 new additional individuals and one entity with the asset freeze, as well as imposing a travel ban on those 16 individuals</li> </ul>

Figure 1 Recent UN Security Council Resolutions Concerning North Korea

### 5. The Kim Jong-un Regime’s “South First, US Later” Policy

First and foremost, what North Korea sought to achieve in the process of its policy of brinkmanship appears to have been direct negotiations with the USA, leading to the suspension of US-South Korean joint military exercises, some kind of US-North Korean peace agreement, and the easing of sanctions on North Korea, in return for North Korea provisionally freezing its development, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons and medium- to long-range ballistic missiles, and promising to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula at some stage in the future. Accordingly, it continued its military provocation for two years, at the risk of triggering military retaliation by the US. However, one wonders what Kim Jong-un intended to do if the US refused negotiations with North Korea, despite its development of nuclear weapons and medium- to long-range ballistic missiles. Its only option in that case would have been to declare the completion of its nuclear missile system capable of reaching the US mainland, bring its policy of brinkmanship to an end, and explore peace with the South. This would be the “South First, US Later” policy, in which North Korea would first achieve peace with South Korea and then attempt to negotiate with the USA. Needless to say, the completion of the nuclear missile system was in itself a major achievement for North Korea.

Its “South First, US Later” policy is essential if it is to avoid military reprisals by the US and put in place an environment conducive to US-North Korean negotiations. This goes beyond mere “smile diplomacy” into the realm of “strategic appeasement,” constituting a “peace offensive” based on the assumption of an inter-Korean summit meeting. Chairman Kim Jong-un’s New Year Address and dispatch of a North Korean team to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in South Korea clearly pave the way for this. Naturally, one should probably regard “South First, US Later” as a

deliberate strategy that was being prepared from the very start of North Korea's policy of brinkmanship two years ago. This is because it is unthinkable that a small country such as North Korea would embark on a policy of brinkmanship toward a major power like the US without having prepared a policy for the next phase. After the death of Kim Jong-il, the first project on which Kim Jong-un started work was the construction of the Masikryong Ski Resort. In that sense, "South First, US Later" was simply a policy for bringing a chaotic situation under control, as well as being a plan B in case the policy of brinkmanship ended in failure.

However, looking at developments from the summer of 2017, it is hard to conclude that "South First, US Later" was entirely unrelated to the economic blockade measures imposed on North Korea in the form of the two Security Council resolutions on sanctions (2371 and 2375) adopted in response to the two Hwasong-14 test launches in July that year and the sixth nuclear test, which took place in early September. Despite the fact that the Hwasong-15 ballistic missile test had still not been carried out, on October 7, the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) suddenly convened the second plenary meeting of its 7th Central Committee, at which it affirmed that North Korea would hold fast to its strategic line of simultaneously pushing forward economic construction and the building of nuclear capability. Interestingly, at the start of his report, Chairman Kim Jong-un remarked that "US imperialists are making last-ditch efforts to completely stifle our sovereignty and rights to existence and development by cooking up UN Security Council 'sanctions resolutions' one after another with mobilization of their vassal forces." He went on to say, "The whole Party should pay efforts to strengthening the primary party committees and party cells and thus make all the basic party organizations move in a militant and viable manner at all times under the unified leadership of the Party Central Committee." Extraordinarily, the plenary meeting of the WPK's Central Committee was attended by observers in the form of senior officials from central government bodies; provincial, city, and county administrations; and major industrial establishments. Following on from this, the Conference of Cell Chairpersons of the WPK was held on December 21 and it would be no exaggeration to say that this marked the launch of a system to mobilize the entire state.

However, as has already been pointed out, it was only in his 2018 New Year Address that Kim Jong-un announced his "South First, US Later" policy to the rest of the world. Kim Jong-un said, "In no way would the United States dare to ignite a war against me and our country. The whole of its mainland is within the range of our nuclear strike and the nuclear button is on my office desk all the time; the United States needs to be clearly aware that this is not merely a threat but a reality." However, this was not the main thrust of his speech. More important was the section in which he said, "This year is significant both for the north and the south as in the north the people will greet

the 70th founding anniversary of their Republic as a great, auspicious event and in the south the Winter Olympic Games will take place...we should improve the frozen inter-Korean relations and glorify this meaningful year as an eventful one noteworthy in the history of the nation.” Chairman Kim Jong-un continued, “As for the Winter Olympic Games to be held soon in [S]outh Korea, it will serve as a good occasion for demonstrating our nation's prestige and we earnestly wish the Olympic Games a success. From this point of view we are willing to dispatch our delegation and adopt other necessary measures....” Thus, the new year marked the beginning of North Korea’s “Olympic Diplomacy.”

Figure 2 Key Points of Chairman Kim Jong-un’s 2018 New Year Address

- The whole of the US mainland is within the range of our nuclear strike and the nuclear button is on my office desk all the time
- Order to mass produce nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, to give a spur to the efforts for deploying them for action
- Our country’s nuclear forces constitute a powerful deterrent capable of thwarting any nuclear threats from the US
- Request to South Korea to discontinue military exercises with the US and refrain from deploying US strategic weapons
- 2018 is significant both for the north and the south, as North Korea will mark the 70th anniversary of its founding, while the Winter Olympics will take place in South Korea
- We should improve the frozen inter-Korean relations
- We wish the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics a success and are willing to dispatch our delegation

North Korea’s decision to participate in the Olympics had been long awaited by the administration of Moon Jae-in, which came to power in May 2017. This is because, first of all, it could not have expected the Pyeongchang Olympics to be a success if they had taken place without North Korea’s participation amid an atmosphere of increased military tension on the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, the very staging of the Olympics would have been under threat if the crisis had escalated. Second, for South Korea, the denuclearization of North Korea is an issue that must be resolved by peaceful means, above all else. This is because, if the US were to choose a military solution, South Korea would inevitably become a battlefield. Third, at home, the South Korean government was expected to play some kind of proactive role in achieving a peaceful resolution to this issue. This is a backlash against power politics by global superpowers. Fourth, President Moon Jae-in had positioned “a phased and comprehensive approach” as the basic tenor of his North

Korean policy. For these reasons, ironically, both the maximum pressure policy of the US and North Korea's "South First, US Later" policy encouraged South Korea to adopt a strategy of appeasement toward the North. In fact, as inter-Korean dialogue progressed, President Moon Jae-in identified a "proactive role" for South Korean diplomacy as an intermediary in US-North Korean dialogue. For example, during a conference at the presidential Blue House on January 22, President Moon looked ahead to the difficulties that South Korea could face in its foreign and security relations following the Olympics, remarking, "We must work to make the South-North Korea dialogue lead to talks between the United States and North Korea. Only then can we peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, and peace and prosperity can continue on the Korean Peninsula,"

At this point, one of the factors behind the "South First, US Later" policy, namely diplomatic cooperation between China and Russia regarding the Korean Peninsula denuclearization issue, should probably be noted. This is because the joint statement concerning the Korean Peninsula issued by Chinese and Russian foreign ministers Wang Yi and Sergei Lavrov following their talks in Moscow on July 4, 2017, ahead of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, has not received much attention, despite its importance. In fact, the two foreign ministers came up with a "joint initiative" based on the respective diplomatic initiatives of China and Russia. China proposed (1) a "double freezing" initiative under which North Korea would freeze its nuclear and missile activities, while the US and South Korea froze their joint military exercises; and (2) "parallel advancement" toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the creation of peace mechanisms on the peninsula. Russia's proposal was a stage-by-stage plan for settling the Korean Peninsula issue. Both called for the use of military means to be ruled out and for the dialogue process to be resumed. The joint initiative proposed by China and Russia is clearly closer to North Korea's "South First, US Later" and President Moon Jae-in's phased and comprehensive approach than to President Trump's policy of maximum pressure.

## 6. A Proposal for a Policy of Flexible Containment

North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is the result of single-minded determination across two generations of leaders: Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un. The military option likely offers the only possibility of making North Korea abandon this within the short term. However, even if that were technically feasible, the risk of failure could not be reduced to zero. Moreover, the toll in the case of failure would be too high for anyone to be able to bear the responsibility for it. A number of defects have been pointed out regarding military action, whether a

full-scale attack in the form of a “decapitation operation” or a limited “bloody nose strike.” In a worst-case scenario, more than a million human lives could be lost and the costs involved in reconstruction would likely be astronomical. The collapse of the South Korean economy might trigger a chain reaction of economic crises. Furthermore, there would undoubtedly be a loss of trust toward the USA in both South Korea and Japan. The USA’s alliances with South Korea and Japan would likely break up, leading to major upheaval in East Asia’s international system. These are the inconvenient truths that we must squarely confront.

However, there is also an inconvenient truth for North Korea. Even if it perfects a ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear weapon to the US mainland, the existing military pressure and stringent economic sanctions would, if they became prolonged, merely cause economic misery and the maintenance of the regime could not be guaranteed. To put it another way, without some kind of agreement between the US and North Korea over the denuclearization issue, North Korea’s “South First, US Later” policy cannot offer a fundamental solution. Consequently, an appropriate means of correcting North Korea’s overrating of its possession of nuclear missiles and inducing it to abandon its development and deployment of them would be a policy of flexible “containment”; in other words, “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment” (George F. Kennan). It is unlikely that the situation would become as prolonged as the Cold War era if regional stability mechanisms formed between North and South Korea were used to deploy this policy. North Korea is not a superpower on the scale of the Soviet Union or China.

Figure 3 The Inconvenient Truths for Both Sides

Japan, USA, and South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The military option would result in the loss of over a million lives in a worst-case scenario and require astronomical sums to be spent on reconstruction</li> <li>• The collapse of the South Korean economy could potentially trigger a chain reaction of economic crises in Asia and around the world</li> <li>• Trust toward the USA would decline in Japan and South Korea. Risk that US alliances with Japan and South Korea would crumble, leading to upheaval in the international order</li> </ul>
North Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even if it perfects a nuclear missile capable of reaching the US mainland, military pressure and economic sanctions are likely to continue</li> <li>• International pressure will only cause economic misery and the maintenance of the regime — its top priority — could not be guaranteed</li> </ul>

On the other hand, there needs to be an accurate perception of North Korea's nuclear missiles, which differ from those held by superpowers such as the US, Russia, and China. The latter are "nuclear weapons that will not be used," based on the theory of mutual nuclear deterrence, as demonstrated during the Cold War era, but this is not necessarily the case with the former. In that sense, nothing would be more dangerous than causing the collapse of a nuclear-armed divided state by means of external pressure. A containment policy would involve proceeding cautiously, while discouraging the counterpart's aggressive intentions and waiting patiently for its policies and regime to change. Looking back, part of the blame for the situation faced today lies with neighboring countries, who divided the Korean Peninsula in two at the end of World War II, left it that way throughout the Cold War, and failed to achieve *détente* on the Korean Peninsula (cross-recognition of the two Koreas) when the Cold War came to an end. If the visits to North Korea by Shin Kanemaru and Junichiro Koizumi had resulted in the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea, the situation that we face today might not exist.

It is questionable whether the policy of maximum pressure — that is to say, military pressure and economic blockades — can achieve the denuclearization of North Korea. North Korea is already 90% of the way to perfecting an ICBM capable of carrying a nuclear weapon, so we should take it as read that it will leave no stone unturned in its efforts to complete this process and will not yield to blackmail or blockades. Even during the "Arduous March" of the late 1990s, North Korea did not call a halt to its nuclear weapons development, despite its acute food crisis. Moreover, it paid close attention to the fate of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, who had abandoned nuclear development; for North Korea, this became a good example of what not to do. Consequently, if China cuts off North Korea's supply of crude oil, the crisis is likely to escalate to extreme levels. If the outside world mistakenly applies pressure greater than North Korea can withstand, Kim Jong-un might choose the path of explosion rather than implosion. Alternatively, he might be tempted to finance the maintenance of the regime through nuclear proliferation. In that situation, even if arms exports by North Korea can be thwarted, it would probably be impossible to prevent the dispatch of engineers overseas. To put it another way, the policy of maximum pressure does not necessarily guarantee that North Korea will renounce nuclear missiles.

The supreme leaders of the US and North Korea are both unusual characters and it seems unlikely that they have sufficient experience to manage a crisis. One is a dictator's son in his early 30s, while the other is a real estate tycoon with no experience as a lawmaker or government official. These two individuals have been exchanging provocative and hyperbolic words. Moreover, both are constrained by domestic politics. For Kim Jong-un, his prestige as supreme leader is of paramount importance, while Trump will inevitably be affected by suspicions of Russian influence and the

midterm elections. Furthermore, if the preemptive strike doctrine based on wishful thinking becomes widespread, one side's fears of a preemptive strike by the other could lead it to launch a preemptive strike of its own. Alternatively, this kind of psychological interplay could provoke the other side to launch a preemptive strike. Under such circumstances, crisis management mechanisms (CMMs) prior to denuclearization will be crucial. As such, the first step toward crisis management is probably the "double freezing" advocated by China and Russia: the freezing of nuclear weapon and missile testing by North Korea and of joint military exercises by the US and South Korea. However, this is a measure to avoid a military crisis, merely providing the first catalyst for resolving the situation through negotiation.

In the first stage following on from crisis management, an international agreement will be required, covering a freeze on North Korean development and deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, along with international monitoring and final disposal. To achieve this, it will likely be necessary to hold not only the initially planned US-North Korean negotiations, but also negotiations among the parties directly involved in the Korean War (the US, China, and North and South Korea) or the parties to the Six-Party Talks. This will necessitate the easing of relevant UN Security Council resolutions on sanctions and sanctions imposed unilaterally by each country. In any event, returning — as far as possible — to the joint statement adopted during the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks in September 2005 offers a shortcut. However, caution is essential regarding the conclusion of a bilateral peace treaty between the US and North Korea. This is because going over South Korea's head could lead a nuclear-armed North Korea to harbor gratuitous expectations concerning its advantage over South Korea, possibly encouraging the destabilization of the regional situation.

If North Korea refuses to budge in negotiations over denuclearization, all that the US has to do is consider redeploying tactical nuclear weapons at US military bases in South Korea. While this would largely be nothing more than a means of relieving the psychological burden on the South Korean people, it would likely solidify the US–South Korean alliance and lay the foundations for a policy of long-term containment. However, even if the opportunity for negotiations between the US and North Korea does not arise, the resumption of inter-Korean dialogue, exchange, and cooperation should not be excessively restricted. It would be a mistake to think that this could thwart nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development by North Korea. On the other hand, North Korea's shift toward inter-Korean dialogue using participation in the Pyeongchang Olympics as a lever was largely the result of international economic sanctions. A moderate easing of economic sanctions, along with inter-Korean economic exchange, could actually energize North Korea's literal market economy and promote economic reform and opening up. Without this, there

is no hope of transforming North Korea’s regime.

In the second stage of working toward North Korea’s denuclearization, it will be important to use the agreement already reached to secure the foundations for long-term, stable coexistence between the two Koreas and for economic development in North Korea. If inter-Korean dialogue, exchange, and cooperation promote the development of North Korean economic infrastructure, reform and opening up, and export-oriented economic development, leading to the formation of a regional stability mechanism, a kind of mutually dependent inter-Korean economic community could emerge a decade hence. In the third stage, a confederation or federal unification based on this could possibly be designed. Peace on the Korean Peninsula means long-term, stable inter-Korean coexistence. Until this is institutionally guaranteed, North Korea is unlikely to completely abandon its nuclear missiles.

Figure 4 The Envisaged Denuclearization Process (Proposal)

Crisis Management Stage	As a preliminary step toward denuclearization, efforts are devoted to avoiding a crisis, with the first step being consideration of a freeze on North Korean nuclear weapon and missile tests and joint military exercises by the US and South Korea
Stage 1	Conclusion of an international agreement covering a freeze on North Korean development and deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, as well as international monitoring and final disposal
Stage 2	Formation of a regional stability mechanism by using the agreement on nuclear weapons and missiles to secure the foundations for long-term, stable coexistence between the two Koreas through dialogue and cooperation, and for economic development in North Korea
Stage 3	Formation of a mutually dependent inter-Korean economic community, providing the basis for the design of a confederation or federal unification, which would institutionally guarantee long-term, stable coexistence between the two Koreas, resulting in complete abandonment by North Korea of its nuclear and missile program

Figure 5 Key Points of the Policy of Flexible Containment

(1)	The sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council will be maintained until North Korea fully renounces nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles
(2)	If North Korea freezes its development, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and accepts international monitoring, the US and South Korea will curb aggressive military maneuvers and saber-rattling, and relax UN and unilateral economic sanctions
(3)	Inter-Korean reconciliation, exchange, and cooperation will not be impeded
(4)	In the long term, North and South Korea will embark on an initiative with neighboring countries — including Japan, the US, China, and Russia – to build a stable international system on the Korean Peninsula

In conclusion, the key points of the policy of flexible containment advocated in this paper are as

follows: (1) the sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council will be continued until North Korea completely renounces nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. However, (2) if North Korea freezes its development, testing, and deployment, and accepts international monitoring, the US and South Korea will curb aggressive military maneuvers and saber-rattling, and relax UN and unilateral economic sanctions. (3) Inter-Korean reconciliation, exchange, and cooperation will not be impeded; and (4) in the long term, North and South Korea will embark on an initiative with neighboring countries — including Japan, the US, China, and Russia — to build a stable international system on the Korean Peninsula. All of these are measures that should have been taken 30 years ago when the Cold War ended and North Korea embarked on its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development program.

Ultimately, in the process of implementing the “South First, US Later” policy, North Korea might propose resuming negotiations with Japan over the normalization of diplomatic relations, including the resolution of the abductions issue. Along with an inter-Korean summit meeting, this is the last diplomatic card remaining in North Korea’s hand. This is because the Trump administration will not be able to refuse to negotiate with North Korea if an inter-Korean summit meeting takes place and negotiations between Japan and North Korea resume. Even if relations between the US and North Korea improve first, negotiations between Japan and North Korea will be inevitable. Given that Prime Minister Koizumi brushed off strong concerns on the part of the US when he visited Pyongyang, an improvement in US-North Korean relations would put in place the conditions required for the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea. Amid intense expectations on the part of the families of abductees, this proposal could actually be the last opportunity to normalize relations between Japan and North Korea, so Japan will need the determination to accept this challenge. As Prime Minister Koizumi’s experience shows, building a strong personal relationship of trust with the US president is essential to negotiations with North Korea. Right now, the only person with such a relationship is Prime Minister Abe. The resolution of the abductions issue and the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea could likely become the starting point for a peaceful and prosperous Northeast Asia.

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