



## ***EDITORIAL NOTE***

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This issue of the Journal includes a set of studies on Korea coordinated by three scholars specialised on Korea: Jimmyn Parc, EunSook Yang and Stephen Ranger. It includes eight articles dealing with several key topics in order to understand the present situation in the Korean Peninsula.

It focus principally on inter-Korean relations and the Peace process, considering the possible role of the European Union and ASEAN. Adding to this, an article explains the China relations with the two Koreas and two articles try to clarify the Japan's strategy towards the Korean Peninsula and the recent events that worsened the relationships between Japan and South Korea.

One of the critical issues, the negotiations for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the relationship of the United States with the two Koreas was initially written for the publication in this issue but, taking into consideration the results of the negotiations between the United States and North Korea in 2019 and the nuclear standoff, we have preferred to wait until the present impasse is clarified and see whether an interim deal is reached or a deep negotiating change takes place. In any case, we hope that the fog will vanish in the coming weeks and we can include this study in the monograph on Korea that we hope to publish soon.

In any case, we consider this study a fundamental study, given the important regional and global implications of the US policies, in addition to the inertia in the present negotiating process. The current situation and current negotiating assumptions are significantly different from those initiated with the Six-Party talks. Then, it was intended to prevent North Korea from achieving the status of a nuclear country. In those days, the United States was still the dominant power in Northeast Asia's regional system and North Korea sought US security guarantees, economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, the normalization of relations with the United States and Japan and the negotiation of a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

A second period started when president Obama arrived to the White House. The new administration wanted to change the course and developed a policy of engagement with North Korea. However, after the second nuclear test on 25 May 2009, the Obama administration changed drastically its engagement policy and adopted a hardline policy, The United States maintained, during President Obama's administrations, the policy of strategic patience. However, the situation worsened once Kim Jong-un rose to power. In the last two years of the Obama administration, nuclear and ballistic missile programs were tested. North Korea, in a short period of time, took significant steps not only to consolidate its nuclear status but also to hit with long range missiles the U.S. territory beyond Guam. As a consequence, President Obama studied the possibility of a preemptive attack. But the intelligence services and the

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Pentagon, after a thorough study, considered the attack not feasible, based on its possible results. The policy of strategic patience had failed.

In this impasse, Donald Trump won the presidential elections and from the beginning of his presidency considered the North Korean problem as the principal problem affecting the US security. In 2017, after constant diplomatic and political insistence on China, the US got the final approval of new and tougher sanctions on North Korea by the United Nations Security Council. However, the regional security environment had essentially changed. China had achieved a new regional status and the *statu quo* in Asia Pacific had changed during the former presidency of Barack Obama.

After that, in 2018, new and increased sanctions at the UN were no longer an appropriate policy for dealing with North Korea. Neither China nor Russia were willing to accept the imposition of new sanctions and both states did not strictly comply with the Security Council resolutions. Investments, people, oil and black-market commerce continuously flowed across the borders. North Korea, for its part, achieved some adaptation to the new economic barriers and sanctions imposed.

For all this, a US unilateral approach to solve the nuclear problem had clear limitations and Donald Trump in 2018 moved to a policy of engagement maintaining in parallel the policy of “maximum pressure”. However with very limited results.

These limitations have been verified after the three summits held between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump in 2018 and 2019. No agreement has been reached. Both parties are far apart on the definition and timing for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the lifting of sanctions. North Korea wanted a process of gradual agreements and a denuclearization process that will take time, going in parallel with the gradual lifting of major economic sanctions imposed to North Korea. And the United States, for its part, wanted initially a big deal, not trusting North Korea that, far from dismantling its weapons facilities, after the first summit in Singapore, has been expanding them and taking steps to conceal these efforts from the United States. The United States asked for a full inventory of nuclear programs for verification and to start dismantling irreversibly its nuclear and missile facilities and requested to North Korea to give up all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons before any sanctions relief.

North Korea did not agree to this central proposal and got the support from China, Russia and South Korea for its position of taking gradual steps. Neither North Korea trust the United States and, in this process, tried to slice “the salami” too thin, demanding the building of a climate of confidence first by lifting sanctions, offering in parallel some denuclearization steps and asking for international legally binding security guarantees not only US specific security guarantees. Thus, the denuclearization process and building a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula should last a significant period of time and done only in a multilateral framework, given the Northeast Asia new geopolitical and security environment. North Korea will need also deterrence, not merely a peace treaty, in this difficult regional environment.

Nevertheless, the US negotiating position changed in 2019, in particular after the John Bolton resignation, adopting a more flexible and incremental approach, in order to resume talks. But in vain. The incremental approach offered by the US, first in the contact group and later in informal conversations, was considered insufficient by North Korea.

The implications of this negotiating process are critical. The personal connection of Donald Trump with Kim Jong-un apparently is clearly insufficient to move the negotiating process. Adding to this, a clear cut division exists in the US political establishment. Nancy Pelosi does not believe that North Korea intends to denuclearise and the former Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats, said publicly that “we currently assess that North Korea will



seek to retain its WMD capabilities, and is unlikely to completely give up its nuclear weapons and production capabilities”.

There are also concerns regarding the implications of the negotiations for the US future presence in the Korean Peninsula, once denuclearization and reunification are coordinated with the gradual withdrawal of US troops.

Moreover, the US allies are worried after the publication in the newspapers of a proposal to dismantle the long range missiles- not the short and middle range missiles- in the incremental process of negotiations. Adding to this, the US was silent during the continuous testing of short-range missiles by North Korea during 2019, violating the UN Security Council resolutions. The risk of decoupling is evident.

Other important concern is the following: easing the US demands with the new negotiating methodology involves giving a precious time to the consolidation of North Korea as a *de facto* nuclear country. This result is not acceptable and clashes in addition with the negotiating philosophy adopted by the US with Iran. Thus, the possible global and regional implications (“going nuclear”) are very serious.

Additionally, we can say that, at the regional level, the role of South Korea is clearly limited. South Korea can not be a mediator in the scientific meaning of the term, but it can use its good offices, especially between the US and North Korea. Adding to this, the UN sanctions to North Korea and the geopolitical security issues generate insurmountable barriers that block the freedom of movement needed for expanding the inter-Korean relations (unless South Korea, giving the top priority to unification, considers appropriate an Acheson line, changing the traditional security rationale, when North Korea and China are flexing their military muscles).

These are some considerations on the US policies that can clarify the content of this issue of the Journal.

The Journal finally ends presenting an article on the terrorist threat assesment in 2020, a traditional contribution of professor Rohan Gunaratna to this Journal.

Let me finish giving my thanks to the coordinators and the authors of the different articles for their generous contribution.