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Open Session on the Situation on the Korean Peninsula
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There are at least five common misconceptions about North Korea that are making it difficult for policy makers to come up with an effective set of actions to deal with that country. This statement discusses those misconceptions and then makes recommendations for a sustained policy to support American interests and those of our allies.

1. Misconception One: Nuclear deterrence does not work in the case of North Korea.

In fact, American nuclear deterrence has been effective against all three generations of the Kim dynasty.

North Korea first gained access to nuclear technology and materials in 1962 when it established, with Soviet assistance, the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center. In 1993, when Kim il Sung was still dictator, the IAEA conducted a series of inspections of Yongbyon, and announced that North Korea had diverted plutonium from the reprocessing plant there for nuclear weapons. In 2002, now with Kim Jong Il in charge, North Korea admitted publicly that it had a clandestine nuclear weapons program, and conducted two nuclear weapons tests. Now the third Kim dictator, Kim Jong Un, has openly claimed that his country has nuclear weapons, and tested them four times.

In other words, North Korea has had nuclear weapons for about 25 years. Yet it has not used them. It is not because of a lack of delivery systems. Crude large nuclear weapons that are well within North Korea's technical capacity could have been, and still can be, delivered against South Korea, Japan, and even the United States, by submarine, disguised fishing boat, or bomber aircraft.

North Korea has not used nuclear weapons for the same reason no other country has used them against another nuclear power or its allies – fear of retaliation. The Kim regime wants above all to maintain its ruling position and survive. Using a nuclear weapon against the United States or its allies means certain destruction of North Korea, the end of the regime, and death of the current Kim despot and his family.

Intercontinental ballistic missiles are simply another delivery system for North Korean nuclear weapons. Because of the limitations of North Korean testing, their nuclear missile force will always be of unknown reliability. North Korean ICBMs will be weapons for bargaining and

blustering, not for delivering against a country with thousands of highly reliable, thoroughly tested nuclear systems.

2. *Misconception Two: Sanctions have not worked against North Korea*

In fact, strict sanctions have never been attempted against North Korea.

As Nicholas Eberstadt reminded us recently in an article in *Commentary Magazine*, the international sanctions against North Korea have been only moderately punitive, and have been weakly enforced.

We know that reduction in outside support can destroy the North Korean economy. This is what happened when Soviet support collapsed in the early 90s, and overall foreign merchandise coming into North Korea dropped by half. The Korean economy seized up, and there was a mass famine. Even Kim Jong Il had to make concessions and reforms to stay in power.

In the last five years, based on a combination of a limited and controlled private market system within the country and a restoration of inflows of food and merchandise from other countries, North Korea has improved and stabilized its economy. Yet it remains vulnerable to sanctions. International sanctions against North Korea are less strict than those against either Syria or Iran. Many countries are paying even these sanctions lip service, while permitting North Korean slave labor to work in their countries and turning a blind eye to criminal activity run out of North Korean embassies.

Part of the work in putting a true economic squeeze on North Korea is up to China. However, the US can influence that by secondary sanctions against Chinese companies that are successfully violating the sanctions. The rest of the work is divided among many countries. The United States is beginning to monitor sanctions implementation by other countries, almost all of which can be shamed into tightening sanctions, as was Malaysia following the assassination of Kim Jong Un's half-brother in the Kuala Lumpur airport. It will take a sustained intelligence and diplomatic effort to build international economic sanctions that will cause real pain to North Korea's leaders, but it has not been done yet.

3. *Misconception Three: Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons.*

In fact, North Korea has bartered some of its nuclear weapons programs for political and economic concessions.

It is true that North Korea will comply only and barely with provisions of agreements it signs that can be inspected, and it will hide as much as it can of other parts of its program. Under the 1994 Agreed Framework North Korea concealed its uranium enrichment program, but it did agree to give up its plutonium program. In 2008, the Six Party talks had produced an

agreement that controlled both the plutonium and uranium nuclear weapons programs. North Korea balked at the end of the negotiations and refused to agree to effective verification.

Although there are many advantages to North Korea from having nuclear weapons, there are also heavy costs. The negotiating record shows that North Korea cannot be trusted any further than it can be inspected, but that it is also willing to give up at least some of its nuclear weapons in return for American economic and political concessions.

For the future, the international community should not accept North Korea as a nuclear state, and the objective of complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all North Korea's nuclear weapons should remain the ultimate objective of the United States and the entire international community. However, while retaining that overall objective, the United States may learn something and may gain something by patient, well prepared and skeptical negotiations with the North Koreans about their nuclear programs.

4. Misconception Four: Time is on North Korea's side.

In fact, important trends are running against North Korea.

Its primary supporter, China, is increasingly considering it a liability, and is actively discussing with the United States the possibility of North Korean collapse. Its economy hangs by a thread, vulnerable to internal mismanagement, rampant corruption, and external reductions of support. It cannot feed itself. Pyongyang is a Potemkin village of faux prosperity and modernity as the rest of the country struggles to survive. The physical condition of its soldiers is deteriorating and it cannot afford to modernize its military equipment. The number and level of defectors is increasing.

Among its roughly 25 million people it has been able to identify and educate the several thousand scientists and engineers required to develop nuclear weapons, missiles and cyber-attacks. It has supported them with first call on its tiny industrial sector; using the hard currency it earns through criminal activities, it purchases on the international black and gray markets the remaining components these programs need.

North Korea is no more than an extreme example of a pattern we have seen many times in history, a pattern with an unbroken record of regime failure. Dictators attempt to maintain their grip on power through a combination of repression, nationalism and materialism. They ultimately fail. The Kim dynasty so far has been unflinching in its repression, but its nationalism is artificial and it consistently fails to meet the material needs of its people. The wheels will come off sooner or later. The United States should pursue policies that make that date as soon as possible, but recognize that the pressure from within North Korea will be the primary cause of collapse.

5. *Misconception Five: American policy towards North Korea has failed.*

By any objective measure, American policy on the Korean Peninsula has been a signal success.

At the end of the Korean War in 1953, the Korean Peninsula was divided into two countries, one an ally of the United States and the other an ally of the Soviet Union. North Korea had most of the industrial capacity and natural resources on the Peninsula. With China's and the Soviet Union's approval it had attempted to conquer South Korea by force of arms, and was still determined to do so.

Sixty-five years later South Korea is still America's ally, it is the 4th largest economy in Asia and the 11th largest in the world, it has transitioned peacefully from a dictatorship to a democracy, and North Korea has no chance of conquering it successfully.

North of the DMZ is a country that has nuclear weapons, but has no allies or friends, is among the poorest in the world and is a brutal dictatorship.

To judge American policy on the Korean Peninsula by its failure to achieve one of its many objectives, prevention of a North Korean nuclear capability, is both narrow and dangerous. Any country that is willing to sacrifice the well-being of its people and endure international diplomatic and economic isolation can develop nuclear weapons. The technology and the component parts are widely available.

6. *The United States has no policy choices but to attack North Korea.*

In fact, building on what it has learned in dealing with North Korea over the years, the United States has many policy choices.

American policy towards North Korea must evolve to meet North Korea's advances in developing long-range missiles, nuclear weapons and cyber weapons. There have also been changes in the security environment in Northeast Asia that must be taken into account. However, the successes as well as the shortcomings of past American policy should be considered as the United States formulates policies for the future to deal with North Korea.

Yes, North Korea has been able to develop nuclear weapons. They have had them for 25 years. However, the Kim dynasty, with its finely-honed survival instincts and skills, is as subject to deterrence from the actual use of those weapons as have been all governments, totalitarian or democratic, that have developed a nuclear capability since the atomic age began. Although the development of nuclear weapons has been a high priority for North Korea, over the years it has been willing to trade parts of its program for political and economic gains. While never recognizing it as a nuclear state, other countries can shape North Korea's nuclear weapons program through negotiations. Sanctions against North Korea can be much stronger than they ever have been, cause greater economic pain, especially to the members of Kim dynasty and its

immediate supporters. Many trends are running against North Korea that the United States can nurture and reinforce.

Military preparedness, and the use of military force are vital components of American policy towards North Korea. The United States and the Republic of Korea have developed, exercised and resourced a contingency plan to turn back a North Korean attack, destroy the North Korean armed forces, and take control of the entire peninsula. North Korea knows that it will lose a major war if it starts one. Damage will be heavy on all sides, but there is no question about the outcome. North Korea keeps its provocative actions below the threshold that it believes will trigger a major conflict it knows it will lose.

The United States and the Republic of Korea have been less effective in responding to North Korean provocations below the level of major attack – from the capture of the *Pueblo* to the sinking of the South Korean frigate *Cheonan* to cyber-attacks. Responses that have been effective are serious military operations like the chopping down of the cherry tree in the DMZ in 1976, backed by major force deployments to South Korea, and the preparations to bomb the Yongbyon reactor in 1994. Every time the US-ROK response has been relevant and strong, supported by contingency plan preparations that make it clear that if North Korea escalates the Alliance is ready for major war, North Korea backs down. It will later in the future commit further and different provocations, but it will retreat in the near term.

The United States and the Republic of Korea should respond promptly and disproportionately to North Korean provocations such as missile tests that land on or near American, South Korean or Japanese territory and nuclear tests in the Pacific Ocean, as well as traditional limited military provocations by special forces or regular military units. North Korea will understand that the actions are retaliation for what North Korea has done. At the same time, when these responses take place, the Combined Forces Command of the United States and the Republic of Korea must raise its readiness level so the North Koreans know that if they escalate the confrontation, they risk starting a war they know they will lose.

Finally, the kryptonite that can weaken North Korea is information from beyond its borders. Subjected to an unrelenting barrage of government propaganda, ordinary citizens, soldiers, and even many in the favored elites do not understand just how bad things are in their country compared to the rest of the world. About one fifth of North Koreans have access to cell phones that connect to cell towers on the Chinese side of the Yalu River, allowing penetration of information from the outside. Texts to these cell phones can provide subversive truth. There are many other ways that Koreans can be informed about the true state of their country, countering the relentless propaganda and repression of the Kim regime. Cell towers can be extended; CDs and thumb drives can be smuggled in; radio and TV stations can be beamed there. While it is very difficult for ordinary citizens to revolt against the regime, the objective is to separate the Kim family from its primary support – the secret police, the Army and the propaganda ministry. In other equally brutal totalitarian states, these elites have realized that life would be better for their country if they replaced the dictator, and once that process starts, it is hard to stop. Such will be North Korea's fate.