

3 The Yoon Government's North Korea Nuclear Policy: Challenges and Tasks

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Abstract

The new Yoon Seok-youl government has set out the Complete, Verified, and Irreversible Denuclearization (CVID) of North Korea as its goal for sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula. However, the circumstances for denuclearizing North Korea are far from ideal. North Korea's attitude remains highly provocative, and the external conditions are not conducive to denuclearization. Above all, the Yoon government must utilize effectively two strategic assets at its disposal - deterrence and sanctions - in order to deter North Korean provocations and facilitate North Korean denuclearization. Further, there is a need to design a new denuclearization roadmap that will strengthen South Korea's ability to play a leading role, be aligned with realities, and most of all, to bring about substantive denuclearization. Given prior experience and harsh current realities, the Yoon government may not realize complete denuclearization during its five-year term. However, denuclearization can be earned along with peace, if the government of the Republic of Korea (ROK) adheres to principles and common sense without being narrowly focused on short-term results, works toward building a normal inter-Korean relationship, and creates the environment in which the people of both Koreas can live together in safety.

※ The views expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author and are not to be construed as representing those of the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU).

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The Yoon Seok-youl government took office on May 10. It declared its aim to be turning South Korea into “a Global Pivotal State that contributes to liberty, peace and prosperity.” Further, in order to realize this goal, the government has set itself two policy tasks, to “radically reinforce the capacity to respond to the North Korean nuclear and missile threat” and to “pursue North Korean denuclearization” thus highlighting responding to the North Korean nuclear issue as being a priority. However, the new government has been handed an uncertain and difficult situation. North Korea’s provocations have become so aggressive as to endanger South Korea’s security. North Korea has completely ignored the continued efforts by South Korea and the international community at dialogue, expectations for denuclearization are becoming lower, and policy fatigue is becoming more evident. This is why the burden that the Yoon government faces with respect to denuclearization and peace on the Korean peninsula is heavier than any previous government in Seoul. How should it respond and overcome these difficulties? This article seeks to interpret the issues and suggest ways that the ROK government can respond to. It examines the issues in the following order: ① analysis of previous government policies, ② assessment of the policy environment, ③ the setting of goals, strategies and mechanisms, and ④ suggestion for strategic considerations.

Policy Review

The Yoon government’s North Korea denuclearization policy must begin with an assessment of the Moon government’s record. This is necessary to ensure the coherency of the policy environment that the new government faces. The Moon government’s denuclearization policy turned out to be a failure. North Korea ended its moratorium on ICBM tests, and is turning back the nuclear clock by restoring its nuclear test site. The Moon government ultimately failed to make progress on the nuclear issue. Indeed, since the Eighth Korean Workers’ Party Congress in 2021, North Korea has made clear a goal of further developing its strategic weapons systems, and in first half of 2022, has sought to continue and further raise the intensity of its provocations with ICBM and SLBM tests. The failure of the Moon government was a consequence of a range of causes, thus the

new government has many lessons to draw from them. But this article will consider what can be learnt primarily from the Moon government's perception and assessment of the policy environment, how they had designed and pursued policy, and the flexibility of their approach.

First, reviewing the process of policy design offers lessons on how important it is to calmly assess North Korea's position and strategic views. If the government misunderstands and misinterprets the North Korean position, either under or overestimating North Korean strategy, then South Korean strategy will be distorted at the planning stage. This will negatively impact the possibility that the government's goals will ultimately be achieved. Seen from such a perspective, there is a need to reexamine the Moon government's perception and assessment of the situation early in its time in office. In early 2018, it believed that the North sought dialogue in order to normalize its status within the international community – this purportedly reflected a strategic shift in Pyongyang's position.¹⁾ However, such an assessment overlooked the possibility that, having claimed to have completed its nuclear program (as of November 2017), its participation in denuclearization dialogue may have represented a set of strategic moves aimed at sanctions relief. Policymakers in Seoul thus largely ignored the possibility that North Korea's expressed desire to denuclearize was not sincere. Further, their assessment of the situation also gave rise to excessive confidence in their ability to help North Korea 'normalize' its status and hence, resolve the North Korean nuclear problem.

Second, North Korea's nuclear weapons program has served to highlight just how viewing the security issue as vital, naturally and rightly, is important for policy designing. Security can only be achieved when existential risks are actively reflected in policy and where actors take responsibility in the process. Yet, in the face of North Korean short and medium range missile tests that targeted the South, and tactical nuclear weapons development, the Moon government did not revise its policy. Further, it severely

1) In some quarters, North Korea's declaration that it had completed its nuclear program was interpreted as meaning Pyongyang felt it had no need to further strengthen its nuclear capabilities. In other words, the one part of the nuclear-economy dual development line inherited from prior leaders had been accomplished. Thus, North Korea was expected to now pursue economic reform and opening, economic growth, and normalization of the country's status internationally. Such an assessment placed considerable weight on North Korea's tactical declarations, making expansive inferences from these declarations while ignoring the actual state of the country's nuclear capabilities.

misinterpreted how its actions weakened the strategic value and role of South Korea from 2018 onward, even in 2016-17 when it had demonstrated significant leadership through international cooperation. Consequently, denuclearization policy was designed around the contradictory notions that, on the one hand, the US-North Korean relationship was central, but on the other, this relationship could be influenced by the inter-Korean relationship. What is more, North Korean denunciations led some in the South Korean government and in the ruling coalition to denigrate the US-ROK Working Group, calling for its dissolution, and damaged ties between US and South Korea – a relationship that had hitherto been hailed as crucial to denuclearization.

Third, policy is not a goal in itself, it is a tool. Hence, where the goals of policy remain unchanged, adhering to principles where possible must not preclude a flexible response to changing circumstances. In this regard, the Moon government failed to modify its policies in a concerted way in the latter half of its term in office. The government faced challenges that required a significant turns in policy. Early in its time in office, circumstances required the government to adopt strong sanctions to deter North Korean provocations and to force North Korea back to dialogue. As a result, in late 2017, North Korea signaled its willingness to compromise, and the government rapidly transitioned from a posture of pressure to one of cooperation. But from 2020 onwards, North Korea itself switched to a strategy of pressuring the South and the US. The North Korean nuclear issue had reached an impasse,²⁾ yet the Moon government continued to push the same policy line.³⁾ The government had three options, (1) deterrence, (2) pressure, and (3)

2) In December 2019, at the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), Kim Jong Un asserted that "if the US persists in its policy hostile towards the DPRK, there will never be the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and that the DPRK will steadily develop indispensable and prerequisite strategic weapons for national security until the US rolls back its hostile policy and a lasting and durable peace regime is in place." Further, at the Eighth Party Congress of the KWP in January 2021, strengthening the country's nuclear forces was made a concrete strategic objective. Hence, from around 2020 onward, one can argue that North Korea moved to a strategy of pressure through strengthening its nuclear capabilities.

3) President Moon clearly stated in his 2017 Liberation Day Address that "The purpose of enhanced sanctions and pressure against the North is not to heighten military tensions but to bring it back to the negotiating table." But from 2020 onward, North Korea has refused to engage in dialogue, and made clear its determination to further advance its nuclear program. Subsequently, even as it has moved to act upon these statements, the Moon government did not transition to a policy of sanctions and pressure to bring North Korea back to negotiations. This is not unrelated to the excessive optimism that the government had regarding the mood of 2018, which meant that the government did not prepare a Plan B for the contingency that circumstances could change.

cooperation. Having rapidly transitioned from a policy of pressure to one of cooperation, it completely failed to transition back from cooperation to pressure when the former had failed. The rigidity of its policies, which were not malleable to changing realities, formed the backdrop for the subsequent blatant and insulting attacks on the South Korean government by the North.⁴⁾ Moreover, instead of responding flexibly to changing circumstances, events were misinterpreted to allow the government to maintain its existing policies.

Policy Environment

The North Korean nuclear issue is an international diplomatic and security problem. Hence, the Yoon Seok-young government's policy planning must go beyond considerations of inter-Korean military issues and also consider the influence of a range of regional and international challenges. Among these, the following three factors can be considered independent variables and key in constituting the policy environment, and thus will exercise a significant impact on the Yoon government's North Korean nuclear policy: ① North Korea's capabilities and strategy, ② US strategy toward North Korea and Sino-US relations, and ③ the impact of geopolitical crisis. Efforts to distinguish challenges resulting from shifts in these elements of the policy environment must precede the creation of a denuclearization roadmap and the pursuit of denuclearization.

First, the most important part of the policy environment is the character of North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities and strategy. If North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities advance, the prospects for denuclearization become proportionately worse. Stronger capabilities raise Pyongyang's expected utility, and raise the costs of denuclearization. What is more, as nuclear capabilities are further strengthened, the North Korean leadership may become less cautious and restrained in its approach, and more blind and aggressive in its strategy.

4) After June 2020, Kim Yo Jong's public statements marked a significant rise in the intensity of North Korea's verbal attacks on the South. At the same time, North Korea took issue with South Korea's attitude to the United States, and sought to foment discord between Seoul and Washington by demanding the dissolution of the US-ROK Working Group, openly seeking to drive a wedge between the two.

The acquisition of a second strike capability, and the question of whether the North can actually deploy tactical nuclear weapons⁵⁾ will likely anchor how North Korean strategic thinking changes going forward.⁶⁾ Were North Korea to acquire both tactical and strategic nuclear weapons, then its military and diplomatic options will grow while the strategic burden on South Korea will increase dramatically. The North's test of both ICBMs and SRBMs in provocations aimed at South Korea and the United States on May 25 gives us some indication of the direction that North Korean nuclear strategic thinking is headed. In addition to this, we must be vigilant in meeting the potentially foreseeable and difficult situations that could arise were North Korea to acquire a wider range of nuclear capabilities.⁷⁾

Second, another important part of the policy environment that the Yoon government faces is Washington's North Korea policy and US-China relations. US policy toward North Korea directly affects the environment in which North Korea advances its nuclear and missile programs. A passive North Korea policy in Washington creates an environment in which the North may misinterpret US intentions and policy aims. Conversely, the more active US policy is toward North Korea, the more conducive to denuclearization the situation can become as dynamism around the nuclear issue increases. For instance, if Washington were to radically boost its extended deterrence capabilities, this in itself could deny North Korean expectations. Further, the policy that the US adopts toward China will also be important for the North Korean nuclear issue. If the US is determined to force China to cooperate with UN sanctions resolutions targeting the North, and if it is prepared

5) North Korea seeks to acquire a range of tactical nuclear weapons and deploy them within as short a period as possible. The South needs to respond with cutting-edge conventional forces and effectively foreclose the possibility for unintended escalation (from North Korea's point of view).

6) Anchoring Effects may mean that if North Korea acquires second strike capability vis-à-vis the United States and the capacity to hit the South with tactical nuclear weapons, North Korean leadership may view their interests as being better served by such capabilities than by stopping further nuclear and missile development or reducing their existing capacity.

7) If the North Korean leadership believes their prospects for survival are grim, and thus were they to conclude that it is difficult for their regime to survive, they might decide to improve their prospects through incomplete denuclearization. For instance, especially in the long-term, we cannot rule out the possibility that North Korea will propose scrapping its strategic nuclear forces in exchange for the normalization of the US-North Korean relationship, and the removal of sanctions, while being allowed to keep some tactical nuclear weapons – i.e., a form of 'incomplete denuclearization.' However such a scenario is premised upon US cooperation. It would mean the abandonment of the joint US-South Korean goal of 'complete denuclearization,' and hence, it appears exceedingly unlikely to happen at present.

to respond to unfair Chinese coercion directed at South Korea with active counter-coercion, then this may help create an environment highly conducive to policymaking in Seoul.

Third, the historic shifts in the strategic environment caused by the Ukraine crisis may have a meaningful impact on the North Korean nuclear issue. The world has been highly focused on Ukraine, and has become less interested in the North Korea nuclear issue. Washington views the Ukrainian issue as a central challenge to its global leadership and has focused all its available resources on it, so it may become relatively lax in its management of the North Korea nuclear issue. Further, the US is likely to actively demand continued cooperation from South Korea on European issues, and this may push the North Korean nuclear issue further down the US-South Korean alliance agenda. At the same time, the Ukraine crisis creates challenges for North Korea. North Korea will be interested to see whether Washington's exclusive focus on Europe creates a strategic gap which it can utilize. North Korea's recent provocative ICBM tests are likely related. North Korea will closely watch how a relatively small and weak state, Ukraine resists Russia, a major regional power. It would be fortunate if North Korea clearly understands the reality that Russia is unable to use nuclear weapons. But if North Korea's leaders were to delude themselves into believing that it is not impossible for them to prevail in a war against the US, this could have negative consequences.

Goals, Strategy and Mechanisms

The Yoon government has made its North Korean nuclear policy goal the 'complete denuclearization [of North Korea].' Sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula through the complete and verified denuclearization is a major part of their overall policy agenda. They are seeking to make a reality of the CV (Complete, Verified) part of CVID (Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Dismantlement) denuclearization, which has been the international community's North Korea denuclearization goal since the first term of the George W. Bush administration. CVID can be interpreted as going beyond even physical disassembly and dismantlement of nuclear facilities, being a more comprehensive form of denuclearization. The Yoon government's policy design indicates significant efforts have been made to be

more realistic by offering flexibility regarding some reversible actions taken by the North in the process of irreversible denuclearization.⁸⁾

Is the Yoon government formulating some kind of grand strategy to achieve this goal? As yet, they have not released a name for such a strategy. But if we examine the three tasks the government plans to pursue in its agenda, and policy pledges made during the presidential election, we can infer what the principles and core content of their North Korea denuclearization strategy will be. It is considering and will likely emphasize the following core principles and directions in its North Korea denuclearization policy: ① strengthen the power of South Korean leadership, ② maintain a principled and consistent approach to negotiations with the North, ③ make strategic use of North Korean sanctions, and ④ pursue conditional engagement with the North.

First of all, the Yoon government plans to pursue North Korean denuclearization through strong cooperation with the international community. The essence of such cooperation is the firm maintenance of sanctions targeting the North and their strict implementation. In order to do so, the Yoon government plans to work with allies and international institutions, and also seek to induce Chinese and Russian engagement. Further, by emphasizing principles and consistency in negotiations with the North, it seems likely to focus on a ‘process’ that can contribute to real substantive denuclearization, rather than dialogue for its own sake. In particular, ‘substantive progress’ toward North Korean denuclearization is a stated precondition for peace agreement negotiations and the pursuit of cooperation with respect to inter-Korean economic and development plans. Hence, peace agreements and inter-Korean economic cooperation are apparently not being offered as inducements to dialogue. That said, neither “substantive progress” nor “substantive denuclearization” have been concretely defined, nor have specific standards for what constitutes either of these two goals been set out. Arguably, this indicates that the Yoon government will take a flexible and changeable approach to decisions made by North Korea in pursuit of denuclearization.

8) The Yoon government does not directly mention this (ir)reversibility component, but this does not mean it has excluded or has abandoned irreversibility. When one looks at their policy agenda, which links the sustainability of peace and the goal of the creation of a peace regime to complete denuclearization, one can argue that the latter obviously and necessarily includes irreversibility.

The Yoon government has also set out a mechanism that connects its denuclearization goals with its strategy. First, the Yoon government aims to achieve its strategy by ‘strengthening Korean leadership.’ This reflects the view that South Korea is the main stakeholder to issues on the Korean peninsula, and the direct target of the North Korean nuclear threat. Hence, the Yoon government plans to proactively lead international cooperation on future denuclearization, and proactively manage inter-Korean relations. In so doing, it seeks to actively ensure that South Korean interests and its perspective are reflected throughout the denuclearization process. The Yoon government is also considering policy projection mechanisms that ‘directly target the North Korean people.’ It holds to the principle that denuclearization is not simply an intergovernmental issue, but a broader policy area directly linked to future lives of the people living on both sides of the inter-Korean divide, i.e., the future of the nation. Hence, actively finding ways to improve the human rights and humanitarian situation facing the North Korean people forms a major part of their denuclearization policy agenda.⁹⁾

Strategic Consideration 1: Strengthening Deterrence Capabilities

The pressing concern of policy with respect to North Korean denuclearization is strengthening the capacity to deter North Korean missile and nuclear provocations. North Korean provocations are a part of its efforts to develop its nuclear capabilities. As the capacity to deter such efforts is strengthened, the utility the North can gain from further nuclear development lessens. What is more, the resources invested in such efforts are sunk, and a sanctions regime that is strengthened as a result of provocations brings further economic and social losses and damage. Strengthening deterrent capabilities is the most important and fundamental response. It has three potential beneficial effects: it can lessen North Korea’s motivation to engage in further provocations, increase the costs associated with holding nuclear weapons, and realistically and substantially counter the threat posed

⁹⁾The Yoon government’s denuclearization policy in itself ultimately is premised on the view that the goal is unachievable without addressing the issue of change within North Korea. Given the unavoidable sanctions in place to induce denuclearization, this appears to be a highly realistic approach.

by North Korea's nuclear program. Further, given North Korea's continued ICBM tests and the impending seventh nuclear test, strengthening deterrence is clearly a pressing task for policy to directly and immediately impact North Korean decision making.

Both South Korea and the US sharing this view held a summit on May 21 and agreed to strengthen US-ROK combined defensive capabilities to meet the growing North Korean nuclear threat. Both affirmed that nuclear weapons were a means of extended deterrence and confirmed again that the US would use the full range of defensive capabilities including conventional weapons to fulfill its commitments. This is the first time that a US-ROK summit has specified and affirmed the means by which extended deterrence is to be effected. Further, the leaders of the two countries also agreed on the timing and coordination of the deployment of strategic assets, and the expansion in the scope and scale of joint exercises. For deterrence to be credible it must be visible, hence this agreement will contribute to strengthening deterrence.¹⁰⁾ Moreover, agreeing to restart the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG) was a rather positive development insofar as it creates a forum for the discussion of and cooperation regarding the strengthening of deterrence.

In spite of these successes from the summit, given the severe threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons, the Yoon government must continually consider how to acquire stronger and a more malleable deterrence posture. In other words, South Korea needs to radically strengthen its own independent capacity to deter the North and seek further measures from Washington to strengthen extended deterrence. The urgency and necessity of increasing limited capabilities to counter the North Korean nuclear threat requires a concentration on missile defense and increasing airpower. In this regard, the ROK should consider diverting the estimated 3 trillion won required to build a light aircraft carrier over the next ten years into building the Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system and

10) The basic means by which the North is deterred is by credibly conveying to it the determination and capabilities of both the US and South Korea. Some deny or underestimate the deterrent effect from the deployment of strategic assets and of joint exercises, and the North Korean leadership may, in reality, ignore such deterrence posture. But simply by directly showing what capabilities can 'actually' be used and sowing doubt about whether they 'actually' would or would not be used, the necessary conditions of deterrence are satisfied. Further, regardless of a particular government's views and the decision making of the leader, if North Korea is attentive to the 'system of commitments' constituted by an actually operable deterrent capability, it can have preventive effects with respect to potential escalations resulting from accidental clashes.

strengthening the Kill-Chain system. This is not because possessing light aircraft carriers is not important, but because it is less needed and less urgent. Further, even with the resumption of the EDSCG, the Yoon government should seek to avoid using this forum in accordance with the will and interests of the US, which is the provider of deterrence for the ROK. There is also a need to consider consultations through the EDSCG and Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD) on the Korean acquisition of nuclear submarines to further boost deterrence capabilities.

Strategic Consideration 2: Strategic Sanctions

North Korean sanctions are the second core pillar in the Yoon government's denuclearization policy. Sanctions exert significant influence on the strategic environment that North and South Korea face. First, just like deterrence, they place a range of unavoidable costs on North Korea. Deterrence thwarts the realization of the expectations that motivate North Korea's nuclear development. In the same way, sanctions exert an influence on the strategic calculations and beliefs of Kim Jong Un who apparently believes that he 'absolutely needs' nuclear weapons to maintain his power. The tough economic sanctions that have been enforced since 2016 have made damage to the North Korean economy unavoidable. The immiseration of the North Korean economy that arises from the prolongation of sanctions will also likely drive change to North Korea's social and economic order.¹¹⁾ Changes within North Korea will positively impact the public support for a regime, and will clearly negatively impact Kim Jong Un's efforts to retain power, which is what he thinks is most important.

On the other hand, sanctions create a positive environment for South Korea. As the latter half of 2017 confirmed, strong sanctions are an effective, strategic asset that can force North Korea to the negotiating table. In 2018 and 2019, North Korea demanded that sanctions be rescinded, and could not simply walk away from negotiations during the

11) Hwang Tae-hee, "The successes of North Korea sanctions and implications," (Korea University Ilmin International Relations Institute, IIRI Online Series, vol. 102, 2022.5.4.), pp. 2~3, <https://ibook.korea.ac.kr/View/PO4B9XJAO7B2?_ga=2.211815508.1308951609.1653613913-1531166105.1653613913> (Accessed: May 4, 2022).

summits held during that time. Tough sanctions had the effect of binding the North to negotiations. What is more, strong and flexible sanctions can also foreclose the possibility of the North engaging in subterfuge. Hence, sanctions targeting Pyongyang are a necessary condition to drive North Korean denuclearization. At the same time, they are also a crucial strategic asset in dealing with the North. Through sanctions, it is possible to raise the possibility of both voluntary and involuntary cooperation by the North, and in the process, to naturally further strengthen South Korea's control over events. The Yoon government's firm establishment of the principle that UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions cannot be rescinded without complete denuclearization represents an assessment of such strategic necessities and policy imperatives.

The Yoon government's approach to North Korean sanctions going forward must focus on consolidating the UN sanctions regime and on changing the mechanisms by which sanctions are enforced. First, the effectiveness of the existing UN sanctions resolutions must be further strengthened, and new sanctions must be prepared in advance for circumstances in which they might be needed. But as strategic conflict has rapidly deepened between the international liberal order, principally the US and EU on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other, it has become increasingly difficult to expect cooperation between UNSC members. This development means that the Yoon government would be wise to keep in mind plans that would further strengthen strategic cooperation with China and Russia.

Second, there is a need to modify the sanctions mechanism to raise the effectiveness of sanctions. Simply gradually raising the intensity of sanctions in line with the intensity of North Korean provocations, like in the past, does not account for North Korea's capacity to adapt to sanctions, nor the uncooperativeness of China and Russia. This means that sanctions are no longer sufficiently effective. Hence, as an alternative, after sanctions have been raised to their maximum possible strength, there is a need to find ways to shift to mechanisms that allow for the strategic use of sanctions exemptions and relief in response to North Korean cooperation. In the same logical context, it is worth noting that the May US-ROK Summit's joint communique also includes the following: "Both leaders also reaffirm the commitment of the U.S. to deploy strategic U.S. military assets in a timely

and coordinated manner as necessary." The active deployment of strategic assets within the vicinity of the Korean peninsula prior to North Korean provocations creates ex ante detection capacity and strongly demonstrates the US's determination to provide extended deterrence. That in itself arguably contributes directly and effectively to more firmly deterring the North.

Strategic Consideration 3: New Denuclearization Roadmap

Stronger deterrence and sanctions are focused on degrading the North Korean leadership's capacity to resist denuclearization and creating the conditions to resume dialogue. Hence, the Yoon government needs to create separate plans for the pursuit of 'substantive' denuclearization. Above all, there is a need to draw up and design a roadmap that will offer a comprehensive blueprint for the pursuit of denuclearization over the next five years. As the history of the North Korean nuclear program over the last three decades confirms, it is difficult to be optimistic that denuclearization policy and North Korea policy will go according to plan and in accordance with the intentions of policymakers. But the Yoon government sees a consistent and pragmatic North Korea policy based on principles and common sense as important. There is a need to create a new plan to pursue denuclearization that faithfully reflects this underlying philosophy.

The Yoon government must consider the following conditions when designing its denuclearization roadmap: ① South Korea's capacity to lead, ② feasibility, ③ applicability, and ④ sustainability. South Korea's capacity to lead should be strengthened with respect to international cooperation and the inter-Korean relationship. The underlying principle should be to guard against excessive faith in dialogue and to proactively protect the national interest. Considering the current situation surrounding the internationalization of the North Korean nuclear issue, the roadmap must be drawn up based on a close analysis and prudent assessment of the North Korean nuclear situation and the perspectives of other countries in the region. The intentions and actual actions of countries in the region are grounded in cold strategic interests, and cannot be explained through beautiful words and values like good intentions, peace, community, and cooperation. Thus, when the roadmap is

prepared, there is a need to consider what elements can be included to make it acceptable to the major states in the region, which have very different views of the situation. In particular, plans should include small compromises that both the US and North Korea would be willing to make on the expectation that something bigger can be acquired. Finally, it must help to advance substantive denuclearization. Given policy fatigue, the need to mobilize resources efficiently and to preclude the potential for North Korean deception, the steps in pursuit of the plan's overall goals must be simple given policy fatigue, the need to mobilize resources efficiently, and the need to preclude the potential for North Korean deception. But there is also a need to examine how to install strategic detour in preparation for potential regression or in case the North tries to break away from the process.¹²⁾

Given the aforementioned conditions and principles, once the Yoon government has drawn the North back to the negotiating table, its roadmap should consider the following elements to effect a compromise that realizes substantive denuclearization: comprehensive agreements, concise stages for progress, securing early measures toward denuclearization, the possibility of North Korea accepting the roadmap, and ways to prevent North Korean subterfuge. The route for the pursuit of denuclearization can be divided into the following general stages: ① comprehensive (or provisional) agreement → ② exchange of early denuclearization measures and for reversible compensation → ③ exchange of complete denuclearization for irreversible denuclearization. The core of a comprehensive agreement is found in South Korea designing a denuclearization roadmap and securing leadership capabilities in the pursuit of cooperation. Early denuclearization measures will go beyond a moratorium on provocations and involve actual measures including the halt of operations at the Yongbyon nuclear facility and its closure, reporting of the country's nuclear capabilities

12) If the denuclearization roadmap is excessively disaggregated into stages based on the results of cooperation then it may struggle to respond to varying circumstances. If the roadmap does not have sufficient room for maneuver built in, then policymakers may fear that they are compelled, unreasonably, to continue onto the next stage, regardless of actual progress. Under such circumstances, policymakers may overestimate insufficient results or go to great lengths to ignore adverse circumstances – i.e., fail to coolly assess the actual situation. Policymakers may rapidly proceed to lower priority issues in an unfavorable environment, and if the results of such policies are unsatisfactory, then the roadmap itself may cease to be functional. From the latter half of 2020, the Moon Jae-in government's concentrated pursuit of an end-of-war declaration is not unrelated to such dangers.

and inspections of these capabilities. Reversible compensation will involve unilateral sanctions imposed by South Korea, the US and other states. Irreversible compensation means the revocation of UNSC sanctions. The roadmap must be designed in such a way as to guard against the temptation North Korea may have to stray from its obligations under the agreement and to engage in preemptive deception. A core goal is to maintain UNSC sanctions against North Korea until it has been completely denuclearized.¹³⁾

Conclusions

The North Korean nuclear threat is at its highest in history. North Korea has a strong determination to possess nuclear weapons, and it is not far from reaching fresh milestones in its efforts toward nuclear advancement. The intensity of its provocations is also rising over time. The conditions for bringing about denuclearization are becoming more adverse too. North Korea has failed to find compromise on denuclearization, and has turned its back on dialogue. The Ukraine crisis has spilt over into international competition between the US and China making international cooperation on denuclearization yet more difficult. Regrettably, the difficult path to denuclearization that the Yoon government faces is liable to get worse. As yet, the end point that North Korea is headed to is still far away, and who wins in the new Cold War conflict of international politics will not be decided in the immediate future. Above all, it will take a considerable amount of time before the effects of most of the policy options at our disposal can be known.

The reason why the future appears so difficult and fraught is not because there are no ways to respond to the threat, but because there is no sure way to denuclearize the

13) The roadmap should apply a snapback principle up to the second stage, but not at the third stage. The snapback principle employed in the second stage will work because it will only exchange unilateral sanctions imposed by individual states for denuclearization measures. Where a snapback mechanism comes into effect, there is no need to worry about whether China and Russia will cooperate. However, what constitutes commensurate denuclearization measures in response to such sanctions relief is unclear. At the Hanoi Summit, Pyongyang sought to exchange the Yongbyon nuclear facility for the relief of some UNSC sanctions. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the North will not see the rescinding of unilateral sanctions as worthy of significant denuclearization measures in response. If so, the Yoon government will be able to assess what they consider to be 'substantive' denuclearization measures. Further, the extent to which UNSC sanctions are enmeshed within unilateral sanctions will also be a variable.

North. However, thorough preparations to counter the threat, and continued efforts to thwart North Korea in achieving its aims can gradually and slowly open the door to denuclearizing the North. The first responsibility of the Yoon government's Korean peninsula denuclearization policy is to effectively demonstrate a resolute determination to not allow North Korea to control the situation surrounding its nuclear program and the inter-Korean relationship by thoroughly responding to North Korea's growing provocations. Because the process of denuclearization will be long and difficult, it may not be possible to fully denuclearize the North in five years. However, during the Yoon government's term in office, if it does not fixate on success, but seeks to build a normal inter-Korean relationship based on principles and common sense, then the precious result of denuclearization will at some point bring peace to the people on both sides of the inter-Korean divide. © KINU 2022