

National and Personal Interests in North Korea-United States Relations

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need for celebrity. “President Trump should win the Nobel Peace Prize,” suggested South Korean President Moon Jae-in. This absurd prospect may have strategically furthered the continued opening of diplomatic relations with North Korea. The tension between those supporting long-standing US policy and others embracing Trump’s chaotic treatment of North Korean President Kim Jong-un (calling him a “madman” one month and “honorable” the next) has led to roller coaster relations.

The North Korean Deterrent

North Koreans have a justified fear that the US is looking for regime change. Both John Bolton, the recently appointed National Security Advisor, and Vice President Mike Pence have promoted the “Libyan model” in relation to the North. In Libya, relief from sanctions was offered in exchange for international oversight as the country relinquished its nuclear weapons program in 2003. Despite Libya’s disarmament, it was bombed by the US and NATO allies in 2011, and Col. Muammar Gaddafi was publicly assassinated by US-supported militias. Additionally, the North views the regular joint military exercises by the US and South Korea as rehearsals for invasion and regime change. The North has long offered denuclearization in exchange for a halt to the exercises and a non-aggression pact.

Recently, a statement from the South Korean president’s office said: “The North showed willingness on denuclearization. . . . If military threats to North Korea decrease and regime safety is guaranteed, the North showed that it has no reason to retain nukes.” Unfortunately, the trust necessary for North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to denuclearize is difficult to achieve while being threatened with the Libyan model.

What Does North Korea Want?

In 2017 there was a New Year’s announcement that the North was close to completing its nuclear program, and at the end of the year the government declared that mission accomplished. Tim Shorrock,

who writes for the Korea Center for Investigative Journalism and *The Nation*, who was raised in South Korea and Japan, remarked about the nuclear weapons program that, Kim “does have the weapons, though [the] interesting thing about his program last year was that they stopped short of actually getting a weapon onto a missile that can enter the atmosphere and hit a target. So, they do not have a nuclear-armed ICBM that can hit the United States at this time. They may be two or three years away from that.”

High on the North Korean priority list are a peace treaty, a non-aggression pact, an end to the military drills, but also energy and food to ameliorate chronic malnourishment. “The policy of the North Koreans has been something called the Byungjin Line and it has been a dual track. One has been the pursuit of its nuclear and missile program,” said Christine Ahn, of Women Cross DMZ. “The other track has been improving the economy of North Korea, and that is so critical to understanding what is the incentive also for North Korea to be willing to give up its nuclear weapons, because they want so much to advance their economy,” she said.

Prospects and Progress With or Without a Summit

Whatever happens between the United States and North Korea, hope is still held out for realization of parts of the Declaration of Peace between South and North Korea. That is what drove the South Korean grassroots movement that led the candlelight revolution when, according to Ahn, “almost for half a year where one in three South Koreans, 16 million people took to the streets to call for the impeachment of [President] Park Geun-hye” and in turn elected Moon Jae-in. Within two months of being elected Moon Jae-in reached out to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to meet. On Jan 1, 2018 Kim accepted the offer, followed by a slew of diplomatic moves fostering new levels of trust and common ground among the US, South Korea and North Korea. On April 27 the two Korean leaders met in Panmunjeom. Kim Jong-un was the first North Korean leader to ever set foot inside South Korea.

Some of the points in the Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace can be pursued independently between the Koreans. In the Declaration Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un pledged “there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula and thus a new era of peace has begun.” In the brief document they agreed to three points to improve relations between the Koreans, alleviate military tension and establish a peace regime, determining the future of the “Korean nation on their own accord.”

Some of the specific points of the Declaration have begun to be fulfilled. The week after it was signed, South Korea ended their loudspeaker broadcast into North Korea. South Korean police even prevented activists from unloading a truck with 5,000 anti-North Korean leaflets. North Korea shifted its clocks by 30 minutes to be in sync with South Korea. A direct telephone link between the two leaders has been set up.

Other gestures indicating openness to reconciliation have been made. In addition to freezing nuclear weapons testing, North Korea has unilaterally destroyed its underground nuclear testing facility, and on May 9 released three United States prisoners.

Even the United States has made concessions. According to the *New York Times* on May 3, Trump ordered the Pentagon to find ways to reduce the number of troops in South Korea. Later in May Trump abandoned further sanctions that he had been seeking.

The South Koreans that nonviolently overthrew Park Geun-hye lit the fire for peace in Korea. The momentum for peace has been built and shot down over and over. With on again off again relations, the preparations for a US-North Korea Summit are shaky, but moving in a direction that lets the doves be optimistic about one thing for the first time in a long time, even if for a brief moment.

—Sources: *Wall Street Journal*, May 28; Agence France Presse, May 6; *New York Times*, May 3; The Intercept, May 2; Democracy Now!, April 30; “Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula,” April 27, 2018

Sea Monsters: Rudderless Reactors on the High Seas

Joke: Did you hear the one about the Exxon Valdez-Fukushima-Chernobyl-Gulf-Oil-Titanic? Yeah: Russia towed a floating double reactor barge 3,000 miles in the Arctic Ocean to power off-shore oil rigs and nothing went wrong!

Announced with sarcastic headlines around the world, Russian engineers launched a giant ocean-going nuclear power barge, carrying two reactors, on a lengthy voyage over the Arctic Ocean from Russia’s far northwest to its far northeastern reaches.

Sailing from St. Petersburg April 28, the one-of-a-kind *Akademik Lomonosov* presents such an obvious and appalling risk to sea life and seacoasts that even *Newsweek* magazine said in an April 30th headline, “Russia’s ‘Nuclear Titanic’ Raising Fears of ‘Chernobyl On Ice.’”

The barge has no propulsion of its own and must be towed and towed for a year-long journey

of over 3,000 miles. Its manufacturer, the Russian corporation Rosatom, said at the send-off celebration that it has built in “a great margin of safety” that is “invincible for tsunamis and natural disaster.” Chortles of “*Titanic!*” couldn’t be resisted since it’s been reported that when White Star Line Vice President P.A.S. Franklin was informed that *Titanic* was in trouble, he announced “We place absolute confidence in the *Titanic*. We believe the boat is unsinkable.”

The teetering, 12-story-tall *Akademik Lomonosov* has travelled through the Baltic Sea and the North Sea—having so far avoided collisions with icebergs, shoals, or oil tankers—and docked May 17 at the far-northernwestern city of Murmansk, where planners intend to load its two reactors with uranium fuel and conduct startup tests. The government initially intended to load and test the reactors in downtown St. Petersburg, a city of 5.3 million. But Greenpeace activists and others successfully petitioned to have the dangerous operation done far away from the metropolis. The fueling and startup will still be done close to Murmansk, a city



***Akademik Lomonosov*, a Russian barge holding two nuclear reactors, left St. Petersburg April 28 for Murmansk where it will undergo fueling and test startup. Critics dubbed the vessel “Nuclear Titanic” and “Chernobyl On-the Rocks.” AFP photo/Alexander Nemenov**

of 300,000 in Russia’s far northwest. Greenpeace reported: “Only a petition by 12,000 St. Petersburg citizens, questions in the city’s legislative assembly, and major concerns from Baltic Sea countries about transporting two reactors filled with irradiated fuel, without its own propulsion, along their rocky coasts, caused Rosatom to use some common sense and shift loading plans to a less densely populated area.

If the fission reactor tests go as planned, the barge is to be towed some 3,000 miles through the Arctic Ocean to the far northeastern Siberian city of Pevek and go online sometime in 2019.

In what could be called a Faustian Rube Goldberg scheme, the “floating Chernobyl” is supposed to provide electric power to oil drilling platforms. The breath-taking self-destructive carbon footprint of this fossil fuel-consuming, pollution-spewing sea monster can hardly be exaggerated. The mining, milling, processing and reactor fissioning of uranium, the production of radioactive wastes that need managed isolation for a million years, all done to drill for oil which is then transformed into pollution, cannot be smarter or cheaper than conservation and efficiency that cost next to nothing and are pollution-free.

As a public relations cover, the Nuclear Titanic will also provide electricity to the city of Pevek (pop. 100,000) and to a desalination plant, replacing four small reactors called the “Bilibino” complex, which is set for decommissioning beginning in 2021.

Undersea earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricane winds and rogue waves are dangerous, unpredictable and inevitable, but they are natural disasters. Placing hot, bobbing vulnerable nuclear reactors directly into a pristine wilderness like the Arctic Ocean in the face of such enormous risks is not just tempting fate, but constitutes reckless endangerment of the public commons. The Bellona Foundation in Oslo warned, using more diplomatic and understated terms, that “far-flung locations present hurdles to proper disaster response in the event of an accident.”

Most governments with nuclear stationary reactor operations understand them to be uniquely dangerous. Ordinary reactors stand alone among all the world’s potentially disastrous industrial operations in being required to have evacuation plans before powering up. But how to evacuate the oceans? —*JL*