

Talking Points

Xiaohu Cheng, Renmin University of China
for

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“Reducing Tension and Building Confidence in the Korean Peninsula”

- Given your experience and perspective, can you assess the current processes and interests of the parties to reduce tensions and build confidence (implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration)?

1, the current situation on the Korean Peninsula is evolving in a good direction we have not seen for more than ten years. Sino-North Korea political relations has been normalizing with frequent top leaders’ meeting. The two Koreas are enjoying a hard-earned rapprochement with a restoration of all kinds of stalled dialogues. The US-DPRK relations is thawing and they are still on the track to make further high-level negotiations. North Korea and Japan entertain

2, the previous rapprochement among major powers in this region is still fragile and is subject to change. The absence of NK’s new commitments in the Kim-Trump summit demonstrated the complexity of the denuclearization and related issues. The summit was a direct result of collective international efforts, the following US-DPRK should not be a two-actor game, more international efforts warranted. The Sino-US trade brawl complicates future US-DPRK negotiations.

3, North Korea’s determination to shift its effort from developing nuclear and missile weapons to developing economy only. Even though uncertainties remain and setback may occur, North Korea will continue to pursue diplomatic normalization with the United States, no matter what will be happening between China and the United States. The US has made several unilateral concessions at the Singapore summit, the pressure on NK to make its new concession in the next possible summit is building up.

4, with full-blown trade war with the United States looming large, China is not in a position to prevent NK from seeking a rapprochement with the United States since it serves NK’s national interests. By the same token, China also cannot prevent NK from denuclearizing since it is the only way for NK to secure a badly-needed rapprochement with the United States, which is one of necessary condition for NK to opening its door to outside world and reform.

- Are there any lessons from the JCPOA or other mechanisms?

- Lesson one: basic cooperation among key signatories are crucial
- Lesson two: JCPOA is a nuclear deal, but the confrontation between US and Iran in Yemen, Syria encourage the United States to abandon the deal, even though Iran seemingly shows no sign of agreement breach.
- Lesson three: do not let one key player to ruin the show, easy exit should be blocked.
- Lesson four: preventing one country from going nuclear should be relatively easy than persuading or pressuring the country to give up its nuclear weapons. Do it now, avoiding being too late.

- What role for the actors outside the Big 4 - ROK, DPRK, US and China?

- The big 4 will continue to play a significant role in the foreseeable future. But they are not equal in that regard. On Korean unification issue, the two Korea play a leading role, the US and China are supportive; on denuclearization issue, NK and the US plays a leading role, China and South Korea are supportive actor.
- Russia and Japan will be included in the political negotiating process in the future, their roles will be confined to be supportive.
- EU and other international organization has a very limited say and will be so in the near future. More participants do not necessarily help and generate good results.

- What can the international community do to support the current momentum and engagements?

- Be aware its roles and stick to it;
- Be cooperative and don't play zero-sum game;
- Offer assistance if needed;

- Both the ROK and the DPRK have been taking concrete measures to de-escalate and reduce tensions. Example: the recent halting of loudspeakers, the reestablishment of military communication channels and the implementation of the 2004 agreement to avoid naval clashes are important first steps. Share your experience how best to keep the current momentum, potential challenges and ways to overcome.

- The momentum on inter-Korean relations are good and forward-moving, but still fragile since the two Koreas are still competitors in the national unification mission.
- If the two Koreas cannot escape from a head-on unification competition, they will return to the confrontation sooner or later. It is difficult for two competing states to cultivate a rapprochement and more difficult to maintain a rapprochement. So far, history does not support a lengthy rapprochement between two competitors.
- ROK and DPRK are two leading actors on the inter-Korean relations, they decide which directions their relations should move, but international support are necessary for a sustainable inter-Korean rapprochement.
- International actors are not equal, China and the United States are the two leading supportive actors. Two Koreas' relations with China and the United States will influence the inter-Korean relations.
- Any sustainable inter-Korean rapprochement should be buttressed by concrete confidence-building and institution-building. In order to do so, both sides should avoid competing for international standing. Starting cooperation in the economic field. Increasing military transparency. Decreasing number of military exercises and agreeing to mutual observation. Reducing size of military forces. Etc.