

‘Talking Towards Peace? The North Korean Crisis’: An Expert Roundtable Discussion on the DPRK

Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (1st Floor), SOAS, 5 June 2018

The presidency of Donald Trump has coincided with an advancement in North Korea’s ability to project its growing nuclear arsenal to the American mainland. The result of both factors has seen a new level of tensions between Pyongyang, Washington, D.C. and its allies. Unusually, the Trump administration has focused much more capital on pushing China to enforce economic sanctions on the regime.

While there has been much analysis over the administration’s willingness to use the threat of military force on the Peninsula – despite the warnings of much of the Korean-watching community – there has been comparatively little on its diplomatic adroitness witnessed in recent months. Despite strong rhetoric from Trump himself on Twitter, both the President and the Vice-President have repeatedly stated that the United States is open for talks. As a result, President Trump is scheduled to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on June 12th. This meeting will come a few weeks after South Korean President Moon Jae-in held its own summit meeting with Kim.

Remarkably, the South Korean and United States governments have managed to maintain close links over the past six months of the crisis. Despite apparent efforts by North Korea to widen a US-ROK rift – see Kim Yo-jong’s invitation for a North/South summit – President Moon has managed to keep close to the White House and minimized alliance discord. To some extent, Russia and Japan – two important members of the Six Party Talks – have had less impact on the pace of the crisis, with Prime Minister Abe’s efforts to maintain alliance exercises being shut down by Seoul.

It seems that at least three of the players – the US, the ROK, and China – have shown an unusual level of diplomatic flexibility over the past five months. This presents policymakers on all sides with challenges and opportunities for diplomatic peace-making. As the risks of an accidental or unintended conflict have not disappeared, all three sides have shown some convergence on how to resolve the issue. This has been demonstrated by the three’s agreement over the economic pressure policy, first, and the need for diplomatic engagement now. If this flexibility can be translated into useful starting points for negotiations with the North, there might be a chance of a peaceful resolution to the crisis.



This Roundtable discussion represents the first stage of a three-stage project that will form the basis of a report (second stage) encapsulating different perspectives on the possible outcomes of the current diplomacy aimed at bringing denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula. The report will be produced by the Henry Jackson Society and London Asia Pacific Centre (SOAS and King's). Its launch will take place in Parliament where it will be subject to further discussion by an audience of politicians, expert practitioners and academics (third stage). The Roundtable will be divided into two panels, each focusing on three of the states involved in the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Roundtable Panel 1: The First Three

This roundtable will focus on the three states who will be meeting later that week on April 29th, the United States, North Korea, and South Korea. In a sense, it is becoming common knowledge that the Korean crisis is complicated, but what does that actually mean? What are the negotiating positions of the three primary states? What are their extreme demands, what are their bottom lines, and where are the middle gaps, where compromise is possible? If some sort of policy compromises is possible for these three, what does that mean for the other three states?

Roundtable Panel 2: The Second Three

Building off of the first roundtable, this session presents the strategic objectives and possible barriers to a resolution that any of these three might offer. Russian opportunism, Japanese insistence on a resolution to the abductee issues, and Chinese insistence on its geopolitical objectives being safeguarded all present varying challenges to the other three negotiating nations. Of these China and Japan also have special relationships with the states in the first three (with North Korea and US respectively).



Roundtable Schedule

- 09.00 – Participants Arrive (Coffee/tea/pastries in adjacent Rm 109)
SOAS Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing
- 09.15 – 09.45** **Welcoming remarks**
Dr Tat Yan Kong , Reader (SOAS)
Baroness Valerie Amos (Director, SOAS)
Dr Ramon Pacheco Pardo, KF-VUB Korea Chair, Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, & Senior Lecturer, King's College London
- 09.45 – 11.00** **Panel 1: The First Three**
Chair: Dr John Hemmings, Henry Jackson Society
Speaker 1: Mike Cowin, North Asia Research Department, FCO
'North Korea's Primary Negotiating Strategy'
Speaker 2: Andrea Berger, Senior research Associate,
Middlebury Institute of International Studies
'The Trump White House and North Korea'
Speaker 3: Dr John Nilsson-Wright, Cambridge University &
Chatham House
'Moon Jae-In's negotiating objectives'
- 11.00 – 11.15 Coffee Break (in adjacent Rm 109)
- 11.15- 12.30** **Panel 2: The Other Three**
Chair: Dr Ramon Pacheco Pardo, King's-VUB
Speaker 1: Dr Tat Yan Kong, SOAS
'China's Core Interests, Unification, and Borders'
Speaker 2: Hayato Hosoya, Chatham House
'Japan: Abductees and Reconstruction'
Speaker 3: Dr Natasha Kuhrt, Lecturer, King's
'Russian interests on the Korean Peninsula'
- 12.45 – 14.00 Lunch at *Ristorante Olivelli's*, Store Street



Full List of Roundtable Participants (confirmed)

Andrea Berger, Senior Research Associate, Middlebury Institute of International Studies

Maria Blancas, PhD candidate, King's

Xuechen Chen, PhD Candidate, King's

Mike Cowin, Research Analyst, North Asia & Research Group, FCO

John Everard, former UK Ambassador to DPRK

Dr John Hemmings, Asia Programme Director, Henry Jackson Society

Hayato Hosoya, Academy Fellow, Chatham House

Sung-Tak Kim, broadcaster, JTBC

Dr Tat Yan Kong, Reader, SOAS

Dr Natasha, Kuhrt, Lecturer, King's

Agathe L'Homme, Analyst, Economist Intelligence Unit

Dr Nicola Leveringhaus, Lecturer, King's

Yutaro Mochida, Secretary, Embassy of Japan

Dr John Nilsson-Wright, Senior Lecturer, Cambridge University & Chatham House

Dr Ramon Pacheco Pardo, Senior Lecturer, King's, Korea Chair, VUB

Jeongho Park, Secretary, Embassy of the ROK

Charles Scanlon, Journalist and former BBC Asia Correspondent

Prof. Steve Tsang, Director, SOAS China Institute



