HOW TO SOLVE THE NORTH KOREAN THREAT? US-CHINA-RUSSIA’S STRUGGLE FOR CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION?

FENG-YUNG HU*

Summary

The escalated situation in the Korean Peninsula has aroused fear of an imminent nuclear war. The pursuit for denuclearization and long-term peace has been broken by the DPRK’s testing of the hydrogen bomb and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Trump’s and Kim’s vitriolic words have demonstrated hot-headedness on both sides. To know how to solve the threat represented by North Korea, we must examine assertions and approaches of the six party players in the Northeast Asian region. UN and US economic sanctions are ongoing but have stimulated the DPRK’s further tests of catastrophic weapons. Diplomatic and political negotiation is far from ideal under the scenario of a war of rhetoric. The author found that all players make use of the DPRK as a strategic buffer and chess piece for their own interests and assumed that this makes the situation more complicated than ever before.

Key Words: Korean Peninsula, nuclear war, six parties, economic sanctions, negotiation.

Introduction: Real War? Or an Endless War of Words?

Many observers have found that the rhetoric between the President of the United States Donald Trump and the leader of North Korea Kim Jong-un has been ongoing for a long time. Do they want to have a real war? Or are they both making use of political standoff and military deterrence to achieve their goals? This raises questions about what their real goals are.

North Korea’s vitriolic war of words with the US is ratcheting up fears that World War III could
break out as Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump continue to threaten total destruction.\[1\] Let us examine what they said. In a speech before the UN General Assembly, Trump called Kim a suicidal “rocket man” and threatened to “totally destroy” North Korea if the US is “forced to defend itself or its allies.” Kim allegedly responded with a written statement, in which he called Trump a “mentally deranged US dotard” and said that “a frightened dog barks louder.” Many experts have denounced Trump’s speech, suggesting that his words could provoke Kim to take dramatic action.\[2\]

However, other US experts assume that Donald Trump’s aggressive rhetoric towards North Korea does not mean that we are on the brink of war, but it does raise questions about his goals.\[3\] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also questions Trump’s goals; he has said that he thinks the United States will not strike North Korea because it knows Pyongyang possesses nuclear weapons. “The Americans won’t carry out a strike on [North] Korea because it’s not that they suspect, they know for sure that it has nuclear bombs,” Lavrov said in an interview with Russia’s NTV television that aired on September 24.\[4\]

Now, we might have entered the eve of the Thucydides trap. The former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy and Plans Allison concluded “the defining question about global order for this generation is whether China and the United States can escape Thucydides’s Trap.”\[5\]

Therefore, in this paper, the author reviews the attitudes of all six parties to see whether real war is possible. It seems to me that China has supported both the US’s and Russia’s approaches, and I thus choose to focus on the attitudes of the future Russia–US dialogue. The author’s questions are the following:

1 - What is Trump’s goal for the North Korean chess piece?
2 - What is Kim Jong-un’s goal in raising the frequency of the testing of nuclear weapons and ICBMs?
3 - How will South Korea react between China and the US in terms of THAAD?
4 - Why does Japan assume that negotiation is invalid, and why has it chosen to sign a peace treaty with Russia?
5 - How will China react in response to the United States and North Korea to reduce the pressure?
6 - What is Russia’s role in the escalated situation in the Korean Peninsula?

**US-China-DPRK Triangle Relations**

Recently, Trump has announced more severe economic sanctions on all countries with economic ties with North Korea. The US Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, also said that banks doing business in North Korea would not be allowed to operate in the US.\[6\] The US government believes that China is the key economic leverage that can push North Korea to the negotiating table. This appeal has been enforced since Trump took the presidential office and adopted more aggressive actions in handling THAAD deployment in South Korea.

Therefore, China is facing a difficult choice between the US and North Korea, which has been regarded as a traditional ally since the Korean War of 1950–1953. This has aroused severe disagreement in the Chinese media and scholarship. The first challenge for China is whether the US THAAD is threatening; does China want to keep North Korea as a strategic buffer or maintain a good relationship with the United States?

US scholars suggest that if the United States and its allies can convince China that cooperation against North Korea is in its best interests, China may help enforce new UN sanctions, compel North Korea to return to the negotiating table, and force it to remain until an acceptable
solution is found, and then ensure that the terms are implemented. However, the United States cannot trust that this outcome will come to pass or wait for the situation to evolve of its own accord, particularly as the nuclear threat grows; the United States needs to be ready to defend its national security interests and those of its allies in the face of continued Chinese reticence and North Korean intransigence.

Trump’s Korean policy is close to Victor Cha, who is likely to be appointed as the envoy in Seoul. Cha supports adopting a riskier policy on North Korea and putting pressure on China to lean more heavily on Pyongyang to scale down its weapons program. First, Cha’s idea is probably retrieved from his negotiation experience when he was the deputy head of the U.S. delegation to the six party talks during the administration of former President George W. Bush. The United States paid North Korea over half a billion dollars in energy assistance for denuclearization deals that were ultimately broken. Now, Cha says, it should be China’s time to “pay to play” or face strong secondary U.S. sanctions. Second, Trump attempts to keep the American First Policy, which means partly to reduce the overseas military budget used to assist allies with security and make them pay to buy US weapons. Cha’s assertion is likely supported by Trump.

**Cha’s Skeptical Idea**

Victor Cha believes that the testing program of ballistic missiles and military devices in past years has been strengthened over time, such that it threatens the neighboring countries more than ever before, and the failure of the six party talks provided North Korea time to improve its military technology. Therefore, if the United States did not adopt a riskier policy to inhibit North Korea, it would have no chance to uphold the balance upset by North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons. The reason for his assumption is based on past changes that Cha wanted to confirm with the US Congress on February 7, 2017.

First, Cha said that under the current regime, North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons. Second, the portfolio of pressure and diplomacy administered over the past 25 years has been ineffective. Third, the DPRK program is a significant threat. Fourth, absent a change in its strategic thinking, China will limit its cooperation with measures that risk a collapse of the North Korean regime. Fifth, the current threat due to North Korea’s nuclear progress will expand to a Homeland Security threat in the course of the current administration’s tenure.

Obviously, Cha’s suggestion will make the Trump administration put more pressure on China; otherwise, he would like to release the pressure South Korea faces due to China’s tourism restriction to South Korea. Cha thinks that the rising threat of North Korea has not been countered successfully because China has not shown enough effort. Therefore, pushing China to put more pressure on North Korea should be a task of the newly elected Trump administration. According to his assumption, China has not taken its responsibility, and it is time to ask China to pay.

Therefore, the logic of Cha’s sceptic conception is that talks and energy assistance are not effective, and the United States should adjust its foreign policy. Cha’s attitudes towards China will make the United States step back from relationships among Russia, China and North Korea; in other words, the United States only needs to use its power to give an order to China and then watch the tigers fight among themselves. At the same time, the United States can deploy THAAD to protect its allies South Korea and Japan against the DPRK’s ICBMs. From Cha’s perspective, it seems that provoking the relationship between China and North Korea would be an effective strategy and broaden US influence in the Korean Peninsula. Cha is close to the South, and his advice has the function of punishing China because China has punished North Korea, as well.
Therefore, Trump uses rhetoric and economic sanctions against the DPRK, Russia and China because the provocation will raise the tension on the Korean Peninsula and cause the related countries to cope with the USA under the fear of real war. The United States will maintain its power to curb the rising powers in fighting among themselves. China’s attitude towards the US Korean policy determines the possibility of the “Thucydides trap.” Therefore, Trump’s war of words more likely means that he wants to escape real war. The United States only needs to wait for the results to earn money from the movement of military sales and foreign investment from the risky areas into US territory. Under the risky policy, China and North Korea might kneel down to beg US forgiveness. At that time, Russia might become isolated from the Northeast Asian region. However, Russia will not allow this to happen. Therefore, the political wrestling among the six parties will be increased to get benefits but avoid war.

**Trump’s Talk and Actions**

Trump warned at a UN speech that the US would “totally destroy North Korea” if forced to defend itself or its allies. He said that while the US has “great strength and patience,” its options could soon run out. Directly putting the country’s leader on notice, Trump suggested that Kim Jong-un could not survive an American attack. “Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself,” he said. Trump then wrote on Twitter: “The U.S. has been talking to North Korea, and paying them extortion money, for 25 years. Talking is not the answer!”. From these words, we can see that Trump and Victor Cha shared similar assumptions towards North Korea.

However, the US state secretary Tillerson said, “We do view it as a provocative act against the United States and our allies,” and “We’re going to continue our peaceful pressure campaign as I have described it, working with allies, working with China as well to see if we can bring the regime in Pyongyang to the negotiating table.” Defense Secretary James Mattis, asked about Trump’s tweet, said, “We’re never out of diplomatic solutions. We continue to work together for the protection of our nations, our populations and our interests, and look for all the areas with we can collaborate.”

South Korean President Moon Jae-in made a plea at the United Nations to scale back tensions with North Korea. “We should manage the North Korea nuclear crisis in a stable manner so that tensions are not escalated too much or peace is not destroyed by accidental military clashes,” Moon said at the U.N. General Assembly’s annual debate. This shows that the US ally, South Korea, wants peace. Does Trump’s Korean policy differ by office? Probably not. Each office presents declarations for different parties relative to the issues. Therefore, Tillerson and Mattis should calm the antipathy of South Korea and that of China, which urges “stopping irritating each other” in the Korean Peninsula.

So far, Trump has not given prerequisites for when the United States would use military power to destroy North Korea. A war of rhetoric would only upset Kim Jong-un and encourage him to adopt riskier provocation in his testing program. The war of words is often ongoing before a disaster occurs, as rhetoric acts as provocation that escalates a situation to the edge of war, and yet no one could afford the consequences of a nuclear war. Therefore, we can say that both Trump and Kim Jong-un attempt to use the standoff to force all parties to take a political stance between the US and DPRK. South Korea and Japan are US allies and are willing to stand by Trump, although South Korea must suffer from an economic downturn. However, division and mistrust might be raised among China, the DPRK and Russia, and this is the scenario the US would most like to see.
South Korea’s Embarrassment

The rhetoric between Trump and Kim-Jong-un has placed Moon Jae-in in the prisoner’s dilemma. Like China and Russia, he urges lowered tension. However, North Korea’s testing program of ballistic and nuclear missiles has upset the USA and Japan. Deploying THAAD has aroused the punishment from China’s economic and tourism restrictions on South Korea, further weakening South Korea’s economic trade with China. Moon Jae-in’s permission to resume a relationship with the North contradicts Trump’s risky policy towards North Korea, and that is why Victor Cha will take up the mission of persuasion as ambassador by Trump’s appointment.

Moon is a strong advocate of pursuing dialogue with Pyongyang and has already faced domestic resistance to the deployment of the US missile defense system, THAAD, which opponents say will provoke China and put the South more at risk. China has vigorously opposed the stationing of the THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea, complaining that it threatens security and fuels tensions in the region. The South Korean government says that the system is designed to reduce the threat from North Korean missiles. South Korean businesses that rely on foreign tourists are feeling the chill. “There’s been a big reduction in the number of groups of Chinese tourists in Seoul since the THAAD missile crisis,” said Kil Ki-yon, the director of Seoul Tiger Bus.

“North Korea continues to make very wrong decisions, so I’m very frustrated and I’m saddened to see this,” Moon told CNN Thursday. “He is in a ‘no-win’ situation, just like his predecessors,” said Kim Hyung-A, an associate professor of Korean politics at Australian National University. “No matter what they say, when US pressure gets really serious, then there is very little (they) can do but whatever the US wants.”

Therefore, South Korea is caught between the US and China in terms of THAAD deployment. On the one hand, South Korea does not want to irritate North Korea and China because the provocation on the Korean peninsula has damaged the Korean financial environment for attracting foreign investment and weakened trade ties. South Korea has faced economic loss because of the deployment of THAAD. On the other hand, the United States needs the provocation to justify increasing its military presence in the Northeast Asian region to counterbalance the rising powers such as China and Russia. Moon tries to pursue peace and establish cooperation with China and Russia, and that will marginalize the US in this region. Therefore, Trump’s Korean policy expects South Korea to sacrifice too much. The standoff will test which of the six parties will be weakened.

Japan’s Hard Attitudes

Itsunori Onodera, the Japanese defense minister, said, “We cannot deny the possibility it may fly over our country.” Since North Korea’s missiles launch flew over Japanese Hokkaido and successful hydrogen bomb testing occurred, Japan has faced panic over being attacked by nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. The US–Japan military alliance will be strengthened in face of the rising threat from North Korea. However, the US–Japan military alliance is regarded as the Asian NATO by China and Russia and will curb the Russia–Japanese cooperation in the Kuril Islands.

The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he is determined to sign the peace treaty with Putin. However, the Kremlin office director Peskov said there is no deadline for a solution while both sides are building an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation. After the end of World War II, the Kuril Islands were incorporated into the Soviet Union. However, the ownership of Iturup, Kunashir, the Shikotan Islands and the Habomai Islands is challenged by Japan. In 1956, the Soviet
Union and Japan signed a joint declaration to cease the state of war; however, no peace treaty has yet been signed.\textsuperscript{[19]}

Indeed, Japan supports the United States’ economic sanctions against Russia. Therefore, it is too early to set a timeframe for signing the peace treaty. Why did Abe show such determination? Perhaps to present the image of a good relationship with Russia to make China and the DPRK suspicious. Japan may attempt to make China feel anxious and accept the US policy for implementing stronger economic sanctions against the DPRK. All these actions are intended to isolate the DPRK. Improving relations to win Russia’s support for pressuring China and North Korea will please the Trump administration, as well.

At the same time, getting closer with Russia is the long-term strategy for Japan’s national interests, including winning back the ownership of the four islands, importing Russian energy by establishing pipelines, fishing in the North Asian Pacific sea area, investing in the Russian Far East for better economic integration and containing both China and North Korea to avoid security threat. Normalization with Russia meets Japan’s national interests, and Japan will raise its international status by playing the bridge between the US and Russia and helping maintain Trump’s power in the Northeast Asian region.

Abe said that diplomatic attempts to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear aspirations have failed over two decades. “Dialogue for the purpose of having dialogue is meaningless,” Abe said at the New York Stock Exchange.\textsuperscript{[20]} Abe devoted almost his entire speech to North Korea, saying that history shows that Pyongyang uses direct talks only to “deceive” its dialogue partners and buy more time to develop weapons.\textsuperscript{[21]}

Abe’s UN speech was welcomed by Trump. However, Japan still refuses the idea of negotiation with North Korea. This will continue to irritate North Korea, and that is why Abe hopes Putin capable of persuading Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un to calm the escalated situation. Abe tries to use Russia as geopolitical leverage between China and the DPRK, using economic investment to appease Russia and attempts to produce the image of a close Japan–Russian relation to raise China’s suspicion. China is usually jealous of Russia’s international influence and tries to formulate an international image of peace and tolerance. Mistrust between Japan and China will make China consolidate its comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia. Therefore, Abe hopes to benefit from Japan’s role in promoting Russia’s economic proposal in the Far East Economic Forum. This pleases Putin, who is willing to make efforts to sign a peace treaty without a deadline.

**North Korea’s Goal and “Juche”**

North Korea has repeatedly stated that it will continue to pursue nuclear weapons and long-range missiles capable of reaching the US because it sees that strategy as its only protection against what it believes is a hostile superpower bent on regime change or possibly outright invasion.\textsuperscript{[22]}

The DPRK’s frequency of H-bomb and ICBM testing has increased such that outsiders doubt its storage capability. The question is whether the economic sanctions have been successful for the denuclearization program. Putin said that Russia does not recognize the DPRK’s nuclear status. All other parties have consensus on denuclearization. However, the DPRK is isolated and uses the nuclear weapon tests to deter US aggressive actions. This means that the United States cannot start a war to make its allies act under the threat of nuclear weapons. The only way out is to compel China to cope with North Korea and this will force North Korea to lean on Russia. Russia’s clout on North Korea will make China decide to collaborate with both Russia and the USA.
China’s Call for Double Freeze and Double Trajectory

But even if the configuration of Chinese power for the next five years has stabilized after Xi Jinping has consolidated his power in the 19th Communist Party Congress, this does not mean that the geopolitical, economic and domestic political factors paralyzing Chinese willingness to cooperate with the United States on North Korea will suddenly disappear. The contradictions between China and the US’ Chinese policy formation will likely intensify. China’s geopolitical aspirations will constrain cooperation with the United States on policy toward North Korea. China’s suspicions of U.S. intentions toward North Korea under Trump have surely not been assuaged by his calls for cooperation, even while Chinese fears of U.S.-North Korea military confrontation have gone up. Moreover, the more Trump pressures Xi on China, the more the North Korea issue becomes enmeshed in a broader struggle for hegemony in Northeast Asia. North Korea’s growing threat saps American strength and generates strains in America’s alliances with Japan and South Korea, which constrain China’s growing desire to dominate Asia. North Korea’s ideological and historical value as a fellow communist country will prevent Xi from sacrificing the North Korean buffer, for fear that the absence of North Korea as a foil would turn public criticisms inward and challenge the Chinese Communist Party’s domestic legitimacy.\[23]\n
In North Korea’s latest testing of ballistic missiles and hydrogen bomb in the Northeast Asian region, China was pushed to abide by the UN economic sanctions for banning importing workers, textile products and coal and freezing the banks doing business with North Korea. China also limits export of petroleum products to the DPRK. However, this has caused a split between the two traditional allies and sparked a controversy of rhetoric debate between the Chinese scholars of China–DPRK relations. China’s urge for restraint amid the war of words between Trump and North Korea is invalid, and this has raised dispute inside China.

China is North Korea’s most important ally, largest trading partner, and main source of food and energy. It has helped sustain Kim Jong-un’s regime and has historically opposed harsh international sanctions on North Korea in the hope of avoiding regime collapse and a refugee influx across their 870-mile border. China’s support for North Korea dates back to the Korean War (1950–1953), when its troops flooded the Korean Peninsula to aid its northern ally. Since the war, China has lent political and economic backing to North Korea’s leaders: Kim Il-sung (estimated 1948–1994), Kim Jong-il (roughly 1994–2011) and Kim Jong-un (2011–). Strains in the relationship began to surface when Pyongyang tested a nuclear weapon in October 2006 and Beijing supported UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which imposed sanctions on Pyongyang.\[24]\n
China has also urged calm, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi telling his Japanese counterpart that Tokyo should not abandon dialogue over North Korea.\[25]\n
Wang Yi said that the key to solving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula is both sanctions and dialogue. He said that China strongly opposes North Korea’s nuclear test, supports further moves of the UN Security Council on the issue and will maintain close coordination with related parties. He called on the international community to help revive stalled talks.\[26]\n
Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang called for tighter sanctions and efforts to resume dialogue. All sides should “not further irritate each other and add oil to the flames of the tense situation on the peninsula at present,” Lu said a daily news briefing.\[27]\n
Regardless of China’s urging, Trump has threatened a trade war if China fails to rein in Kim. The ability to deliver robust economic growth underpins the Communists’ legitimacy in the country’s one-party system. Thus, as U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened a trade war if Xi
does not use his economic leverage to curb North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, authorities in Beijing need to also weigh the domestic cost of implementing sanctions.\textsuperscript{[28]} This means that under the escalate situation, China is the first to suffer from economic loss and strategic compression due to Washington’s request. This will increase Russia’s importance as leverage in the Korean Peninsula.

Russia’s Role Has Gained Importance

Russia is the six party talk advocator because it considers that all the interested parties should sit down to discuss the goal for the long-term strategy. By consensus, denuclearization is required for a normalized relationship. However, the situation is more complicated than ever before. North Korea has raised the frequency of ballistic missiles and hydrogen bomb tests, and the United States uses this to justify its military presence in South Korea and Japan, which is regarded as a threat by North Korea, China and Russia. The different resolutions and approaches followed to achieve denuclearization have deepened the cracks in Northeast Asia, where regional security is threatened by the escalated propaganda and military race.

Moscow’s assistance to Pyongyang has emerged not out of a desire to promote the DPRK’s nuclear program, but because Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, sees Kim very much like he sees his own country: victims of a U.S.-led international system that tramples on their choices and sovereignty.\textsuperscript{[29]}

Alexander Gabuev of the Moscow Carnegie Centre explains: “Russia believes that Pyongyang’s aim is not to bomb anyone, that its [nuclear program] is a deterrent against South Korea and the US.” Georgy Toloraya said: “What are we going to do? Stop all energy exports, so people freeze and ambulances have no fuel to reach the sick?” He suggests “the Americans need to make contact [with Pyongyang], and the sooner, the better. We can pass information on, if they want.” President Putin himself described energy exports to its neighbor as “practically zero,” although some 30,000 North Koreans are employed in logging and construction in Russia’s Far East. Like China, Russia shares a border with North Korea and sees it as a buffer against South Korea, a political and military ally of the US.\textsuperscript{[30]}

Lavrov’s response was consistent with the ambivalent rhetoric from Russian and Chinese representatives at the U.N. Security Council. “All must understand that progress towards denuclearization of the Korean peninsula will be difficult so long as [the North Korean regime] perceives a direct threat to its own security,” Vasily Nebenzia, Russian ambassador to the U.N., told the council. “For that is how the North Koreans view the military build-up in the region, which takes on the forms of frequent, wide-ranging exercises and maneuvers of the U.S. and allies as they deploy strategic bombers, naval forces, and aircraft carriers.”\textsuperscript{[31]}

Although Russia’s ability to benefit economically from closer links with North Korea is limited, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s willingness to deepen the alliance with Pyongyang highlights Moscow’s desire to expand its role as a stakeholder in the preservation of long-term peace in the Korean peninsula. An improvement in Russia’s relationship with South Korea could increase its influence over the security situation on the Korean peninsula because Russia would be able to uniquely position itself as a strategic partner of both Pyongyang and Seoul.\textsuperscript{[32]}

International sanctions and a Chinese ban on imports of North Korean coal in February after a series of missile tests have steadily squeezed Pyongyang’s other sources of foreign revenue. That has left the export of labor, along with state-run restaurants and other small businesses in Vladivostok and elsewhere on the regime’s shrinking list of ways to generate hard currency. The boom in North Korean labor exports to Russia coincides with an expansion of other links between
the two countries, including a recent surge in Russian coal exports and the start in May of a new twice-weekly ferry service between Vladivostok and Rason, a special economic zone on the east coast of North Korea.[33]

Moscow may be looking to take advantage of the nuclear standoff between Pyongyang and the international community. As cracks deepen in the decades-old friendship between China and North Korea amid increasing U.S. pressure, Russian President Vladimir Putin stands ready to fill Beijing’s shoes. “Russia (has) begun quietly laying the groundwork that would strengthen its ties to North Korea, thus increasing its global political leverage should it need it,” analysts at political intelligence firm Stratfor explained in a May 5 report, referring to Putin’s strained ties with the West.[34]

The Russian former diplomat and expert on Korean Peninsula issues, Georgy Toloraya, assumed that the decades-long tug of war on the Korean Peninsula has entered a new and more dangerous round in recent years. Neither North Korea nor South Korea has recognized the results of the 1950–1953 war, and they have not made peace. In the 1970s and 1980s, North Korea relied on Chinese and Soviet assistance in defending the country and even dreamed of using their assistance to achieve reunification on its own terms. While some hotheads in Pyongyang may be considering taking over the South using nuclear supremacy, the regime would hardly resort to that. Until recently, tensions on the Korean Peninsula increased and subsided with seasonal regularity, but no one dared to cross the red line as neither side is prepared to start a large war.[35]

Toloraya noted that it is unknown how acceptable North Korea still finds the “double freeze” initiative, which it proposed last year, and which was later proposed again by China. Because the ICBM launch coincided with the Chinese president Xi Jinping’s visit to Russia, Toloraya noted “the North Koreans made a ‘gift’ for the Chinese and Russian presidents, although mainly for the American president, by launching the intercontinental ballistic missile on US Independence Day.” However, this did not hinder the Russian and Chinese leaders from conducting productive talks.[36] Toloraya suggested that through the Six Party talks, making the early denuclearization of North Korea a priority should be analyzed from the perspective of broader Russian interests vis-à-vis both the Korean Peninsula and global interaction with major partners, including the US, China, Japan and South Korea.[37]

Thus, Russia’s influence on the Korean Peninsula has increased probably because of the following four reasons: first, Russia opposes the regime’s overthrow for reasons of overstepping sovereignty and prefers a diplomatic approach; second, Putin launched the policy Turn to Asia, which requires economic development in the Russian Far East for economic and geopolitical reasons; third, Russia hopes to connect North and South Korea through its railway and energy pipeline building projects, regarding this as a bridge from Russia to South Asia; fourth, Russia uses North Korea as a strategic buffer and leverage towards other parties in the Korean Peninsula. However, Russia joined China in urging restraint amid the war of words and other provocation between Trump and Kim Jong-un, and that is because Russia can build mutual trust with China to reduce the division appearing between the DPRK and China, which intends to implement further embargoes to cheese the United States.

Conclusion for Further Discussion

Now, the confrontation between Trump and Kim Jong-un is limited to a war of words. Does this mean that both sides are trying to avoid a real hot war? If they do not want a real war, then strategic deterrence is a way to prevent disaster. North Korea will continue to develop its nuclear
weapons and ICBMs to avoid regime change, and the US will strengthen its military forces in South Korea, including deploying THAAD to protect its allies. The result is a military race on all sides as a strategy of deterrence.

However, China refuses to accept THAAD deployment in South Korea. China also refuses North Korea the right to have nuclear weapons. So far, China’s requests have been ignored by North and South Korea. This makes China turn to Russia for assistance in persuading both North and South Korea to end their military provocation. Furthermore, this urged restraint is intended to reduce US pressure through UN economic sanctions and maintain China’s traditional influence in Korean Peninsula despite the emerging division between China and the DPRK.

Thus, Russia broadens its economic ties with the DPRK and tries to prove that ineffectiveness of economic sanctions against North Korea means that pressure is not an effective method for denuclearization. North Korea appears to be approaching Russia and promoting Russia’s role in the Korean peninsula. Therefore, Russia’s role is gaining importance because China, Japan, South Korea and even North Korea are turning towards Russia. Russia is becoming the only game player with influence on Trump, who has been accused of involving Russia to change the result of the US presidential elections and who is also eager for normalization of relations between US and Russia.

In summary, if Russia and the US are the key players in the Korean Peninsula, then all the other players must pay these two giants to avoid a real war. If China could further cooperate with Russia, it might escape the “Thucydides trap” that Graham Allison predicts in this decade.

Table 1. Assertion and approach of six parties.

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<tr>
<th>Six Party-Talk Players</th>
<th>Assertion on the Threat</th>
<th>Approach to the Solution</th>
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<td>US</td>
<td>Totally Destroy: Trump at UN speech 2017 said: “The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea.”[39]</td>
<td>Economic Sanctions: Trump announced an executive order on Sept. 21 to enforce economic sanctions on North Korea and countries that do business with the “rogue regime” of North Korea.[40]</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Diplomacy + Military: The US State Secretary Tillerson: “We will continue our efforts in the diplomatic arena, but all our military options are on the table”[41]</td>
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| North Korea            | No Place Safe under the scenario of denying the DPRK regime existence: Kim Jong-un: “Anyone who dares insult our supreme dignity and deny the existence of our state H-bomb and ICBMs against the US: North Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Ri Yong said the potential test of “the most
can never go scot-free. The enemies will find no place safe on the earth from the fire of our nuclear bombs and H-bombs fitted into the powerful striking means of Juche.”[42]

**South Korea**

**Denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula:*** Moon said: “We will never accept nuclear weapons in the Korean Peninsula but we do need to develop our military capabilities.”[44]

**Humanitarian Aid:** South Korea’s unification minister, Cho Myung-gyon, said the government had “consistently said we would pursue humanitarian aid for North Korea in consideration of the poor conditions there among children and pregnant women.”[45]

**Japan**

**No Talks, Pressure and All Options:** The Japanese prime minister Abe said: “We consistently support the stance of the United States: that ‘all options are on the table.’” “What is needed to do that is not dialogue, but pressure.”[46]

**Support US Positions:** Abe wrote in a New York Times op-ed published Sunday that time is short for the pressure of international sanctions to truly put the brakes on the regime of Kim Jong-un.[47]

**China**

**Peaceful Solution:** Xi said China has been adamant in preserving international nuclear non-proliferation, maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula, and resolving the nuclear issue through talks.[48]

**Sanctions + Talks:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, (pictured), said today that the key to solving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula is both sanctions and dialogue.[49]

**Russia**

**Sanctions Useless until the DPRK Feels Safe:** At the BRICS summit, Russian President Putin said that Russia condemned North Korea’s provocations but that further sanctions would be useless and ineffective, describing the measures as a “road to nowhere.”

Foreign interventions in Iraq and Libya had convinced the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, that he needed nuclear weapons to survive, Putin said.

**Contact + Calm + Talks:** Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov urged all parties to maintain a diplomatic approach to the Korean Peninsula crisis, saying “We have to calm down the hotheads and understand that we need pauses, we need contacts.”[51]
“They will eat grass but will not stop their [nuclear] programme as long as they do not feel safe.”[50]


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*Feng-Yung Hu* - Assistant Professor in the College of General Studies at Yuan Ze University. She works as the Contributing Researcher at Taipei Forum Foundation and the columnist for many newspapers and News Agencies in Taiwan, HK and China. She has contributed many articles about Russia foreign policy and Russia-China relations in the Chinese media. She got her PhD degree at Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MGIMO). She worked as the short-term visiting scholar at Georgetown University under the the Asian Studies Program (2012.9-2013.2). She also served as the Program Planner of the 18th International Association of Intercultural Studies (2012-AICS Annual Convention) at YZU in Taiwan. She is organizing Russian and Eurasian studies Center in the College of General Studies at Yuan Ze University. This paper has been sponsored by a key Chinese National Program in the Social Sciences, No.16AZD052, conducted by Professor Wu Fei

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