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NUKES: THE FIRE AND THE FURY

— Bonnie Jenkins

President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continue to exchange words of anger as the world watches. The character of the dialogue and the highly public name-calling between the two are unlike anything the international community has seen from heads of state in recent years.

The complicated relationship with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program is not new. The United States and North Korea and other regional countries have a longstanding and challenging history of negotiations. In 2003, North Korea withdrew from the Nonproliferation Treaty but in 2005 agreed to give up its program in exchange for energy assistance from the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. The following year, North Korea tested a long-range missile, forcing the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to demand North Korea suspend its program. After also testing a nuclear weapon in 2006, North Korea agreed in 2007 to close its main nuclear reactor in exchange for aid worth 400 million USD.

Continued six-party talks (with the United States, North Korea, China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea) later resulted in negotiations breaking down in 2008 because North Korea refused to allow international inspectors unfettered access to its facilities. In 2009, North Korea conducted another nuclear test, and more sanctions were imposed.

This past summer, North Korea fired a missile that flew over Japan, and North Korea tested its sixth nuclear weapon in September. Neither the six-party talks nor sanctions imposed on North Korea provided a lasting solution. With the current relationship between North Korea and the United States at a tipping point, maybe the time is right to consider how the international community can bring forth new perspectives and approaches to the stalemate.

For many years, the United States promoted the process of negotiation through the six-party talks. Those talks are based on the belief that the six countries are the most likely to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. Outside of the UNSC involvement in sanctions and some Track II discussions, the six-party talks have been the predominant platform for negotiations. Now, however, North Korea's continued testing and the inability to find a diplomatic way forward have become a global problem. The rest of the world is waiting for a diplomatic solution to the standoff.

Nuclear weapons are a global concern, and many states have a stake in the resolution of the issue. In the negotiations leading to the 2013 destruction of chemical weapons in Syria and the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear program, there was a multilateral effort to resolve each of those international security issues. Each effort engaged states that can bring to the table different strengths and approaches. By making the structure of negotiations on North Korean nuclear weapons more inclusive, the international community can take advantage of lessons learned from other challenging diplomatic engagements. We can learn from our past to help shape our future.

For example, the Syrian chemical weapons issue needed a quick response, prompting the active engagement of several countries in 2013. Russia, the United States, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Finland, the United Kingdom, and others were engaged in the effort. There was significant involvement of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations (UN). The global community realized that an international effort was needed.

Similarly, in the multilateral negotiations leading to the JCPOA, several countries came to the table: France, Germany, Iran, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Russia, as well as the European Union. Those negotiations led to an agreement that halted a significant concern in the international community about Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions.

While it is worth considering making negotiations with North Korea more inclusive, it is important to note that no discussions will occur until there is a reduction in the level of heightened tensions. At a minimum, the United States can start by working with other countries to articulate a vision for the future. The United States and others, both within and outside the region, can discuss the goals of such negotiations and determine what would be a success. New perspectives can lead to innovative strategies. However, it may prove challenging to get North Korea to the negotiating table, so figuring out how to bring in North Korea is paramount.

It would be worth considering bilateral negotiations when it is diplomatically and substantively suitable, such as between the United States and North Korea, or between North and South Korea. At times it would

be best to have discussions with just countries from the Northeast Asia region or revamped six-party talks. At other times, it would be more appropriate to add other countries to the negotiations, such as France and Germany, to bring in additional perspectives and experiences gained from talks that led to the JCPOA and chemical weapons destruction in Syria. Such discussions may include, where appropriate, relevant international organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency. As noted, however, reducing the current tensions between the United States and North Korea and finding the right incentives to bring North Korea to the table is critical. The stakes could not be higher.

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