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Денуклеаризация Корейского полуострова: забытые аспекты

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Аннотация. При обсуждении различных вопросов денуклеаризации Корейского полуострова западные политики и эксперты сосредотачиваются исключительно на поиске путей того, как вынудить КНДР отказаться от её ядерного и ракетного потенциала. Одновременно США пытаются всяческими посулами убедить КНДР перейти в американскую зону безопасности в США. Между тем в совместном заявлении лидеров США и КНДР, принятом по итогам их саммита в июне 2018 г., говорится о денуклеаризации всего полуострова, т. е. не только Северной, но и Южной Кореи. Автор предлагает своё видение именно этих и ряда других, почти не затрагиваемых экспертами, аспектов денуклеаризации Кореи.

Ключевые слова: Корейский полуостров, Южная Корея, денуклеаризация, безопасность, ядерное оружие, средства доставки ОМУ.

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Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula: forgotten aspects

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Abstract. When discussing various issues of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Western politicians and experts focus exclusively on finding ways to force the DPRK to abandon its nuclear and missile capabilities. At the same time, the US is employing all the sorts of inducements to persuade the DPRK to move to the American security zone in NEA. Meanwhile, the joint statement of the leaders of the United States and North Korea, adopted at the end of their summit in June 2018 in Singapore, refers to the denuclearization of the entire Peninsula (not only North Korea, but South Korea as well). The author offers his vision of these aspects of denuclearization of Korea, almost untouched by experts.

Keywords: Korean Peninsula, South Korea, denuclearization, security, nuclear weapons, WMD delivery means.

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Introduction

One can hardly deny that the US played a major role in elevating the DPRK nuclear program to the international agenda in the early 1990s. Washington is still trying to claim the role of a representative of the entire international community in solving this problem and at the same time trying to impose its vision of the reasons for its emergence in the world, and which is more important, the ways to solve it, with little regard to opinions and proposals of other participants of the settlement.

The history of the negotiation process on the nuclear problem at the “Six-Party” format (US, China, Russia, Japan, North and South Korea), held in 2003–2008, demonstrated that the United States used the talks not so much to deal with the non-proliferation dossier, but to realize its own geopolitical interests in the region, the essence of which was maintaining the US military and political dominance in East Asia at any cost. Within this framework the US used all means available to achieve the isolation and subsequent collapse of the DPRK. Naturally, such a course could hardly win support from Russia and China.

With the advent of Barak Obama’s “pivot to Asia”, the US major efforts were shifted to “deter” China and make it pursue a policy, that fits into the framework of the US-led world order. Realizing a regime change in the DPRK and unifying the peninsula under Washington’s patronage (thus obtaining the most important bridgehead at the junction of the borders of Russia and China) remains the US ultimate goal in the region.

The approach represents a real, not declamatory US policy toward North Korea, which was epitomized by a well known expert on Korean affairs in the Bush administration Victor Cha. As early as in 2009 he left a very explicit behest to Obama’s team of newcomers in White House: “Keep an eye on the prize: remember that the ultimate prize is not denuclearization but managing an eventual “inheritance” process, where a united Korea (free and democratic) is an engine of peace and economic growth in Asia and a global partner of the US in world affairs” [Cha Victor, 2009].

With the Trump administration access to power certain adjustments were made to this policy. They were caused first of all by the unexpected success of the DPRK nuclear and missile programs, namely by the North’s acquisition of the means of delivery of nuclear weapons to the continental part of the US. Any attempts to eliminate this capability did not guarantee success and therefore were fraught with unpredictable consequences and met with strong objections on the part of the US two main allies in the region – South Korea and Japan, which could suffer most in the event of war.

As a result, the United States was forced once again to try a negotiated solution of the problem. However, the 2018–2019 dialogue (like it happened before) was designed by the US not so much to bring the complete denuclearization of the DPRK (although this goal is not officially abandoned), as to force the country’s unconditional surrender through the US-orchestrated “maximum pressure” campaign. In this atmosphere the US-DPRK negotiations have stalled over how to implement the broadly worded joint statement, approved by D. Trump and Mr. Kim in Singapore in June 2018. By the end of 2019 both sides have resumed mutual accusations sounding increasingly frustrated about negotiations.

Approaches Chosen and Forgotten

The failure of the US-DPRK working level meeting in Stockholm in October 2019 once again demonstrated how far both sides remain from each other on the essence, meaning and scope of the Korean Peninsula denuclearization.

The debate on how to solve the problem of the denuclearization – employing a step by step approach of gradual mutual concessions or concluding the so-called “big deal”, drawn by John Bolton and Mike Pompeo and proposed to Kim Jong-un by the US President Donald Trump at the summit in February 2019 in Hanoi remained at the center of rather heated discussions during 2019. Sometimes it seems that the American side is finally beginning to embrace the opinion of the majority of experts, who have pointed out that the only realistic way in the current circumstances is a gradual, phased process leading toward this goal.

To my mind the two minimum conditions for this progress are the existence of sustainable political will and building mutual trust, which can be achieved only if each party unconditionally fulfils its obligations at each of the agreed stages of denuclearization.

The lack of trust is a major reason, why a “one-time” solution is impossible. This was well understood by the participants of the Six-Party Talks back in 2005, when they agreed to implement the Joint Statement of September 19th in Beijing “in a phased manner in line with the principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action” [Text of N. Korea talks agreement, 2005].

Unfortunately, this principle was not observed later on, which ultimately led to the collapse of the Six-Party Talks. Meanwhile exactly this approach was successfully applied in the process of implementation of the so-called “Iranian deal” since 2015, until on May 8, 2015 the President D. Trump announced the US unilateral withdrawal from the agreement, approved by the UN Security Council by the way.

Thus the disputes about the methods of solution of the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula (KPNP), unfolded in 2018–2019 were totally pointless, especially considering the fact that the Joint Statement of September 19, 2005 was approved by all the participants of the Six-Party Talks, including the United States.

If we accept the argument of some American experts and politicians justifying the right of the new US administration to make appropriate (in its opinion) adjustments not only to the US foreign policy, but also to the international agreements, signed by the previous US administration, the conclusion of any long-term agreement with America for any country loses any sense. First of all, this applies to countries, which relations with the United States have been or remain controversial or even hostile and are characterized by a critically low level of mutual trust.

Pyongyang also cannot help but wonder what will happen to possible agreements with the US “after Trump”. The DPRK already has a disappointing experience in this regard. The relations markedly progressed under Bill Clinton and were totally reversed by George W. Bush, who included the DPRK in the so-called “axis of evil” and in Pentagon list of seven countries that could become the objects of the US preemptive nuclear strikes. G. Bush made the motto of his administration’s policy abbreviation A. B. C. (Anything But Clinton approach) – a course that denied everything that was done under B. Clinton. The motto of the incumbent host of the White House could be described by a similar formula – A. B. O., revoking everything, that was done under Obama: the TPP, NAFTA, the

agreement on climate change, the nuclear deal with Iran and etc. Even long-time allies in the military and political blocs – from the Atlantic to the Pacific – are unceremoniously pushed around.

Besides, Pyongyang cannot ignore the extremely poor record of the United States in complying with its international obligations in the field of arms control and reduction, from its unwillingness to ratify the CTBT to its withdrawal from the ABM and INF treaties, as well as its apparent unwillingness to extend the Start III Treaty with Russia, which expires in 2021.

One can expect almost with 100-percentage confidence that if the Democratic party candidate wins the presidential elections in the United States in 2020, his slogan will be A. B. T. – anything, but not what Trump has already done in foreign and domestic policy. It is unlikely that Pyongyang does not keep in mind such an option.

In addition, the Trump administration itself lacks unity on how to deal with the DPRK. The statements on this subject, made by such figures as Vice-President M. Pence and currently fired national security adviser J. Bolton indicate that they are the supporters of a much tougher course toward Pyongyang.

Thus taking into account the above far from complete list of problems, the step-by-step approach is the only realistic one.

Denuclearizing South Korea

When the denuclearization issue is raised, many experts prefer to talk mostly about solving the “North Korean nuclear problem”. Meanwhile, it is highly likely that the scope and degree of denuclearization of the DPRK will depend on reciprocal steps in this sphere in South Korea. One should keep in mind that the joint statement signed on the results of the US and DPRK leaders’ summit in June of 2018 in Singapore calls for denuclearization of not just North Korea, but of the whole Korean Peninsula.

The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid special attention to this issue at a news conference, following his visit to the United States. He said that “Our US colleagues use the terms “denuclearisation of the DPRK”. This notion is imprecise and inaccurate, since all the agreements are about denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. These are different things, as you can plainly see” [Lavrov, 2019].

Why is this question important? Firstly, the US was the first to deploy nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula, not to mention the fact that during the Korean War the Americans were going to use these weapons against North Korea and even China.

In 1991 President George W. Bush announced that tactical nuclear weapons had been removed from South Korea. Whether this is true or not is a big question. According to the DPRK press reports, nuclear weapons remain on the territory of the Republic of Korea. Various world media outlets reported in the 1970–80s, that there were American nuclear mines in the South near the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea in most of the tank hazardous valleys.

Secondly, South Korea hosts more than 28 000 US troops; its ports are frequently visited by US nuclear aircraft carriers and submarines, and air space – by US strategic bombers (the carriers of nuclear weapons). There are no signs that the US and the ROK are going to abandon the practice.

Recently the deployment of THAAD system was resumed in South Korea. Last week the North Korean news agency reported that the US stockpiled 2,74 million of depleted uranium shells in South Korea [KCNA, 2019].

In addition, South Korea has 25 nuclear reactors operating at atomic power plants. Seoul is seeking to obtain the right to reprocess US fuel for its reactors.

How would the denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula be ensured if this practice continues on the part of the United States and South Korea? Given these circumstances, even in the case of complete elimination of all nuclear programs in the DPRK, it would be hardly possible to recognize the Korean Peninsula as having been completely denuclearized.

Therefore, it is important how the denuclearization process will proceed and be monitored not only in North Korea, but also in South Korea. If the organization of intrusive inspections at nuclear facilities in the DPRK is envisaged, it is highly likely that the North Korean side would also like to know what is happening in the South to make sure, that there are no nuclear weapons there, including at US military bases.

It is worth noting that this issue has already been discussed during the events that led to the first nuclear crisis in Korea in 1992–1994. Then the US side agreed that inspections should be carried out in South Korea. How this issue will be dealt currently is a big question that will certainly arise in due time.

Unhappy experience of the 1990s makes the author suspect that it is unlikely to obtain North Korea's consent to access to those underground facilities that are not related to its nuclear and missile programs. This will inevitably raise doubts as to whether all the facilities used for these programs have been declared by the DPRK.

Another topic of future negotiations will be, in my opinion, the problem of curtailing the DPRK missile program. The ban, imposed by the UN Security Council in June of 2009 on any launches “using ballistic technologies”, actually prohibits North Korea not only from launching satellites, but also in general from having missiles, that makes it virtually defenseless in the contemporary world.

Adopting relevant resolutions, the UNSC (for some reasons) ignored the fact that in March 2009 North Korea informed about its accession to the International Space Treaty of 1966 (from March 6, 2009) and the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space of 1974 (from March 10, 2009) [RIA-Novosti, 2009].

Those, who are at least a little versed in North Korean politics and psychology of the leadership of this country, understood that such an approach would certainly be rejected in Pyongyang as the “apogee of double standards” and as another attempt of “big countries” (in different historical periods directing the Koreans how to live) to re-establish over the DPRK something similar to trusteeship. The DPRK has never recognized these limitations and is not going to do so in the future. The stance was reconfirmed by the representative of the DPRK Foreign Ministry on August 6, 2019 [Spokesperson for DPRK Foreign Ministry, 2019].

Under such circumstances, given the constant rivalry between Pyongyang and Seoul and their unwillingness to yield to each other, the missile programs of North and South Korea should have approximately the same limitations, for which it is advisable to consider the DPRK accession to the international missile technology control regime (MTCR).

D. Trump's reaction to the North Korean recent missile launches testified that the US actually gave tacit consent to the DPRK possession of middle and short-range missiles in exchange for

Pyongyang's promise to refrain from testing of ICBM and nuclear weapons [North Korea Fires More Ballistic Missiles, 2019].

As for Japan's concerns in this regard, they look, to put it mildly, unconvincing: why Tokyo can launch spy satellites, that are constantly hanging over the territory of the DPRK, while the North Koreans are totally forbidden to have missiles?

Among major reasons for North Korea to develop nuclear weapons is constantly increasing the gap in terms of conventional armaments between this country on one side, and the US and the ROK on the other. As recent North Korean statements made it clear, Pyongyang will highly likely link his denuclearization steps to limitations on deployment of conventional "offensive military hardware" in the ROK.

"Corresponding Measures"

The DPRK indicated that it will move down the road of denuclearization only if the US takes certain "corresponding measures" in two main spheres – security and sanctions.

A major step in security sphere could be the signing of a document officially proclaiming the end of the Korean War. The main concern of the American side is how the adoption of such a document will impact the presence of US troops in South Korea and generally in East Asia.

Some US experts are even afraid that "President Donald Trump, as he did when he decided to deal directly with Kim, will go for a bold and unconventional move to break the impasse: a proposal to pull US forces out of South Korea in exchange for North Korea's final, complete and verifiable denuclearization. Such a last-gasp attempt to keep diplomacy alive may seem attractive to the impulsive and mercurial Trump, but it would inevitably confront a myriad of daunting negotiating, diplomatic, political and technical problems that would likely strangle the idea in its crib" [Depetris D., 2019].

The opinions of some experts, that at the initial stage of the denuclearization process the North Koreans may be satisfied with the opening of liaison offices, the removal of restrictions on human exchanges and activities of international and humanitarian organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to the DPRK seem to be not very convincing.

The content of "corresponding measures" in the economic field was presented by the DPRK Foreign Minister Lee Yong-ho at a press conference immediately after the unsuccessful conclusion of Hanoi summit. According to him, North Korea insisted on removing of a number of provisions in 5 of 11 UNSC resolutions, that have a negative impact on the economy and people's lives in North Korea. Moreover, at the Hanoi summit the DPRK was ready to be satisfied with this partial lifting of sanctions, given that it would be difficult for the US to take "corresponding steps" in a political or military sphere [Rossiiskaya gazeta, 2019].

Generally, the emphasis made on economic benefits, including lifting of certain sanctions, which the DPRK will get in case it will take visible steps toward denuclearization, seems ill-founded and disregarding past experience of dealing with the country. Moreover, such an approach leads us away from the essence of the problem. For Pyongyang economic gains are not a decisive argument. Soon after the start of the Six-Party Talks, Seoul offered deliveries of the electricity to Pyongyang, equally produced by those two Light Water Reactors (LWR), not constructed by KEDO. The North Koreans have not agreed. The fate of the Agreed Framework and the Leap Day Deal speak in favor of the conclusion.

Paying attention to economic aspects of settlement, nevertheless it is necessary to remember that the nuclear problem was caused, first of all, by the security crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Economic factors matter, too, but security considerations were certainly at the forefront for the DPRK.

For the DPRK, especially after Yugoslavia, Iraq and especially Libya, security is a top priority. Pyongyang is trying to normalize relations with the US, because through achieving the goal it hopes if not to get guarantees of the survival, but at least to reduce the external threat and create conditions, under which it will be much more difficult for the US to use force against the DPRK. Economic inducements and lifting of sanctions are viewed in Pyongyang first of all not as economic benefits but as a proof that the US is serious about abandoning “hostile policy” and building “new relations” with the DPRK.

Meanwhile some people in the US are inclined to put off such normalization after the DPRK satisfies American demands concerning human rights, reduction of conventional armaments, liquidation of stocks of the chemical and bacteriological weapon, export of narcotics and fake dollars. In view of such US position, the negotiations from the DPRK point of view are losing any sense because even full satisfaction of the US demands on non-proliferation issues would not allow Pyongyang to achieve a main objective for the sake of which North Korea has agreed to participate in the talks – normalization of relations with the United States.

Trump’s “Grand Design” for the Korean Peninsula

Some US “think tanks” and scholars were looking for a rather long time for ways and means to radically strengthen the US position in Northeast Asia through the formation of a new system of peace maintenance there, which would allow the US to retain its military presence in the region.

American political scientists and “think tanks” are competing to invent any excuses in order to find reasons for maintaining the US military contingent in the south of the Korean Peninsula in the event of normalization of relations between the two Korean states. Peter Hayes, director of the Nautilus Institute, makes reference to analytical paper compiled in August 2019 by a group of well-known US scholars who believe that “US Forces Korea may shift from being a solely partisan deterrent force in Korea to becoming a pivot deterrent, one that provides reassurance to both Koreas that neither will attack the other and that facilitates communication, cooperation, and collaboration between UNC, UNC allies, and the two Korean military forces to reconfigure their respective forces, and to employ them in constructive ways to support peacemaking and the formation of trust between political and military commanders, rather than preparing for war” [Hayes, 2019].

Recently some American experts explore a possibility of including the DPRK along with the ROK in the US-led future security system, embracing both North and South Korea in case Pyongyang accepts the American script of denuclearization. It would allow the US to establish its control over a unique in a strategic value region of NEA, which is located on a joint of borders of Russia and China. It is assumed that in this situation, the US will act as a guarantor of the security of the entire Korean Peninsula (not only South, but North Korea as well) [McKinney, 2018].

The calculation is that although the DPRK and the PRC have recently improved bilateral relations, Pyongyang nevertheless allegedly perceives China’s rise as “potentially threatening to its own foreign policy autonomy and political independence” [Sokolsky R., Depetris D., 2018].

Consequently, American experts conclude that North Korea may be more receptive to the idea of US-proposed alignment of forces in the region.

According to these calculations, among the tasks of the future “trilateral partnership in the field of security” will be: first, “preventing Chinese domination over the Korean Peninsula” to “allow North and South Korea to determine their own future, either separately or together”; secondly, “managing and defusing the broader Chinese strategic threat to the Asia-Pacific region”, and thirdly, to make Japan feel more comfortable in an environment of inter-Korean détente in order to prevent the resurgence of nationalism and militarism in that country [McKinney, 2018].

As it became quite clear, Trump’s Korean policy “grand design” includes applying “maximum pressure” to the DPRK in order to isolate and weaken the country as much as possible, and then offer to Pyongyang “security guarantees”, adding “prosperity” as a carrot according to Trump’s “receipt”. Perhaps in the hope of winning in this great geopolitical combination there is hidden a secret of such an uncharacteristic for D. Trump complaisance, which he has demonstrated toward the DPRK and its leader even after failure of the summit in Hanoi.

However, the DPRK-China summits on the eve of all top-level talks with the U.S. and South Korea testified that Pyongyang, though not averse to play such games with Washington, is not going to put all eggs into a single basket. While praising Trump, the North Koreans hardly failed to notice the U.S. recent actions concerning events in Venezuela. Pyongyang has enough ground to suspect that the advanced technologies of changing “rogue regimes”, tested in Venezuela, will be used not only in Latin America.

Conclusion

Recent resumption of personal attacks from North Korea’s top diplomats against D. Trump for his calling the DPRK leader Kim Jong-un a ‘Rocket Man’ testified, that the North Koreans harbor no illusions about the US true intentions [First Vice-Foreign Minister of DPRK, 2019].

Pyongyang is also seemingly losing patience with Washington over US obvious unpreparedness to make more concessions by the end of December, 2019, that the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un demanded in April of 2019 [North Korea Threatens, 2019].

At the moment there is quite a delicate balance on the peninsula – the US is trying to “drag” the DPRK into its sphere of influence, promising security assurances and economic prosperity, but China is doing its best under current circumstances to retain North Korea as a friendly buffer state against the US forward-deployed forces in East Asia. Meanwhile, Pyongyang is skillfully using this “draw situation” to further advance its nuclear and missile programs.

Bismarck once noted, that politics is the art of the possible. And to be effective, it must take into account existing realities. The stark reality in the Korean case is that during the last 13 years (since North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006) the country became de-facto (and according to its constitution – de-jury) a nuclear-missile power. To demand to realize a complete dismantlement of all its nuclear and missile programs from such a country without any meaningful reciprocal steps, satisfying its security and other concerns and after that only to “allow” the country to revive the peaceful components of those programs “from a scratch” looks attractive from propaganda point of view, but politically unrealistic.

The pragmatic approach today (while not abandoning denuclearization as a final goal) is initially to freeze and restrict and later to downsize and eliminate the most destabilizing military

components of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. As early as in 2017 Susan Rice, the US former national security adviser from 2013 to 2017, called for tolerance and deterrence as major elements of a new policy toward nuclear-armed North Korea [Rice S. 2017]. Today it is crystal clear that any further progress in denuclearizing North Korea could be achieved simultaneously with relevant progress in addressing the DPRK and other regional players' security concerns.

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