



Recent Developments Related to Nuclear and Missile Issues in North Korea

Speakers: Amb Anil Wadhwa, Amb Skand Tayal, Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra

Chair: Amb Ashok K Kantha

Date: 11 October 2017

ICWA Conference Room

In opening remarks, the Chair said that the US had ran out of patience on North Korean nuclear issue, leading to escalation in tensions, with US president Trump talking about deployment of military option to deter North Korea from conducting another missile test as economic sanctions have yielded no results.

To begin with, Amb. Anil Wadhwa offered an overview of the North Korean missile issue with special emphasis on Chinese and Russian perspective. Commenting on the issue he said that recent events related to the North Korean missile issue have escalated tension in the region as nature of the North Korean regime is opaque and unpredictable. The crux of the issue is the North Korean insecurity in terms regime survival, is prompting it to opt for nuclear deterrence against the US; owing to the fact that US has deployed 50000 military troops in Japan, 25000 in South Korea, the US joint military exercise with South Korea and the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD). Countries in the region remain concerned, especially Japan and South Korea; and the US is playing double game of threats of war with North Korea and seeking diplomatic solutions on the issue at the same time. While explaining history of the crisis, speaker said that North Korea has been investing heavily on defence since the last century which served purposes like deterrence against the US and extracting economic sanctions from the US, South Korea and Japan as well. In 1994, North Korea threatened withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT); but with China as a negotiator, the US agreed on a framework where North Korea committed to abandon its nuclear programme in exchange of two Light Water Reactors. The agreement collapsed in 2002 due to non-compliance

from both side which led to North Korea's exit from the NPT in 2003 and thereafter series of nuclear tests, from the first test in 2006 to sixth test up until now. Meanwhile there was also an attempt to resolve crisis in the form of Six Party Talks involving the US, China, North Korea, Japan, South Korea and Russia; but this initiative met with failure apart from 2005 breakthrough when North Korea had pledged to give up its nuclear program and return to the NPT. Now with Kim-Jong-Un in power, North Korea is demonstrating its deterrence capability with great vigour.

As far as the Chinese perspective on the issue is concerned, it is evident that Beijing is apprehensive of economic sanctions on North Korea as this might end up with destabilizing the region, with China facing huge refugee flow from North Korea; and vanishing out the existing buffer zone between China and South Korea – where the US troops have large presence. With respect to Russian perspective the speaker said that Masco is competing for influence in order to fill up the potential power vacuum caused by if the US retreat takes place from the region. Although Russian economic engagement with North Korea is at very low level compared to China; it is certain that they are eyeing for an opportunity to increase business presence in the North Korea.

Ambassador Skand Tayal, put forward the US and South Korean perspective on the issue. The central argument of the speaker was that the international community should focus on containing North Korean nuclear capacity instead of seeking denuclearization of the peninsula. He also pointed out drivers of North Korean behaviour; basically possessed deterrence capability against the US so that it avoids any military option for resolving the crisis and drive a wedge between the US and South Korea, and demand an equal status for negotiating with the US on this issue. The long term objectives of North Korea include regime survival, peace treaty with the US and withdrawal of the US forces from South Korea. The US response to recent provocations from North Korean side can be understood by statements of John Mattis, Secretary of Defence and Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State quoted in the Wall Street Journal on 13 August 2017 which mentioned US's objectives. One, denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula; two, the US has no interest in regime change; three, the US has no interest in accelerated unification; and four, the US has no intension to garrison its troops North of the DMZ. Notwithstanding these statements, on the other hand the White House statement advocates starving North Korea of resources and damage their nuclear progression capabilities. When it comes to South Korean position on the issue, for excluding few military people there seems no sign of opposition from people as they are living under this threat for last six decades. South Korean President was quoted saying that while his conversation with the US president on phone; Trump promised to seek South Korean approval before pursuing any action against the nuclear armed North Korea, South Korea will have a final say in any military action on the Korean Peninsula and there will be no war on the Korean Peninsula again. To conclude, the speaker said he sees no possibility of crisis ending soon and war is not an option for the US and South Korea.

Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra highlighted historical evolution of North Korean missile issue. Prior to that he observed few things; one, he said, North Korea was in a way created by the Soviet Union;

two, China was directly involved in helping North Korea during Korean War. Given the Chinese and Russian attempts of intervention into North Korean domestic politics in 1962-64, from the beginning, North Korea had to deal with friends (China, Soviet Union) and foes (the US, South Korea) to seek its autonomy in foreign policy making. North Korean nuclear program is driven by both rational elements like survival, deterrence and irrational elements like seeking glory in the form of possessing nuclear power. To attain nuclear capability, North Korea used its own experience while reaching out other countries like Hungary, Romania, gaining declassified materials from the UK and some support from Soviet Union. Speaker identifies four phases in North Korean missile programs or crisis. The first phase in initial 1990s where North Korea was faced with a dilemma, over nuclear missiles programs, whether to continue it or shut down; ultimately, North Korean regime decided to quit its nuclear program in exchange of two Light Water Reactors, in an agreement with the US in 1994 but this failed due to breaches from both side. The second phase of nuclear crisis emerged with North Korea leaving out of Nuclear Accord with the US and NPT in 2002 and 2003 respectively; and also exploring the possibility of Uranium enrichment from Pakistan when they realized winding up nuclear program is not an option. The third phase witnessed Six Party Talks and China's influence on North Korea to give up the nuclear program; but it seemed little serious about negotiations which became evident when the first nuclear test was conducted in 2006. The fourth phase continues with North Korea repeatedly provoking the US and South Korea by conducting nuclear missile tests especially in recent times, after Trump came to power.

The speaker concluded saying that both Mr. Trump and Kim-Jong-Un have been provocative with each other, but the US and North Korea will hesitate crossing the redline by attacking each other, even if North Korea continues with its provocative behaviour.

The report is prepared by Mr. Chetananand Y Patil, Research Intern, ICS.

About the Speakers:

Ambassador Anil Wadhwa served as Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs between 2014 and 2016. He was India's Ambassador to the Italy (2016-17), Thailand (2011-2014), Poland (2004-2007) and Oman (2007-2011). He handled the portfolios of Russia and Eastern Europe in the Ministry of External Affairs and also worked on disarmament-related issues for 14 years, including a seven-year stint with the organisation for the prohibition of chemical weapons in The Hague (1993-2000). He also served in China twice, at the Permanent Mission of India in Geneva and in Hong Kong. Ambassador Wadhwa has contributed several articles, mainly in the field of disarmament and international security to various publications.

Ambassador Tayal served in Indian Missions in Sofia, Warsaw, Geneva and Moscow, after joining the Indian Foreign Service in 1976. He was India's Consul General in Johannesburg (1996-98) and Houston (2002-05), and Ambassador of India to Uzbekistan (2005-08). He was Ambassador of India to the Republic of Korea during 2008-11. Ambassador Tayal was Secretary

of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO during 1991-95 and served briefly as the Director in charge of IITs in the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development. He was Joint Secretary (Consular, Passport and Visa) in the Ministry of External Affairs and the Chief Passport Officer of India during 1999-2002. He is currently a guest professor in Delhi University and Vice President of India-ROK Friendship Society.

Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra is an Associate Professor at the Centre for East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He is also an Adjunct Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi and a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi. He writes a monthly column named East Asia Compass at the IPCS website. He completed his Master degree in International Politics from Jawaharlal Nehru University and obtained his MPhil and PhD degrees from the same university working in the field of Korean Studies. He studied Korean Language in South Korea and has been a Visiting Fellow and Visiting Scholar at many South Korean research institutes and universities. He also had a unique opportunity to visit North Korea on a research trip in 2013. The areas of his research interests are Inter-Korea Relations, North Korean Nuclear Issue, International Relations of East Asia and Korea, East Asian Security, and India-Korea Relations.

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