

Reassessing North Korea's Nuclear Threat After the 3rd Nuclear Test

- Session:** Regency Room
Date/Time: February 19, 2013 / 12:30-13:45
- Moderator:** Joshua Pollack, Science Applications International Corporation
- Speakers:** Kim Yongho, Yonsei University
Markus Schiller, Schmucker Technologie
Joel Wit, U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS
- Rapporteur:** Kristine Bergström, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Session Sketch

Kim Yongho, Professor of Political Science and Director of Yonsei Institute for North Korean Studies, Yonsei University, started by declaring that he takes a pessimistic view of the North Korean nuclear issue and that in his opinion North Korea will never abandon its nuclear weapons. Professor Yongho argued that economic sanctions will not work because nothing is more important to the North Korean regime than its political survival, so the only solution is to convince the leadership that they have something to lose. And the way to do this is by sending the message that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un could face the same fate as Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Making the point that the latest North Korean rocket launch in December, 2012 was 'not a big deal,' Marcus Schiller, Senior Analyst at Schmucker Technologie, noted that the launch of the Unha-3 long-range rocket does not have to result in an immediate change of the North Korean threat assessment. Dr. Schiller argued that while it is difficult to guess the intentions of the North Korean leadership, it is possible to look at its nuclear capabilities in order to assess the nature of the threat and think of possible responses. Schiller said that the Unha-3 rocket launch was more of a political signal, both foreign and domestic, and that it aimed to show the people of North

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Korea that their nation is prosperous. Schiller concluded that the rocket launch is a political tool, but not a direct threat at the moment.

Joshua Pollack, Senior Analyst, Science Applications International Corporation, suggested that North Korea has undertaken what he calls a “stepping-stone approach;” in attempting to achieve technical development, the North Korean regime is not building a bridge, but is trying to skip from one small stone to the next with very few resources. Mr. Pollack noted that North Korea proceeds by building a single prototype of a missile, tests it, then moves on to the next without fixing the bugs of the first one. Pollack pointed out that this way of proceeding is similar to that of the Chinese.

Taking the standpoint of a policymaker, Joel Wit, Senior Research Scholar at the US-Korea Institute, The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, said he believes that there is momentum behind the North Korean nuclear weapons program, that North Korea is serious about developing nuclear weapons, and that that is a problem. Mr. Wit added that the launch of the Unha-3 missile is just the tip of the iceberg and that it gives us an idea of North Korea's intentions for the future. Wit concluded that the United States needs to seriously think about its policy toward North Korea and re-examine the current approach that he dubbed “weak sanctions and weak diplomacy.”

Pollack finished by asking how far policymakers should go in making assumptions about potential risks from North Korea based on what has been observed - to which Schiller echoed his previous remarks that while it is important to plan for worst-case scenarios, it is crucial to remain realistic and base policies on reliable data rather than assumptions.

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