



Session Sketch

Asan Plenum 2019: “Korea’s Choice”
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Session: North Korea’s Choice: Nuclear Issue

Date/Time: April 23, 2019 / 21:00-22:30

Rapporteur:

Kathryn Botto, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Moderator:

Jung H. Pak, The Brookings Institution

Speakers:

Chun Yungwoo, Korean Peninsula Future Forum

Bruce Klingner, The Heritage Foundation

Nishino Junya, Keio University

Jonathan Pollack, The Brookings Institution

Scott A. Snyder, Council on Foreign Relations

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The session on “North Korea’s Choice: Nuclear Issue” discussed whether or not North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is ready and willing to make the choice to denuclearize in order to prioritize economic development. Moderator Jung H. Pak of the Brookings Institution noted that around this time last year, Kim announced in a plenary session that North Korea no longer needed to continue nuclear and missile testing. This raised hopes that North Korea would make a strategic choice in favor of engagement and economic development. Despite this pronouncement, it appears Kim still believes there may be a way for him to avoid making a choice and secure sanctions relief while maintaining his nuclear arsenal. However, all panelists agreed that these two courses are incompatible, and Kim must choose to denuclearize in order to procure the concessions he desires.

In this sense, as Scott A. Snyder of the Council on Foreign Relations pointed out, North Korea is making the wrong choice. According to Snyder, there are five changes that would signal North Korea is ready to make the right choice: (1) North Korea begins to honor rather than pocket concessions; (2) North Korea abandons its *uriminzokkiri* nationalist approach; (3) North Korea stops placing the need for total deference to Kim Jong Un as a condition for engagement; (4) North Korea adopts less vertically structured diplomacy to include working level talks; (5) and North Korea promotes flexible and problem-solving approach.

However, Bruce Klingner of the Heritage Foundation, Nishino Junya of Keio University, and Jonathan Pollack of the Brookings Institution laid out reasons why evidence suggests we will not see Kim move in this direction. The question of North Korea’s willingness to denuclearize has been addressed by five U.S. presidents and seven South Korean presidents. In order to force North Korea to make a different choice, the international community will

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need to force North Korea to change its strategic calculus.

Chun Yungwoo of the Korean Peninsula Future Forum noted that one way North Korea could avoid making a choice would be by agreeing to denuclearize while concealing key aspects of its nuclear program that would allow it to rebuild at any time. However, Chun clarified that this does not necessarily mean that North Korea will not denuclearize under any circumstances. Rather, Kim Jong Un likely has terms and conditions for denuclearization, but they are inconsistent with what the international community is willing to accept.

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