

## A Nuclear North Korea: Nonproliferation Issues and Beyond

**Session:** Regency Room

**Date/Time:** February 19, 2013 / 14:00-15:15

**Moderator:** Lee Jung-Hoon, Yonsei University

**Speakers:** Bruce Bennett, RAND Corporation  
Michishita Narushige, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies  
Alexander Vorontsov, Russia Academy of Sciences

**Rapporteur:** Duyeon Kim, Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation

### *Session Sketch*

Panel moderator Lee Jung-hoon, Professor at Yonsei University, set the stage by portraying the failures of the nonproliferation regime manifested through repeated North Korean provocations. Lee argued that “the international community’s inability to contain North Korea has unfortunately compelled South Korea to discuss military options to offset North Korea’s asymmetric capabilities.” The range of such discussion includes nuclear deterrence and the full participation in the US missile defense network. Lee further explained that such discussions are unavoidable for South Korea with its “national survival at stake.”

Bruce Bennett, Senior Defense Analyst at the RAND Corporation, stressed that the nature of the North Korean nuclear threat depends on how the regime uses its weapons. This contradicts the current conventional wisdom that the mere existence and possession of nuclear weapons in it of themselves is a grave threat. Dr. Bennett argues, “in my mind they use them every day, the just didn’t launch them, they use them regularly. We have to understand those uses. North Korea has a rich menu that these weapons help them achieve their objectives.” While noting the absence of a published doctrine, Dr. Bennett identifies seven kinds of possible uses based on official statements coming out of the reclusive country. They are 1) deterring coercion and military action, 2) providing a “nuclear shadow” that

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reduces escalation risks from provocations, 3) demonstrating the empowerment of a failing regime, 4) affecting regional perceptions of the Korean military balance, 5) stimulating interest in purchase of North Korean nuclear weapon capabilities, 6) “leveling the playing field” in a conflict, and 7) providing a means for exacting to overcome US/ROK technology advantages. Dr. Bennett also raised the question of whether the US president would use roughly 100 nuclear weapons in response to North Korea’s use and kill roughly 10 million North Korean civilians, thus challenging some expert beliefs that the US would “turn North Korea into a parking lot” should the regime use a nuclear weapon against it. Bennett believes denuclearization will not work, and that “the focus should be on counter-proliferation. He called for political actions that focus on the regime since military force is not an option and the options for economic sanctions have run out.

Michishita Narushige, Associate Professor at the Japanese National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, said that Japan estimates North Korea possess about 10 nuclear bombs, and 2009 estimates Pyongyang might have succeeded in miniaturizing nuclear devices to mount on missiles, although without absolute certainty. Michishita added that this third nuclear test seems to have been conducted with a miniaturized nuclear device. He explained three scenarios envisioned by Japan in which North Korea might use missiles against Japan: 1) military diplomatic use of missile force should Pyongyang deem Tokyo is uninterested in talks to normalize bilateral relations, 2) another Korean War in which the US would use Japanese bases to fight against North Korea, and 3) a suicide scenario in which the regime is destabilized and Kim Jong-un would feel his days are numbered, which would compel him to leave behind his legacy along with his father’s and grandfather’s legacies.

Michishita concluded by outlining steps Japan has taken in terms of a military and diplomatic response to North Korea. They include ballistic missile defense that was procured in 2003, acquired in 2007, and deployed last year as well as civil defense, or “national protection” in which the parliament enacted the law in 2004 and various municipal governments have been devising action plans. In light of North Korea’s third nuclear test, he posited the question as

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to whether sanctions would escalate or whether Seoul and Washington would “change minds” and hold talks with North Korea.

Pointing to the failure to prevent North Korea from developing its military nuclear program, Alexander Vorontsov, Head of the Korean and Monogolian Studies Department at the Russian Academy of Sciences, drew several conclusions. He stated that “strong-arm tactics” and sanctions alone have failed to bring positive results, and Washington’s “strategic patience” policy has also failed to reach its goals. Vorontsov further denounced Washington’s firm position of “isolating and weakening North Korea, even at the cost of resolving the nuclear issue” pointing to the “policy of economic blockade.”

On the other hand, referring to the Six-Party Talks, Vorontsov argued that a policy of engagement and strategic compromise “has proven quite successful,” pointing to talks – described as a mechanism that placed “the parties on an equal footing and taking into account their legitimate mutual concerns – which he claims “have succeeded in delaying or freezing the situation... and in some cases have even resulted in a cessation of nuclear activities. Vorontsov said he met senior North Korean officials who told him days prior to the third nuclear test and asked them the chances of following through with another test, and what would persuade them against it. In response, the North Korean officials told him they will continue to test because “negative US policy toward us won’t change, we have nothing to lose.”

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