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## SECURITY-BUILDING MEASURES FOR THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR CRISIS

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### Introduction

North Korea's fourth nuclear test in January this year followed by several missile tests between February and April, together with the possibility of another nuclear test soon, is clear evidence of Pyongyang's intentions to disregard international censure of its nuclear ambitions. Meanwhile, the Six-Party Talks – the main option to negotiate North Korea's denuclearization – are de facto defunct since December 2008. In recent years, resuming negotiations has been discredited with a collapse of trust amidst North Korea's failure to abandon its nuclear program. All sides have since then imposed a number of preconditions as the basis for the resumption of negotiations - preconditions, which have turned out to be unacceptable to the parties involved. The U.S. and South Korea meanwhile have focused on toughening sanctions against Pyongyang as punishment for its fourth nuclear test and as a demonstration of strengthening military deterrence against the North. However, these measures have arguably contributed to further exacerbating the North Korean nuclear crisis and military ten-

sions on the Korean Peninsula. Approaches by the international community to try and resolve the North Korean nuclear issue have over recent years rested primarily on two pillars: the 'stick' of sanctions combined with maintaining a strong military deterrence on the one hand, and the 'carrot' of negotiated incentives including energy and economic assistance on the other. However, neither sanctions against Pyongyang nor the multilateral negotiation framework of the Six-Party Talks have succeeded in thwarting North Korea's nuclear ambitions. This presents a two-fold dilemma: the immediate one is how to manage increased military tensions on the Korean Peninsula amidst the growing gravity of North Korea's nuclear threat and its repercussions. The second and longer-term challenge is how to tackle resolving the North Korean nuclear issue in a situation where previous efforts have failed.

### Sanctions or Economic Benefits?

The UNSC resolutions have been aimed at increasing the costs for Pyongyang to develop its nuclear program. There is a hope that the recent new round of sanctions,

which are referred to as “the strongest ever”, will cause enough distress in Pyongyang for its leaders to feel obliged to make concessions. However, there are doubts about the likely efficacy of a strengthened sanctions regime against Pyongyang and whether China, North Korea’s most important trading partner, will implement the sanctions. Indeed, although the recent sanctions could reduce North Korea’s foreign currency revenues, this will only have a limited impact on the domestic economy as Pyongyang’s pursuit of a strong nuclear program enables it to reallocate part of its conventional military budget towards developing the economy (part of its Byungjin Policy), as well as redeploy soldiers to the country’s construction sector. Furthermore, Beijing has not fully implemented the sanctions and cross-border trade continues to provide Pyongyang with economic and energy support to avoid the collapse of the North’s regime, which could bring political instability to China. In view of these considerations, it remains unlikely that toughening sanctions would push Pyongyang to denuclearize.

The kinds of solutions discussed during previous multilateral negotiations have focused on tying economic incentives to denuclearization measures. However, it has become clear that such a strategy has yielded little progress. In what Pyongyang perceives to be a hostile security environment, nuclear weapons offer the ultimate security guarantee for the regime. Thus, against the background of the absence of external security assurances, Pyongyang has opted for regime survival centered on the possession of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, rather than inducing North Korea with economic aid, a more productive approach would be to address existing security concerns on the Korean Peninsula. This necessitates reviewing previous agreements and understanding their limitations. Future negotiations in turn require that both sides compromise on the adoption of approaches and solutions, which are different from previous ones.

### **Security-Building and Crisis Management**

North Korea’s recent nuclear and missile tests have fur-

ther deteriorated the security environment on the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. and South Korea increased the scale of their joint military exercises in February 2016. The military exercises this year included a simulation of destroying the DPRK’s nuclear and missile assets. Furthermore, during the exercises, B-52 long-range bombers, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and other strategic weapons were deployed towards the Korean Peninsula. It is hence no surprise that the exercises have led to aggressive reactions from the North, which have in turn further increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has been firing a number of short-range missiles, its Musudan middle-range missile as well as a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) towards maritime border areas with mixed results. As a result and also against the background of the termination of North-South military hotlines last February, the likelihood of a military conflict in the DMZ area and the Yellow Sea has increased significantly. Consequently, the current situation on the Korean Peninsula calls for crisis management measures, focusing on the prevention of military conflict. To begin with, diplomatic channels, both at official and unofficial levels, between the U.S./ROK and DPRK are urgently needed to clarify intentions and defuse tensions in order to try to stabilize the situation. Steps undertaken could include the establishment of a direct hotline between the South and North Korean militaries; a consultation process for unusual military events; prior notification of exercises and missile tests; notification of increased troop presence and major weapons deployment; and mutual commitments to renounce the use of nuclear weapons. While notification and information exchanges are important as initial steps, it would also be necessary to move gradually towards the actual reduction of threats. For example, the U.S. could propose to cease landing operations and the deployment of strategic weapons in return for North Korea agreeing to a moratorium on missile test firings. While such a compromise may constitute a useful starting point to break the current deadlock, it is also clear that security-building is part of a longer-term process of resolving military, not



just nuclear, tensions. As mentioned earlier, in a situation where North Korea's nuclear program is motivated by a perceived military threat from the outside, there is a need to put greater focus on security-building in return for denuclearization measures. Reducing tensions will eventually build confidence and allow negotiations in

other areas - including denuclearization - to proceed more smoothly. If not complemented by serious long-term efforts at crisis management by engaging each other in dialogue, all parties involved risk the further increase of military tensions on the Korean Peninsula.