
DENUCLEARISATION OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA. CONSEQUENCES OF THE MEETING BETWEEN DONALD TRUMP AND KIM JONG UN IN SINGAPORE 12 JUNE 2018

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Abstract

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As a consequence of the intensification of nuclear testing and long-range missiles, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has become the subject of debate and pressure from the international environment, as manifested by the increasingly stringent sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, complemented by diplomatic pressures and intensified political influence on Pyongyang by the United States and China. As result, the relations between the two Korean states warmed, and the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, offered to implement a process of denuclearisation in North Korea and a direct meeting with the US President, Donald Trump. Why did this unprecedented meeting take place and what are the consequences? How was the meeting perceived by the American regional allies? What is the position of China in connection with the events? What are the prospects for progress in relations between North Korea and the United States, South Korea, China and Japan? Is it possible to fully denuclearise the Korean Peninsula? This article attempts to answer these questions.

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Introduction

One of the key issues in international relations seems to be the issue of the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, which has dangerously escalated in recent years, especially due to the nuclear program implemented by Pyongyang, including 6 nuclear tests and numerous testing of medium to long-range missiles, conducted by the North Korean Armed Forces (Szybalski, 2016).² The complex nature of the problem is evidenced by years of multilateral international discussions between the key players of the East Asian political scene, which since the 1960s have failed to stabilise the situation on the Korean Peninsula (Strnad, 2014),³ despite the involvement of the key players in the game: the United States, China, Japan, Russia and both Korean countries.

Conducting research on the Korean peninsula situation in the light of regional international relations, one could argue that maintaining the status quo of 1953 in relations between both Korean states and major political players in East Asia will not be possible, especially bearing in mind recent events that culminated in the unprecedented historic meeting of the President of the United States with the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The political background of these events will be discussed in this lecture.

In 2017, there was a noticeable escalation of tension in the relations between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Grabowski, 2012),⁴ which engaged other players in the international political scene, in particular the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China and Japan – countries particularly interested in establishing a peaceful environment in East Asia. The escalation of the American-North Korean conflict occurred in autumn 2017, when Pyongyang accused Washington of declaring war and threatened to use strategic forces as a deterrent. The declaration of the North Korean authorities' was made after US President Donald Trump threatened the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (also at the UN) in connection with the regime's ongoing development of nuclear weapons, culminating in the sixth nuclear test (3.09.2017 – according to the experts, it was supposed to be a

² Having just successfully implemented a hydrogen bomb test, North Korea is mocking international opinion (04/09/2017) <https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/polityka/korea-polnocna-przerzenieila-udany-test-bomby-wodorowej/6rvhxxt>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

³ Pages 293-303.

⁴ Compare pages. 153-168.

hydrogen bomb test).⁵ In November 2017, after a successful attempt at launching an intercontinental missile, Kim Jong Un announced the completion of the development of strategic nuclear forces, stressing North Korea's ability to take pre-emptive or retaliatory actions.⁶ In response, Washington indicated that it had not been conducting any military operations against North Korea, and that diplomatic means were the most important tool for resolving the conflict⁷.

During the annual public address of 1 January 2018, Kim Jong Un emphasised the power of North Korean strategic weapons: "The entire United States is within the range of our nuclear weapons, the button is there on my desk and it is not just an empty threat. This year, we should focus on the deployment and operational use of mass-produced nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles that will only be used when our nation faces a threat."⁸ Later in his address, however, Kim changes the provocative tone and declares that Pyongyang is interested in normalising relations with South Korea and concluding a permanent peace agreement instead of the 1953 ceasefire. He also proposes to stop nuclear and missile programs if South Korea withdraws from annual joint military drills with the US Army.⁹

Such a change in rhetoric was possible partly thanks to Moon Jae-in, who took the office of President of the Republic of Korea, and who is more open to cooperation with North Korea than his predecessors. He decided to take advantage of what he perceived as the more conciliatory language of the leader of North Korea – a declaration of the country's intention to send a North Korean team to participate in the upcoming Winter Olympic Games organised by South Korea in Pyeongchang. In January, the long-suspended Inter-Korean dialogue was resumed, making it easier for the Seoul authorities to agree to finance the costs of the North Korean team's participation in the Olympic Games. In addition, the President of South Korea managed to convince Donald Trump to consider meeting with the North Korean leader. At the Olympic Games, despite exchanging little more than icy glances with US Vice President Mi-

⁵ *Korea Północna oskarża USA o wypowiedzenie wojny*, (25.IX.2017), <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,22424468,korea-polnocna-oskarza-usa-o-wypowiedzenie-wojny.html>, [retrieved: 0.11.2018].

⁶ W. Młynarz, *Reżim Kima wypowiada wojnę USA. Dyktator zagroził, że zaatakuje raketami Stany Zjednoczone*, (30.11.2017), <http://niezalezna.pl/210090-rezim-kima-wypowiada-wojne-usa-dyktator-zagrozil-ze-zaatakuje-raketami-stany-zjednoczone>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

⁷ J. Borger, S. Siddiqui, *North Korea's foreign minister: Trump has declared war on our country*, (26.IX.2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/25/north-koreas-foreign-minister-says-trump-has-declared-war-on-country>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

⁸ B. Harrison, S. Kim, M.W. Bishop, L. Suk, *Kim Jong Un highlights his 'nuclear button', offers Olympic talks*, (02.I.2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/kim-says-north-korea-s-nuclear-weapons-will-prevent-war-n833781>, retrieved 10.11.2018.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

ke Pence, Kim's younger sister presented a letter to Moon Jae-in, which suggested her brother's interest in improving relations with the United States.¹⁰

Sanctions imposed on the DPRK by the UN, more effective due to their active support by the authorities of the People's Republic of China,¹¹ pushed the North Korean economy into a severe crisis. The volume of Chinese-North Korean trade dropped by more than half,¹² and Chinese oil supplies were limited to a minimum.¹³ With Beijing being Pyongyang's most important economic partner, accounting for about 90% of its global foreign trade, Kim Jong Un was forced to abandon the aggressive policy of proliferation and construction of medium and long-range nuclear warhead carriers. Between 25-28 March 2018, the North Korean authorities led by Kim Jong Un paid an unannounced visit to Beijing and were received by the head of the Chinese government, Li Keqiang. Although no joint communication was published after the event, it seems obvious that the discussions mainly concerned issues related to resolving the economic and political problems of the DPRK. In his official statement, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised the importance of these discussions "for the mutual friendship between the two countries." He also approved of the "positive transformations" that occurred in 2018 on the Korean Peninsula, which – he emphasised – should eventually bring the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and resolution of the conflict through dialogue.¹⁴

Notwithstanding American propaganda trying to show the improvement in relations between both Koreas as one of the successful results of US President Donald Trump's visit to Beijing in November 2017, it should instead be considered largely a result of Chinese diplo-

¹⁰ V. Cha, K. Fraser Katz, *The Right Way to Coerce North Korea*, (01.04.2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-04-01/right-way-coerce-north-korea>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

¹¹ The PRC accounts for around 90% of the DPRK's trade with other countries, with an export/import ratio of 1:50, and oil supplies from China essentially keeping the North Korean economy alive. Due to stricter economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations, North Korea is completely dependent on China for the supply of raw materials and export of North Korean goods, the sale of which is to secure the influx of foreign currency necessary to implement complementary state policy. Learn more in: M.T. Mencil, *Chińska Republika Ludowa jako współczesny podmiot środowiska międzynarodowego*, T. II, *Wektory*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2016, pages 606-639.

¹² M. Kaczmarczyk, Kim Dzong Un traci grunt pod nogami. Chiny mocno uderzyły w gospodarkę Korei Północnej, (23.02.2018), <https://www.msn.com/pl-pl/wiadomosci/swiat/kim-dzong-un-traci-grunt-pod-nogami-chiny-mocno-uderzyly-w-gospodarke-korei-polnocnej/ar-BBJugJP?ocid=spartanntp>, [retrieved: 15.07.2018].

¹³ Por. A. Borowiak, *W sierpniu spadł eksport paliw z Chin do Korei Północnej*, (26.09.2017), <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/W-sierpniu-spadl-eksport-paliw-z-Chin-do-Korei-Polnocnej-4012191.html>, [retrieved: 15.07.2018].

¹⁴ "Prowadziłem owocne rozmowy". Kim był w Pekinie, Chiny poinformowały USA, [https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/chiny-potwierdzaja-kim-dzong-un-byl-w-pekinie,825416.html](https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/chiny-potwierdzaja-kim-dzong-un-byl-w-pekynie,825416.html), [retrieved: 20.06.2018].

matic pressure on Pyongyang.¹⁵ The first success of the Chinese politicians' diplomacy was the mutual decision of Seoul and Pyongyang to send a joint team for the Winter Olympic Games, held in February 2018 in South Korea.¹⁶ On 27 April 2018, a historic meeting between the leaders of both Korean countries – Kim Jong Un and Mun Jae-in – took place, during which conditions for political and economic rapprochement were discussed, in particular ones that might formally end the state of war between the two nations and lead to the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.¹⁷ Analysts pay particular attention to the pragmatic goals of the meeting which Kim Jong Un set for himself. It is speculated that he was particularly hoping for improvement in mutual political relations at all levels as well as in economic relations, and enhancing North Korea's position in the international community, which would eventually lead to the most important objective – lifting the imposed sanctions that mainly affect the already seriously limited standard of living of the country's citizens. The aim of Seoul, in turn, was to reduce the military tension in the region and the threat of war, which could turn into a supra-local conflict due to the involvement of the United States, Japan and China, and in terms of cultural consequences could lead to reuniting war-divided families.¹⁸

One should neither underestimate the increased involvement of Washington diplomacy in solving the Korean problem by political means. Most probably, in order to protect its own threatened political and, more importantly, economic interests, Beijing put pressure on Pyongyang, approving of sanctions against it and a diplomatic offensive. A key factor that stimulated Chinese involvement with the North Korea issue was Donald Trump's strategy focused on the escalation of multidirectional actions in order to force the North Korean regime into negotiations, which did not exclude the most complex policy tool – war against Py-

¹⁵ Cf. M. Kokot, Trump w Azji. Próbuje ugadać chińskiego prezydenta Xi w sprawie osłabienia północnokoreańskiego reżimu, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,22620396,titru-w-azji-probuje-ugadac-chinskiego-prezydenta-xi-w-sprawie.html>, [retrieved: 15.11.2017]; Misja ostatniej szansy kilka dni po wizycie Donalda Trumpa. Chiny nie chcą znaleźć się na „liście wroga” Kim Dzong Una. Specjalny wysłannik Xi Jinpinga uda się do Pjongjangu, <https://nczas.com/2017/11/15/misja-ostatniej-szansy-kilka-dni-po-wizycie-donald-trumpa-chiny-nie-chca-znalezc-sie-na-liscie-wroga-kim-dzong-una-specjalny-wyslannik-xi-jinpinga-uda-sie-do-pjongjangu/>, [retrieved: 15.11.2017].

¹⁶ M. Orłowski, Korea Północna i Południowa wystąpią na zimowych igrzyskach pod wspólną flagą, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,22911134,korea-polnocna-i-poludniowa-wystapia-na-zimowych-igrzyskach.html?disableRedirects=true>, retrieved 27.06.2018.

¹⁷ “Dziś rozpoczynamy pisanie nowej historii”. Szczyt dwóch Korei przy granicy, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiate,2/polwysep-koreanski-historyczne-spotkanie-przywodcow-obu-korei,832823.html>, retrieved 14.05.2018.

¹⁸ Cf. S. Koziej, Strategiczny manewr Kima, <http://koziej.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Strategiczny-manewr-Kima.pdf>, retrieved 30.06.2018.

ongyang.¹⁹ If this happened, Beijing would be forced to take sides, and due to its historical ties with North Korea, and, above all, China's aspirations to become a regional power, it would likely support Kim's regime. Considering that the Chinese economy has not yet reached the level of development that would enable the People's Liberation Army to face the joint forces of the United States, South Korea and Japan, Beijing had to take the most prudent steps, that is exerting diplomatic pressure on Pyongyang.

Even before the meeting of North and South Korean leaders, the North Korean news agency Yonhap, quoting the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), announced the decision of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Korea to suspend nuclear tests and inter-continental ballistic missile launches starting from 21 April 2018.²⁰ Kim Jong Un mentioned that North Korea's nuclear program had ended in success, and there was no need for further nuclear tests or medium- and long-range missile tests. Many Western analysts, however, were pessimistic, indicating that the declaration did not mention short-range ballistic missiles within range of Japan and South Korea.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not show optimism, either, limiting himself to the mere conclusion that although it was a step forward, the question was whether it would "lead to the complete renunciation of missiles and nuclear weapons in an irreversible and verifiable manner". The same rhetoric could be seen in comments of Japanese defence minister Itsunori Onodera as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Taro Aso. Also South Korean President Mun Jae-in, prior to meeting Kim Jong Un, stated that despite Pyongyang's declaration of willingness to "completely denuclearise" the Korean Peninsula, at the current stage of mutual relations between the two Korean states it would not be possible to withdraw US troops, or to meet any other preliminary conditions set out by North Korea.²¹

During the summit of both Korea's leaders, Mun Jae-in talked to Kim about plans to build a high-speed railway line that would connect Seoul with Pyongyang and further on to Kaeseong and Shinuijuin in North Korea. The cost of the project was estimated at USD 35 billion; it would also include the modernisation of six other railway lines running through North Korea, whose poor technical condition has limited train speed to max. 50 km/h. The

¹⁹ C. Kahl, *The United States Should Resolve to Avoid War With North Korea in 2018*, (27.12.2017), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/27/the-united-states-should-resolve-to-avoid-war-with-north-korea-in-2018/>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

²⁰ *Korea Płn. zawieszca próby jądrowe i rakietowe*, (21.04.2018), <https://www.tvp.info/36890941/korea-pln-zawieszca-proby-jadrowe-i-rakietowe>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

²¹ J. McCurry, *North Korea halts nuclear and missile tests ahead of planned Trump summit*, (21.04.2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/20/north-korea-suspends-nuclear-missile-tests>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

project would be beneficial not only in terms of economics – resulting from an improvement in the quality of transportation services – but particularly in terms of geopolitics, since it would mean incorporating North Korea into the Asian railway network. The constructed and modernised lines would connect: (a) the Shinuijuin-Dandong border crossing (North Korea’s trading centre with China), (b) the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway with the two largest cities of South Korea (Seoul and Busan), (c) the third largest city of North Korea (Chongjin) with Rajin – North Korea’s industrial zone with the highest GDP per capita).²² Political and economic benefits would guarantee Kim Jong Un’s support of the peace declarations and North Korean proactive efforts in the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. However, the North Korean leader might also view it as a factor that might lead to the country’s economic dependence on other countries and regions, which could, in turn, weaken their key and thus far solid political and economic alliance with the People’s Republic of China. An evidence of North Korea’s anxiety in this regard seems to be the fact that the first Inter-Korean railway project was proposed at the beginning of the 21st century, yet its implementation has not yet begun.

The efforts of North and South Korean, Chinese, Japanese and American politicians resulted in the announcement at the end of April 2018 of an intended meeting between the leaders of North Korea and the United States,²³ which took place (despite many obstacles²⁴) in Singapore on 12 June 2018. Both sides were satisfied and described the meeting as a “great success”. The meeting was face-to-face and no official statement was released. In the bilaterally signed document, the four most important points concern the mutual commitment of the USA and North Korea to establish new relations with each other in order to bring the order and prosperity desired by both nations, build lasting and stable peace on the Korean Peninsula, take steps towards the total denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, as well as to recover and repatriate the remains of people who went missing during the Korean War, including tho-

²² L. Garfield, *South Korea wants to build a \$35 billion high-speed railway to connect North Korea with the World*, (09.05.2018), <https://www.businessinsider.com/north-korea-south-korea-plan-railway-peace-declaration-2018-5?IR=T>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

²³ “Czas i miejsce spotkania z Koreą Północną ustalone”, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/donald-trump-rozmawial-z-prezydentem-korei-poludniowej,833254.html>, [retrieved: 20.06.2018].

²⁴ J. Moll, “Co dalej ze szczytem USA-Korea Północna? Trump znowu zmienił zdanie”, <https://zmianyaziemi.pl/wiadomosc/co-dalej-ze-szczytem-usa-korea-polnocna-trump-znowu-zmienil-zdanie>, [retrieved: 20.06.2018 r.].

se that had already been identified. In addition, Trump pledged the security of North Korea and decided to suspend military drills in South Korea.²⁵



Source: <http://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/historyczne-spotkanie-donalda-trumpa-i-kim-dzong-una,artykuly,428644,1.html>, retrieved: 05.07.2018 r.

The US-North Korean summit was acclaimed by both parties as “a breakthrough event that opened up a new chapter in the mutual relations of the United States and North Korea.” Kim Jong Un went on to summarise it as follows: “We shall leave the past behind. Old prejudices and practices had been obstacles on our way, but we have overcome them all and here we stand today.” Donald Trump announced that the North Korean leader had agreed on the inspection and destruction of “the main testing site for rocket engines” that was “to take place very soon”, although no deadline was set. The results of the US-DPRK summit were welcomed by China, South Korea and Japan. Seoul commented that it brought about the “collapse of the last cold war,” and complimented Kim as “the first one in history to take a brave step into the world”.²⁶

However, Donald Trump’s political moves and their results were assessed critically by American democrats, especially due to the lack of explicit declarations regarding further steps towards denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. Critics of the summit pointed out that Trump contributed to Kim’s success in terms of public image and propaganda and became involved in a political game with the North Korean leader, the main aim of which was to lift the sanctions that had increasingly been restricting the regime. Trump countered that the sanc-

²⁵ D. Brunnstrom, J. Oliphant, Trump: North Korea’s “total denuclearisation” started; officials see no New moves, <https://www.roeuters.com/articule/us-northkorea-usa-sites/trumph-north-korea-total-denuclearization-started-officials-see-no-new-moves-iduskbn1jh2qx>, [retrieved: 25.06.2018].

²⁶ D. Sevastopulo, B. Harris, S. Palma, K. Manson, *Trump and Kim pledge New chapter for North Korea*, (12.06.2018), <https://www.ft.com/content/0342ebf2-6dc5-11e8-852d-d8b934ff5ffa>, [retrieved: 10.11.2018].

tions would only be relaxed when nuclear weapons cease to be used as an instrument of North Korean politics, and at this stage it was too early to normalise diplomatic relations between the two countries. He also pointed out that the declared suspension of US-South Korean army drills would not entail the removal of 28,000 American soldiers stationed in South Korea.²⁷

One of the results of the Trump-Kim meeting was the decision of the American president to suspend military manoeuvres by US and South Korean troops,²⁸ which each year caused the authorities in Pyongyang major frustration and discontent, accusing Washington and Seoul of preparing for an invasion of North Korea, which heightened tension in mutual relations and supposedly inspired Pyongyang to make defensive decisions aimed at preventing possible aggression.²⁹ One sign of changes in US-North Korean relations are preparations for mutual visits by both leaders, as announced by the North Korean KCNA Agency.³⁰ In August 2018, a spectacular meeting of families separated as a result of the war between the two Korean states in the 1950s took place.³¹

Judging the development of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the global media are sceptical of the success announced by Trump. The Russian press portrays the Trump-Kim Summit as the success of the latter. Director of the Russian International Affairs Council Andrei Kortunov commented that Kim Jong Un “ended the international isolation of the country and for the first time in its history managed to meet with the President of the United States”.³² He seems to be right, especially since, despite the initial so-called successes that commenced the process of denuclearising the Korean Peninsula, in June 2018 President Donald Trump extended the sanctions imposed on Pyongyang by another year, recognising the actions and policies of the North Korean government as an extraordinary threat to US security.³³ Taking

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Amerykanie zawieszają wspólne manewry wojskowe z Koreą Południową, <https://www.tvp.info/3770551/ amerykanie-zawieszaja-wspolne-manewry-wojskowe-korea-poludniowa>, [retrieved: 08.07.2018].

²⁹ Cf. J. Kociszewski, USA i Korea Płd. ćwiczą scenariusze wojny z Północą. Jaka będzie odpowiedź Kim Dzong Una?, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/usa-korea-pld-cwicza-scenariusze-wojny-olnoca-jaka-bedzie-odpowiedz-kim-dzong-una-6157583464126081a>, [retrieved: 15.04.2018].

³⁰ Donald Trump odwiedzi Koreę Północną, a Kim Dzong Un – USA, <https://www.tvp.info/37622475/donald-trump-odwiedzi-koree-polnocna-a-kim-dzong-un-usa>, [retrieved: 20.06.2018].

³¹ “Nie płacz i żegnaj!”. Gorzkie pożegnania rozdzielonych koreańskich rodzin, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/gorzkie-pozegnania-rozdzielonych-koreanskich-rodzin,862915.html>, [retrieved: 26.08.2018].

³² Prasa na świecie podzielona ws. spotkania Kim-Trump. Niemcy piszą o sceptycyzmie, Węgry o niepewności, a Rosja i Korea Płn. o zwycięstwie Kima, <https://wpolityce.pl/swiat/399337-prasa-na-swiecie-podzielona-ws-spotkania-kim-trump-niemcy-pisza-o-sceptycyzmie-wegry-o-niepewnosci-a-rosja-i-korea-pln-o-zwyciestwie-kima>, [retrieved: 26.08.2018].

³³ Trump przedłuża o rok sankcje nałożone na Koreę Północną, <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/swiat/artykuly/576818,trump-przedluzenie-o-rok-sankcje-korea-polnocna.html>, [retrieved: 28.06.2018].

into account all opinions, the prevailing one is that neither party emerged victorious during the Singapore Summit.³⁴

The opinion that Kim's move was purely motivated by the desire to improve his public image may also be justified, which seems to be corroborated by the report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), that points out that North Korea is still conducting nuclear research and development and the experimental reactor at the Jongbjon nuclear research centre, 100 km north of Pyongyang, has continued its operation launched in December 2015³⁵, which was an excuse for Donald Trump to cancel the second round of talks on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, scheduled for September.³⁶

Pyongyang's ambiguous attitude should not come as a surprise. The myth of an ongoing threat from the West and the ethos of a nation in a constant state of war are rooted too deep in the mentality of the North Korean society and state authorities. In order to initiate the appropriate processes, it is first necessary to establish relations that would increase mutual trust, build inter-Korean economic ties and provide humanitarian aid to a country that is facing many difficulties, exacerbated by adverse weather conditions in 2018, which might lead the country to misery and hunger caused by crop failures.³⁷ Not surprisingly, Kim Jong Un, drawing conclusions from the situation in Ukraine, approaches the guarantee of security made by America with caution. For North Korea, the only sure guarantor of security is China, which seems to be playing a much further-reaching game in the region, using its influence in relations with both Korean countries to limit and completely eliminate the role of the United States in the political and military sphere of East and Southeast Asia and in the longer run also the entire South Asia. In all likelihood it is Beijing that is holding the key to resolving the Korean problem and will only use it for its own interests (Mencel, 2015)³⁸.

³⁴ Chung-in Moon, *There Were No Losers at the Singapore Summit*, (2018.06.19), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-06-19/there-were-no-losers-singapore-summit?cid=int-rec&pgtype=art>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

³⁵ Raport MAEA: nie ma oznak denuklearyzacji w Korei Północnej. "Sytuacja bardzo niepokojąca", <https://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/2180847,Raport-MAEA-nie-ma-oznak-denuklearyzacji-w-Korei-Polnocnej-Sytuacja-bardzo-niepokojaca>, [retrieved: 26.08.2018].

³⁶ B.T. Wieliński, Trump odwołuje kolejną rundę negocjacji z Koreą Północną, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,23823042,trump-odwoluje-kolejna-runde-negocjacji-z-polnocna-korea.html>, [retrieved 26.08.2018].

³⁷ Cf. Średnia temperatura w sierpniu – 39 stopni, zboża usychają. Korea Północna na skraju katastrofy, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/korea-polnocna-na-skraju-katastrofy-prawie-40-stopni-usychaja-uprawy,860188.html>, [retrieved: 26.08.2018].

³⁸ s. 345-368.

The US President's declarations made at the Singapore Summit surprised US major allies in the East Asia – South Korea and Japan³⁹. Blue House (the counterpart of the White House in South Korea) commented that it is necessary “to know the exact meaning or intentions of President Trump”, while the Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera, pointed out that the drills in South Korea are vital to the security of East Asia. A much more critical comment was made by the South Korean Minister of Unification, Jeong Se-hyun, who said that “such a decision would irreparably damage the South Korea-America alliance”. The former comments clearly indicate that there had been no prior consultations on the North Korean issue, which undermines the principle of partnership of the allied countries, as well as the credibility of the American leader,⁴⁰ especially bearing in mind the political pros and cons and resumption of the US-North Korean summit. Despite the public declaration of the Foreign Minister of South Korea on the US-South Korean alliance being as “robust as ever” and American forces “playing a crucial role in deterrence, peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula”, according to experts, it is China that profited most from the Trump-Kim Summit, for whom “stopping the joint drills was a long-term goal”⁴¹.

China's policy towards North Korea is part of their main strategy focused on extending China's influence and eliminating American presence in the region. From Beijing's point of view, Donald Trump's declaration of suspending the US-South Korean military drills can be considered as a sign of the United States' weakening position in the region, especially in the context of Trump's comments on the plan to withdraw the American army from South Korea. What should be considered as Beijing's political success is the fact that the active participation of China is now considered essential for the process of denuclearisation and fostering peace on the Korean Peninsula.⁴² It seems that the view that the Singapore Summit was

³⁹ Compare K. Lo, L. Jeong-ho, *Will US-North Korea Deal leave Japan, South Korea vulnerable?* (13.06.2018), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2150663/will-us-north-korea-deal-leave-japan-south-korea>, [retrieved: 12.11.2018].

⁴⁰ The evaluation is corroborated by the statement of Lt. Col. Jennifer Lovett – a spokesman for the US armed forces in South Korea, who informed the Media next day after the Singapore Summit that she had not received any instructions to stop the drills, and joint drills planned for the fall would be continued (...), Ibid. Donald Trump's decision turned out to be a surprise not only for America's allies, but also for the command of the American army.

⁴¹ N. Chandran, *The US-North Korea summit was great for China, but not so good for the Rest of Asia*, (13.06.2018), <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/13/us-north-korea-summit-impact-on-japan-south-korea-rest-of-asia.html>, [retrieved: 12.11.2018].

⁴² B.S. Glaser, O.S. Mastro, *The Big Winner of the Singapore Summit*, (15.06.18), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-06-15/big-winner-singapore-summit?cid=int-rec&pgtype=art>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

largely the result of pressure on Pyongyang exerted by Chinese diplomacy,⁴³ who expected exactly the results that were announced, seems to be correct.

Chinese dominance in the region can also be seen in Beijing-Seoul relations, which adopted an official diplomatic character only in 1992. Since then, both countries have become important economic partners, as evidenced by the high volume of mutual trade⁴⁴, encouraged by relations at the highest level of state administration. In 2015, the former President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, stood next to China's President Xi Jinping on top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, during the 70th anniversary commemorating China's victory over Japan in World War II.⁴⁵ However, the political relations between South Korea and China seriously deteriorated the following year, when Seoul, in response to the intensification of missile testing by North Korea, decided to have an American anti-ballistic missile defence system THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) built.⁴⁶ The deterioration of the political relations also had a noticeable impact on the economic relations of both countries. Throughout China, South Korean businesses were boycotted, and Seoul saw a sharp decline in the number of Chinese tourists visiting the country.⁴⁷ The Beijing-Seoul crisis lasted until December 2017, when new South Korean President Moon Jae-in visited Beijing. The improvement in mutual relations is not only caused by mutual economic benefits. From Beijing's point of view, it is also an issue of improving stability in its own backyard and keeping both Korean states in the Chinese sphere of interest, thus limiting American influence

⁴³ Prior to the Singapore Summit, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un went to Beijing twice, where he met with the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping. Certainly these were not courtesy visits, but meetings during which procedures to be followed regarding Kim's meeting with Trump were discussed. This stems from traditional tributary relations of China and Korea. During the Korean War in the 1950s, China's military significantly supported North Korea, and after the war it provided Pyongyang with substantial economic assistance and diplomatic support. Cf. M.T. Mencil, *Chiny a Korea: paternalizm i pragmatyzm*, [in:] J. Marszałek-Kawa (ed.), *Od pedagogiki do polityki...*, pages 345-368.

⁴⁴ A. Lockie, *North Korea falls into \$1.7 billion trade deficit with China — but something mysterious is keeping it afloat*, (21.02.2018), <https://www.businessinsider.com/north-korea-17-billion-china-trade-deficit-suggests-mysterious-funding-2018-2?IR=T>, [retrieved: 17.08.2018].

⁴⁵ The military parade was received by the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, accompanied by the President of South Korea Park Geun-hye and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin. Cf. C. Phipps, *China military parade commemorates second world war victory — as it happened*, (03.09.2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2015/sep/03/china-military-parade-to-commemorate-second-world-war-victory-live>, retrieved 14.11.2018.

⁴⁶ Hyung-A Kim, *South Korea's THAAD crisis*, (09.09.2016), <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/09/09/south-koreas-thaad-crisis/>, [retrieved 16.11.2018].

⁴⁷ E. Huang, *China inflicted a world of pain on South Korea in 2017*, (21.12.2017), <https://qz.com/1149663/china-south-korea-relations-in-2017-thaad-backlash-and-the-effect-on-tourism/>, [retrieved: 16.11.2018].

there. The pragmatic approach of Beijing made it possible to postpone the question of installation of the anti-ballistic missile defence by South Korea (Pietrewicz, 2018)⁴⁸.

Following Donald Trump's meeting with Kim Jong Un in Singapore, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took over diplomatic representation of Washington. For the past four months, he has paid four official visits to Pyongyang. While the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs deemed Washington's diplomacy as a "unilateral and gangster-like demand for denuclearisation"⁴⁹, Pompeo claimed that the meetings were "productive". The discrepancy of views is most likely due to the fact that the White House firmly pursues a unilateral policy towards Pyongyang, focusing only on the problem of denuclearisation, while the policy of Kim Jong-Un focuses on a broader spectrum of issues, the most important of which is to relax or even lift the sanctions imposed thus far. This means that the White House has no diplomatic strategy aimed at promoting a process for enhancing security in the region.

American diplomacy focused on denuclearisation having three major drawbacks. First of all, the effort required for the difficult and dangerous processes related to North Korea's denuclearisation has always necessitated its division into different stages, each of which requires time. One of the scenarios for a cooperative denuclearisation process involves as many as ten years for its completion, where both the United States and South Korea would be involved. The scenario also includes other parallel processes aimed at alleviating tensions that might arise during the implementation of the project. Secondly, diplomatic denuclearisation would elevate Pyongyang's status as Washington's equal partner, enhancing North Korea's international image while at the same time weakening Seoul's position. Thirdly, this type of diplomacy puts nuclear and missile issues and experts at the heart of the whole denuclearisation process. Its Western-style approach could eventually clash with Korean cultural realities, thus rendering it politically ineffective.⁵⁰

Washington's diplomacy has met with resistance from Pyongyang, primarily because of its different vision regarding the denuclearisation process. While Pompeo's stance is that the sanctions imposed on North Korea can be lifted only after complete denuclearisation, Pyongyang proposes a step-by-step solution, i.e. a gradual denuclearisation process with the

⁴⁸ Compare.

⁴⁹ During a meeting in Pyongyang, Mike Pompeo demanded from the North Korean regime that it unconditionally hand in 60-70% of its nuclear arsenal. Cf. A. Panda, V. Naragan, North Korea's Nuclear Program Isn't Going Anywhere, (13.08.2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-08-13/north-koreas-nuklear-program-isnt-going-anywhere?cid=int-rec&pgtype=art>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

⁵⁰ P. Zelikow, *How Diplomacy With North Korea Can Work*, (9.VII.2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-07-09/how-diplomacy-north-korea-can-work?cid=int-rec&pgtype=art>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

concurrent gradual lifting of restrictions. North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho pointed out that "coercive" sanctions were lethal to trust-building between the two nations and that without trust there was no way they could unilaterally disarm themselves first.⁵¹

China's role in the process of denuclearisation cannot be overlooked. The political strategy of the People's Republic of China considers the existence of the North Korean state as a top priority. After the end of the Cold War, then Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping and his successor Jiang Zemin feared that the rivalry between the West and the East would move into other areas centred around North Korea. In 1994, in response to Washington's decisive stance on North Korea's nuclear issue, Jiang Zemin not only promised to send the armed forces of the People's Liberation Army of China to defend North Korea, but during his inspection of North Korean troops, he also publicly stressed that "China and North Korea are close neighbours". In order to have North Korea as a buffer zone for China, Beijing must secure its political advantage over both Korean states. In 2006, a political debate on the geopolitical value of North Korea was held in Chinese academic circles. The same year, Pyongyang conducted its first nuclear test, which only increased the importance of the problem in question. Academics were arguing whether North Korea is a strategic asset or a burden for China. Those with liberal views held that North Korea is a strategic burden for China, indicating that Beijing should recognise North Korea's nuclear problem as a priority, especially in order to keep and reinforce its image of a responsible political power capable of supporting the international proliferation regime. Academics with realistic outlooks held quite the opposite view that North Korea was a valuable asset in China's defence strategy directed against the United States. The debate started at that time is still going on today, often stirring up strong emotional reactions in the Chinese academic milieu.⁵²

It is apparent that political realism lies at the heart of China's policy towards the Korean problem. While China accepted most of the resolutions of UN Security Council regarding North Korea and joined international sanctions imposed on Pyongyang, these decisions are rather based on careful assessment of the situation and the assumption that North Korea is economically strong enough to endure external restraints. The approach of Chinese leaders is based on three main foundations:⁵³ (1) The history of China and the Korean Peninsula, which

⁵¹ S. Denyer, *Pompeo, Kim Jong Un agree to hold 2nd summit with Trump as soon as possible*, (07.10.2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pompeo-meets-kim-jong-un-in-north-korea-for-talks-on-denuclearization/2018/10/07/d9832280-c997-11e8-9c0f-2ffaf6d422aa_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9e60c7c136dd, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

shaped a similar system of values based on the philosophy of Confucianism; (2) Geographical proximity; (3) Military reality, which shows that territorial conquest still determines the ultimate winner of war. In China's eyes, Korea is mainly viewed as a subject that should fulfil his obligations to the Lord, who, in turn, is obliged to guarantee it peace and means to live. In the new political reality, Chinese politicians must find a way to maintain relations with Pyongyang without undermining international relations in the region.⁵⁴

The denuclearisation process of North Korea requires significant commitment on the part of South Korea, which can be seen in Seoul's increasingly frequent meetings at the highest level. During the recent one, in September 2018, the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the president of South Korea Mun Jae-in agreed on some important issues that gained the status of an inter-state agreement. Pyongyang agreed that international inspection would monitor the permanent dismantling of key missile facilities and that the main nuclear research centre in Jonbjon would be closed⁵⁵. Moreover, Kim declared he was willing to "permanently dismantle" the main machinery for the production of fuel for nuclear warheads. Still, he did not express his intention to completely abandon nuclear weapons or missiles.⁵⁶ No schedule for further steps was agreed on, either. Nevertheless, the societies of both Korean states have become noticeably closer to each other, which is another political success of Kim Jong Un, who is aiming at "reducing the risk of a US military strike to essentially zero".⁵⁷ Continuing its policy of "pulling" the United States into negotiations to demand concessions for North Korea, Pyongyang is showing a tougher stance, suggesting it might walk away from further denuclearisation talks if Washington continues to resist making a declaration to end the 1950-53 Korean War that would replace the armistice signed after the war.⁵⁸ The signing of a peace declaration by both Korean countries could change the legal framework that would guarantee security on the Korean Peninsula. At the same time, there would be no more legal grounds for the UN Security Council resolutions and the presence of the UN multinational command in

⁵⁴ J. Shifrinson, *Learning to Love Kim's Bomb*, (03.10.2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-10-03/learning-love-kims-bomb?cid=int-rec&pgtype=art>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

⁵⁵ R. Rosiejka, *Korea Północna zgodza się na denuklearyzację. Ustalono konkretne kroki*, (19.09.2018), <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/korea-polnocna-zgodzila-sie-na-denuklearyzacje-ustalono-konkretne-kroki-6296910425745537a>, [retrieved: 27.10.2018].

⁵⁶ Ch. Sang-hun, D.E. Sanger, *North Korea's New Nuclear Promises Fall Short of U.S. Demands*, (19.09.2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/asia/north-south-korea-nuclear-weapons.html>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

⁵⁷ N. Chandran, *Korea talks made some Progress, but 'hard work Remains for the US negotiators'*, (21.09.2018), <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/21/korea-summit-no-real-progress-on-denuclearization.html>, [retrieved: 11.11.2018].

⁵⁸ A. Jeong, *North Korea Ramps Up Pressure on U.S. in Nuclear Talks*, (02.10.2018), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/north-korea-ramps-up-pressure-on-u-s-in-nuclear-talks-1538475813>, [retrieved: 04.11.2018].

South Korea and Japan, and thus – the presence of US troops in the region of East Asia. The new legal reality would undoubtedly boost the role of China and Russia, though⁵⁹.

The issue of denuclearisation of North Korea is also important from a Japanese point of view. However, this is not the only issue in North Korean-Japanese relations. Taking advantage of warmer diplomatic ties, the Japanese prime minister declared he would be willing to meet Kim Jong Un face to face. At the same time, he emphasised the importance of resolving the issue of abductions of Japanese citizens by the North Korean regime in the 1970s and 1980s in order to train them for espionage on behalf of North Korea.⁶⁰

In an effort to normalise the relations between North Korea and Japan, resumed unofficially in Vietnam in July 2018, a Japanese government representative visited Pyongyang in October 2018. While Pyongyang proposed a meeting of the highest state authorities, Tokyo did not address that suggestion.⁶¹ Therefore, one could hardly say it was a breakthrough meeting.

At the beginning of November 2018, Pyongyang, irritated by fruitless attempts at lifting sanctions, issued a warning that the lack of expected results will force the North Korean authorities to resume the development of the regime's nuclear weapons arsenal, stressing that North Korea is not going to abandon the ongoing nuclear negotiations with Washington. Despite this, the US was accused of not honouring the commitments made by Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump at the Singapore Summit. A statement made by the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticised the policy of the White House to use diplomatic pressure combined with economic restrictions against the regime as a tool to achieve denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula.⁶² To make it look more serious, North Korea carried out a test of a new weapon – described in a report of the South Korean press agency's as a strategic weapon –⁶³ which is thought to be a long-range artillery gun. Kim Jong Un personally participated in the

⁵⁹ More in: M. Bosack, *Why China and Russia are Keen for the Korean War to Officially End*, (24.10.2018), <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/why-china-and-russia-are-keen-for-the-korean-war-to-officially-end/>, [retrieved: 04.11.2018].

⁶⁰ *Japan PM Abe open to summit with North Korea's Kim*, (26.09.2018), <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/japan-pm-abe-open-to-summit-with-north-korea-s-kim-10758360>, [retrieved: 12.11.2018].

⁶¹ *Progress on Kim-Abe summit elusive Turing July meeting of North Korean and Japanese officials: envoy*, (28.10.2018), <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/28/national/politics-diplomacy/progress-kim-abe-summit-elusive-july-meeting-north-korean-japanese-officials-envoy/#.W-m0afZFzIU>, [retrieved: 12.11.2018].

⁶² K. Tong-Hyung, *North Korea Warns That It Will Revive Nuclear Program If U.S. Does Not Lift Sanction*, (3.11.2018), <http://time.com/5444027/north-korea-nuclear-sanctions-us/>, [retrieved: 04.11.2018].

⁶³ *Kim obserwował test "nowej broni"*, (16.11.2018), <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/kim-dzong-un-obszowal-test-nowej-broni,884088.html>, [retrieved: 18.11.2018].

tests.⁶⁴ The US military, however, did not seem to notice a significant threat in Pyongyang's operations, as during the G-20 session in Argentina, President Donald Trump announced that his next meeting with the North Korean leader would probably take place in January or February 2019.⁶⁵

Watching the transformations taking place in the international environment of East Asia, the US approach towards North Korea should be regarded as appropriate, despite the world media and many political experts being critical about the consequences of the historic meeting of the US president with the leader of the DPRK. The possibility of using force against the North Korean regime, which Donald Trump had not ruled out until recently, and moreover, which he had even warned about, seems the least realistic option. Certainly, China as well as South Korea will be opposing this solution, as many citizens of those countries have family ties with the North Koreans. Also, the current South Korean authorities prefer a policy based on discussion, consultation and soft diplomatic pressure, as well as economic incentives towards Pyongyang. Involvement in a military conflict would put another financial burden on Washington, which Donald Trump tries to avoid as much as possible. In addition, the possibility of China backing North Korea in order to defend its sphere of influence, certainly acts as a deterrent to White House decision makers.

However, one cannot rule out the possibility that the North Korean leader is playing a double game, aimed solely at receiving economic benefits, humanitarian aid and opening of markets, while repeating empty declarations of North Korea's intention to meet the expectations of denuclearisation and completely put an end to the strategic weapons and missile industry. It would not come as a surprise if Kim Jong Un's foreign policy was directed at attempts to normalise relations with the United States, without venturing beyond what is acceptable to Beijing, which is now the sole guarantor of North Korea's political security and the only country willing to cooperate with the North Korean regime against the American policy of sanctions and diplomatic pressure. Kim's pro-China approach may also be an indicator of the dictator's fear of overthrowing the regime, especially after full nuclear disarmament, and, in Pyongyang's view, nuclear weapons are the only guarantee of security now. South Korea will play a huge role in facilitating further progress in denuclearisation. Seoul should continue its

⁶⁴ M. Kruczkowska, *Korea Północna przeprowadziła test „zaawansowanej broni taktycznej*, (16.11.2018), <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,24174763,korea-polnocna-przeprowadzila-test-zaawansowanej-broni-taktycznej.html>, [retrieved: 18.11.2018].

⁶⁵ *Donald Trump: next Kim Jong-un meeting likely in January or February*, (02.12.2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/02/donald-trump-next-kim-jong-un-meeting-likely-in-january-or-february>, [retrieved: 02.12.2018].

diplomatic and economic efforts so as to encourage the regime to become increasingly involved in international structures working for regional peace and stability. After all, delaying finding a solution to the Korean problem does not benefit any side, although it would seem that maintaining the status quo is the best option.

Further development of North Korea's nuclear weapons may prompt South Korea and Japan to build their own nuclear arsenal, allowing for a balance of power in the region, and emboldening Pyongyang to take risks beyond the country's capabilities, thus increasing the likelihood of war on the Korean Peninsula (Kissinger, 2017), which the United States, bound by military alliances with those countries, would inevitably join. If China also got involved, the conflict could take on supra-regional proportions leading to a global disaster.

From this perspective, the actions of the American president, though sometimes considered as "naive", deserve the full support of all interested parties in the international community. Maintaining order in global or regional relations requires a subtle balance of restraint, strength, and principles, both established ones and those currently being established. Balance understood in a military sense will certainly turn into confrontation, and the ideological approach to partnership will only intensify fears of hegemony. What is therefore required are diplomatic tools that will be able to make use of all stabilising factors in a balanced way.

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