

바이든 행정부와 한반도 비핵화

The Biden Administration and Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

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Just days before the election, President-elect Biden wrote an Op-Ed in which he said:

“As president, I’ll stand with South Korea, strengthening our alliances to safeguard peace in East Asia and beyond, rather than extorting Seoul with reckless threats to remove our troops. I’ll engage in principled diplomacy and keep pressing toward a denuclearized North Korea and a unified Korean Peninsula, while working to reunite Korean Americans separated from loved ones in North Korea for decades.”

Undoubtedly, as president, Joe Biden will focus most heavily on denuclearizing North Korea, as his predecessors had done, all with unsatisfactory results. The boldest of his predecessors was

Donald Trump, who took the unprecedented action to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on three separate occasions. Still, despite the seemingly warm relations between Trump and Kim, results of Trump’s summit diplomacy are disappointingly limited: the US-DPRK negotiations remain deadlocked, and the North Korean stockpile of fissile material and missiles are now bigger and more dangerous than four years ago. As Joe Biden becomes president on January 20, 2021, he will find that the challenge posed by the North Korean nuclear program is not substantially different than when he was vice president, or for that matter, when he was chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee some two decades ago.

Biden is not Obama

With his eight years as Vice President and more than three decades as U.S. Senator, Biden comes to the White House with far more experience than Obama did 12 years ago. This is especially true in the realm of foreign policy, where Joe Biden has genuine interest and expertise in issues ranging from climate change to arms control to nuclear non-proliferation. With a keen instinct for personal diplomacy, Biden already has well established relations with key global leaders, including those in Northeast Asia. Biden and his foreign policy team will undoubtedly use those personal relationships to effectively manage the administration's foreign policy agenda.

The two principal members of Biden's foreign policy team have already been named: Anthony Blinken, nominated to lead the Department of State, and Jacob Sullivan, named as National Security Advisor. Completely trusted by Biden, Blinken and Sullivan represent the traditional engagement wing of the American foreign policy establishment, comfortable with America's leading and convening roles in multilateral forums, such as the UN and G-20, as well as putting forward ideals such as democracy, human rights and rule-of-law as key tenets in US foreign policy. Blinken and Sullivan assume their positions with experience in and in-depth knowledge of their respective charged organizations, especially on how to project US power and influence overseas through military muscle and diplomatic persuasion. This is very different from the team led by Trump, with personnel such as Tillerson, Bolton and Pompeo, who had little or no first-hand foreign policy

management experience, instinctively distrustful of their own bureaucrats and career officials, and see compromise and consensus-building as weaknesses.

Biden and Denuclearization of Korean Peninsula

Biden has clearly indicated a commitment to diplomacy to achieve denuclearization of North Korea, but he inherits a complicated diplomatic reality. After a flurry of summit activities, the United States has not had any serious negotiations with North Korea since the Hanoi summit in February 2019, almost two years ago. There was no "October surprise" with Trump completely consumed domestic US politics. In the meantime, inter-Korean relations have taken steps backward in the aftermath of the Hanoi summit failure, with Pyongyang accusing Seoul of reneging on the South-North summit commitments. China, no longer concerned that Pyongyang is getting too comfortable with Washington, has returned to its traditional hands-off attitude, making it clear that nuclear weapons in North Korea is America's problem, not China's.

In the initial briefings by the US intelligence community, the new Biden administration will also have to face the uncomfortable assessment that North Korea has no intention to give up its nuclear weapons, at least not in the foreseeable future, or for a price the US is prepared to pay. Another consensus assessment among the American expert community is that pressure policies simply do not work on North Korea, which has shown enormous resiliency, a big capability to respond

to pressure with its own pressure, and has big neighbors—read China and Russia—not fully prepared to join the pressure campaign. These assessments are of course in direct conflict with the political reality in Washington that the United States cannot accept or even acknowledge North Korea as a nuclear weapons state.

In meeting this difficult challenge of dealing with North Korea, the Biden administration is likely to establish the following framework:

1. **South Korea.** The Biden administration will consult South Korea first in designing any new initiative toward North Korea, thus allowing Seoul to have a big say in the outcome. South Korea should exercise this leverage with diplomatic finesse, understanding that Biden is not likely to jump into a summit meeting with Kim Jong Un, nor is the new administration likely to rush into a peace-building process, such as agreeing to an end-of-war declaration without meaningful negotiations that concludes with North Korea taking steps toward denuclearization.
2. **Alliance Partners.** The Biden presidential campaign has constantly reinforced the importance of alliances for the United States, and the Biden administration will want new ideas and initiatives to rejuvenate these alliances, especially the NATO and bilateral alliances with South Korea, Japan, and Australia. South Korea and Japan should expect some easing in US demand to increase host nation support, which reached a fevered pitch in the Trump administration with the US demanding a five-fold increase for stationing troops in South Korea. Biden's team is also likely to insist on improved trilateral US-ROK-Japan cooperation and coordination in all security issues, including policies toward North Korea, and to work toward improved Seoul-Tokyo relations.
3. **China.** While US relations with China will continue on the path of strategic competition, Biden administration is also likely to try to carve out an agenda for cooperation, including on climate change and global health and pandemics. North Korea should have a prominent place in the US-China cooperation agenda, as both Washington and Beijing view the denuclearization of North Korea as a key objective, although the two differ in how they prioritize this goal.
4. **Multilateral vs. Bilateral.** Biden's instinct is to strongly favor a multilateral approach in dealing with international security challenges. This is probably just as well, as US-DPRK bilateral negotiations are notoriously difficult to manage as neither side has any goodwill for the other party, with each proposal made by the other party viewed with mistrust only. Broadening the denuclearization negotiations to include other key parties, especially China and South Korea, will provide the much needed additional, and bigger, carrots and sticks.
5. **Short-Term vs. Long-Term.** The Biden administration is unlikely to rush into diplomacy with North Korea. Rather, its

highest priority is domestic: coping with the surging pandemic, dealing with the ailing economy, promoting racial justice, etc. Even in foreign policy, Biden's team is likely to prioritize China, climate change, US military presence in the Middle East before North Korea. This is not to characterize the likely Biden approach as "strategic patience" of the Obama administration, but that the new team will likely to proceed with caution and deliberation, which could have big payoffs, because there is no one "big deal" to be struck, rather a series of smaller deals that builds mutual confidence in order to make future bigger deals. The key to this approach is for North Korea to withhold provocative actions, such as nuclear and long-range missile tests, in order for the Biden administration to come up with a diplomatic engagement plan.

New Ideas?

American analysts, both in and out of the government, have largely concluded that the traditional US approach to North Korea, that Pyongyang must be pressured to choose between nuclear weapons and survival, has failed. These experts believe that a new roadmap to denuclearize North Korea must start with a wider policy aperture than pressure alone, taking into account the realities on the ground and include practical measures to sustain what is most likely to be a series of long negotiations. One idea is to place peace-building on an equal status as denuclearization, thus putting the North Korean demand for ending "hostile" US policies on the same footing as denuclearization. In such a

parallel path, denuclearization steps could proceed hand-in-hand with measures to guarantee the security of the North Korea regime and establish a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Another idea is to introduce elements of arms-control into these negotiations, which would more easily accommodate a step-by-step progress through, for example, a roadmap starting with monitored restraint and confidence building measures to verified reductions to shared communications, etc. Yet another is to move quickly on political normalization first, for example by establishing full mutual diplomatic recognition by Washington and Pyongyang, to break the logjam in bilateral relations. All these ideas have merits—and some drawback too. Still, most of Washington policy community expect the new Biden administration will study them seriously with an open mind.

