North Korea’s challenge to the United

On 28th April 2017 North Korea conducted yet another ballistic missile test which apparently resulted in failure. Yes “apparently”. Because the thresholds of the test were known only to the North Korean scientists. Which means that the speculations regarding the test’s success or failure are rather premature. It is unclear whether the North Koreans were aiming to test the navigation system, flight pattern, range, engine performance or payload weightage. Never mind the failure, but the North Koreans are surely Learning new ways of how not to fail a missile test. As said by Thomas Edison “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” Thus, the only way Kim Jong-un—the portly pariah of Pyongyang—can truly develop a medium-range missile that can hit even Hawaii or Alaska is through a rigorous testing program. Even in failure, the Kim regime gains vital technical data that creates pathways to future success. The same goes for making nuclear weapons small enough to place atop such a missile. While Washington, Moscow or Beijing might have mastered the Jedi arts of nuclear weapons decades ago, North Korea is still in Padawan mode—but making slow and steady progress. The North Koreans have paced up the speed and intensity of their tests in order to attain their version of full spectrum Deterrence by developing a missile system which should be able to hit critical area of mainland USA.

This was the 8th missile test conducted by NK since the beginning of the year 2017 followed by 3 in 2016 along with 3 nuclear tests and one submarine launched test in 2015. More recently it displayed by parading a heavy arsenal of highly sophisticated and deadly weapons systems at the event of their national day, while celebrating the birth anniversary of North Korea’s founder, Kim Il-sung. Clearly North Korea aims to challenge the world community by blatantly violating International norms and laws. This situation leads to certain questions such as: Why is North Korea so compelled to develop Weapons of Mass Destruction? What is the actual beef between North Korea and the USA? And what lies in the future for North Korea?

Chronology of the Conflict

The actual rift between the two parties occurred right after the conclusion of the Second World War. The Korean peninsula was under Japan’s occupation until the closing days of the war. In August 1945, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, as a result of an agreement with the United States, it liberated Korea north of the 38th parallel (North Korea) On the other hand U.S. forces subsequently moved into the south. By 1948, as a product of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, Korea was split into two regions, with separate governments. Both governments claimed to be the legitimate government of all of Korea, and neither side accepted the border as permanent.
South Korea by then, was basically the bread basket of the entire Korean peninsula. While on the other hand North Korea, supported by the soviets formed a communist regime lead by Kim Il Sung as an elected prime minister. North Korea had built industries and hydroelectric dams to support them. This meant that the North was economically sounder than the South. As a result Kim believed that the people of south would join him if he undertook military action and annexed South Korea.

On 25 June 1950, Communist North Korean troops poured across the border into South Korea, intent on reunifying the country through force of arms. What began as an escalation in Korea's bitter civil war soon exploded into a major international crisis, as first the United States and then Red China intervened by sending hundreds of thousands of their own ground troops into battle to prevent the defeat of their respective Korean allies. The war's first year brought seesawing fortunes on the battlefield. After the Communists captured more than 90 percent of the Korean Peninsula, pushing the South Koreans and their American allies to the brink of defeat, a brilliant counterattack engineered by General Douglas MacArthur quickly drove the North Koreans back across the border. Now the Americans surged forward, driving north toward China in hopes of liberating North Korea entirely from Communist rule. But just as MacArthur declared victory to be at hand, hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers unexpectedly poured into Korea, catching the Americans off-guard and sending them into a desperate retreat of their own. Eventually the Americans were able to re-establish a defensive line, ironically located almost exactly at the 38th parallel—the line that had divided North and South Korea before the war began. By early 1951, the fighting settled into an uneasy stalemate—a stalemate that continues to this very day, as the Korean War never officially ended.

During the Cold War, the "problem" of North Korea was tied to the overall balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. Like the plains of Germany in the West, North Korea was a potential (and for a time, actual) front line in the East. The Cold War dynamic constrained North Korea's actions as well as the United States' responses. But with the end of the Cold War, things began to change.

**What North Korea wants?**

In the next four years, North Korea may join China and Russia as the only countries with the ability to reach the US's West Coast with nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles. "Over the past year, North Korea has crossed technical thresholds that were previously thought to be beyond their reach for years," Victor Cha, senior adviser and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said during a panel discussion. In the last 14 years, Pyongyang was responsible for 16 missile tests and one nuclear test. By comparison, in 2016 alone, it conducted 25 ballistic-missile tests and two nuclear tests. The acceleration and frequency in testing shows not only the North's nuclear ambitions but also that the rogue nation has developed something of
an arsenal. Which leaves the obvious question, what does North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ultimately want?

One need to understand that North Korean nuclear armament is not mere security from U.S. attack, which conventional weaponry trained on Seoul has preserved since 1953—and through far greater crises than George W. Bush’s little “axis of evil” remark in 2002. As every North Korean knows, the whole point of the military-first policy is “final victory,” or the unification of the peninsula under North Korean rule. Many foreign observers refuse to believe this, on the grounds that Kim Jong-un could not possibly want a nuclear war. They’re missing the whole point.

North Korea needs the capability to strike the U.S. with nuclear weapons in order to pressure both adversaries into signing peace treaties. This is the only grand bargain it has ever wanted. It has already made clear that a treaty with the South would require ending its ban on pro-North political agitation. The treaty with Washington would require the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the peninsula. The next step, as Pyongyang has often explained, would be some form of the North–South confederation it has advocated since 1960. One would have to be very naïve not to know what would happen next. As Kim Il-Sung told his Bulgarian counterpart, Todor Zhivkov in 1973, “If they listen to us, and a confederation is established, South Korea will be done with.” Hence, the ultimate goal of North Korea is to unify or form a confederation with South Korea.

Opinion polls in the South now strongly favor the left-wing presidential candidate Mun Jae-in, who in 2011 expressed hope for the speedy realization of a North–South confederation. If he or anyone else from the nationalist left takes over, years of South Korean accommodation of the North will ensue, complete with massive unconditional aid. However still, the paramount in Pyongyang’s eyes would be the removal of all U.S. troops and their war machine. The justification for this condition would be that foreign troops and their equipment would no longer be needed in a South Korea at peace with the North. By acceding to that, however, South Korea would be weakened, possibly enough to diminish its deterrence.

On a side note let’s not overestimate South Koreans’ attachment to their own state, which a sizable but influential minority still considers illegitimate. The most popular movie in Seoul at the moment is a thriller about a joint North–South effort to catch a criminal ring of North Korean defectors. That plot tells you something right there. The main North Korean character is played for cool by a handsome Tom Cruise type, while his South Korean counterpart is a homely, tired-looking figure of fun. There is a tradition of this sort of casting. The subtext: Serving the North is glamorous; serving the South, not so much. Let’s keep in mind that Kim Jong-un is watching these movies too. This is also one of the reason why THAAD deployment has become something of a national issue.

**The Problem of THAAD**

A deepening partisan divide over the deployment of the controversial U.S. THAAD missile defense system is becoming a key national security issue in South Korea’s emerging presidential race. In the wake of North Korea’s nuclear tests, the United States has accelerate the deployment
of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, known as THAAD, which uses interceptor missiles to destroy ballistic missiles. However, THAAD brings unwanted baggage along with itself. It is not only expensive (Trump want SK to pay 1 billion USD) but also may result in the making regional power, China, very uneasy. On one hand public disapproval for THAAD in South Korea has been mounting. A poll conducted by Realmeter in December found that public opposition to THAAD grew to 51 percent from a 38 percent disapproval rating in July. Support for THAAD declined to 34 percent in December, down from 44 percent in July. While on the other China’s strong objections to THAAD and reports of Chinese economic retaliation against South Korea may also have contributed to the declining support.

China argues, THAAD uses high-resolution radar designed to detect and track ballistic missile threats at long distances and high altitudes. The system’s radar and infrared seeking technology are used to program six mobile launchers and 48 interceptor missiles. It claims the system’s radar could be used against them and argues the advanced U.S. weapons deployment will only provoke North Korea to reciprocate with further nuclear and missile tests. Hence, Beijing has reportedly taken economic retaliatory measures against South Korea that include temporarily banning some South Korean charter airline flights between the two countries. China has also been accused of limiting the number of its tourists into South Korea, banning the import of some South Korean cosmetics, and barring some K-pop Korean music groups from entering China. The THAAD issue is certainly complicated and there is no clear resolution. As Seong-hyon Lee, a research fellow at the Sejong Institute, notes, Seoul should get ready for “a long, winding, bumpy ride.” Scoring a moral victory will be not enough for South Korea. It’s time for the country to devise a blueprint for reducing its heavy economic dependence on China.

Russia’s Role in the North Korea Conundrum

According to Artyom Lukin (Foreign Policy Research Institute), the long-standing interests on the Korean Peninsula and its substantial leverage, Russia is going to play an active role in the ongoing drama centered on North Korea. The question is what kind of a role it will be. Most likely, Russia’s behavior will gravitate to one of the following scenarios:

Scenario 1. Russia obstructs international efforts to deal with North Korea. Moscow will extend Pyongyang a lifeline that alleviates international pressure. In extremis, Russia can even resume
weapons deliveries to the DPRK, something that Pyongyang has long been seeking from Moscow.

Scenario 2. Russia plays second fiddle to China. Given its emerging quasi-alliance with Beijing, Moscow may defer to Chinese interests with regard to North Korea in exchange for China’s acknowledgment of Russia’s vital interests in Ukraine and elsewhere in the post-Soviet space. That means that Russia will largely follow China’s line on the Korean Peninsula. If China pretends it goes along with the new sanctions, but in fact it does not, Russia will display a similar behavior. UNSC Resolution 2270 gives plenty of discretionary space for loosening the grip of sanctions, for example, containing language that allows transactions with the DPRK if they are done for “humanitarian” or “livelihood” purposes. The most potent corollary of the China-Russia collaboration with regard to the Korean Peninsula could be their joint intervention in case of the Kim regime’s probable collapse. Russia’s participation in such an intervention may not be far-fetched now that Moscow has demonstrated, with Crimea and Syria, its appetite for bold military moves abroad.

Scenario 3. Russia acts as a constructive and independent player. Moscow no doubt continues to attach high priority to maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula as well as safeguarding the global non-proliferation regime. Russia will act as an independent player which collaborates with Washington, Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul as long as their goals align with Moscow’s—namely, preventing war on the Peninsula and protecting non-proliferation regime. With regard to non-proliferation, Russia will be content if North Korea freezes its nuclear and missile programs, viewing complete denuclearization as a long-term goal. The Six Party Talks remain Russia’s preferred diplomatic format for dealing with North Korea.

Even though Russia’s and the US’s interests on the Korean affairs are not identical, they overlap enough to warrant their close cooperation. As the State Department representative for North Korea policy Sung Kim put it in January 2015, “alignment [of the US and Russia] on the core goal of de-nuclearization remains as strong as ever.” He went on to state that “Russia will remain an important player in our diplomacy with the DPRK.” That said, Moscow’s willingness to cooperate with the United States on the Korean Peninsula issues will be directly linked to the general condition of Russian-US relations: if they remain tense, or become even more contentious, Russia would be tempted to obstruct Washington’s Korea policies.

**China’s Standpoint**

China, being the closest neighbor of North Korea and also a dear friend accounts for 90% of the total trade that North Korea trades with all other nations. In other words, North Korea depends on China profoundly for its trade. From time to time, voices have been raised from different platforms that China is responsible for nuke-technology transfer to nations like North Korea and Pakistan. Undoubtedly, China being one of the emerging powers has a key role and
responsibility to play in stabilizing East Asia Region. That’s why Trump in his recent tweet asked for China’s help and moving a step ahead made his attention clear in handling the issue himself individually if China prefers to remain silent.

However, Chinese leader Xi Jinping, visited Trump where he expressed his concerns on NK Issue. Chinese analyst Shi Yinhong says, “Mr. Xi is confident that he can stave off an eruption on the two biggest issues: North Korea and trade,” President Xi is prepared for Trump to press for more economic punishment against North Korea for its expanding nuclear weapons program and will offer to bear down on the North, an ally of China’s”, Shi said. But, he added, the Chinese leader is expected to cleave to a strategic bottom line: North Korea must serve as a buffer zone against the potential of a unified Korean Peninsula dominated by the American military.

Not long ago Chinese aid and diplomatic support was arguably ‘propping up' the DPRK regime. If the alliance with Beijing were to cease, the regime would definitely have serious problems. With the right decisions and a lot of blood (such things have succeeded before, e.g. Pol Pot's Kampuchea) those in power could stay in power. However, the government seems to be a delicate balance of conflicting interests, plus the world is watching, so this worst case is quite unlikely.

China is showing signs of having had enough of the DPRKs nonsense, but the pariah state remains a useful buffer against US interests in NE Asia. As long as the cost-benefit analysis seems to benefit Beijing, the DPRK is staying put. Despite (carefully cultivated) appearances, the North Korean government isn't actually that stupid and will not intentionally push China too far.

The Future

Most of the scenarios in the Korean Peninsula range from dangerous to horrific. This process will continue to test the new administration. Given projected timelines in Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile development, President Trump could face an early decision on whether to shoot down or otherwise disable a North Korean long-range missile, very possibly triggering an even larger military crisis on the peninsula. The president and cabinet officers can set the policy framework, but policy coordination and implementation requires that the fully functioning machinery of government stand behind the policy. Some might argue that with the provided circumstances, all policy options on the peninsula are bad. It is nonetheless heartening that the president shows keen awareness of the scale of the challenge and the need to approach North Korea with deliberation and resolve.
Victor Cha (author and former national foreign policy advisor in the White House's National Security Council) presents five likely scenarios in the North Korea situation. According to him, “the paths forward are about as clear as a foggy day in London”.

*Positive: A positive path would entail a North Korean decision – whether of aggregation of sanctions – to return to the negotiating table over their nuclear weapons programs. This could be in a bilateral format with the Americans or through a return to the Six-Party talks, the multilateral forum chaired by China.

*Ambiguous: That is, North Korea shows a willingness to return to diplomacy, but without a commitment to denuclearize, instead focusing on negotiating a peace treaty with the U.S. as setting the stage potentially for tension-reduction.

*Negative: Kim Jong-un could accelerate his efforts to grow his nuclear capabilities accompanied by more nuclear detonations, missile tests, fiery threats, and potentially even proliferation horizontally to Iran, Pakistan or other non-state actors.

*Instability: Even though the leader celebrates a five-year anniversary this week, exceeding many people’s expectations of whether he could handle the job, the rate of high-level defections and purges in North Korea is unprecedented, which indicates a significant degree of churn inside the system. This internal instability can manifest itself in external spasms that generate outright conflict in the region.

*Status quo: North Korea in this scenario would not be characterized by an increased tempo of testing, nor an increased interest in diplomacy. Instead, it would work methodically as it has done over the past few years to build programs, remain cool to negotiation, and provoke occasionally but not at a level that would generate U.S. or South Korean reactions.

**Possibility of a Second Korean War?**

It's important to remember that the 1950-1953 Korean War was a disaster for both sides, and that fact is largely what drives North Korean military policy. It's what keeps the people supporting the regime through animosity toward the US and South Korea. However, due to nuclear weapons the threat of widespread destruction is the deterrent that keeps the conflict from boiling over.
Fighting between North and South Korean forces will be particularly brutal, and as a result, there is no reason to believe either side would pull punches today. Both countries have significant military power. South Korea has one of the most powerful militaries in the world, with 3.5 million troops. North Korea has 5 million troops with another 5 million that can fight in a protracted war. The North Korean “Songun” policy means the military comes first in terms of food, fuel, and other materials before any are given to the population at large. Mandatory conscription (for a 10-year enlistment) means that most North Koreans have some form of military experience.

**If war was to occur**

It would doubtless begin with the North pressing the advantage of surprise for as long as possible; Pyongyang’s only hope for a positive resolution lies in the ability to force its opponents to withdraw before bringing their arms to bear. The North Korean forces, though numerous (1.1 million soldiers, 820 jets, and 4,200 tanks) are poorly fed and questions arise as to their combat readiness. Their technology is believed to date as far back as the 1950s and, in most cases, lack the necessary fuel to run. However, their soldiers are heavily indoctrinated from a young age and stand ready for combat. However antiquated, the North Koreans additionally possess significant numbers of conventional and missile artillery.

A North Korean attack on the South would give the north a slight advantage in surprise and initiative — for a few days. Allied forces would respond instantly, but the North would still have the initiative. Retired Army Gen. James Marks estimates it would have the initiative for four days at most. When the first war was launched across the Demilitarized Zone, the DMZ wasn't quite as defended as it is today. No one was expecting the attack, and the bulk of US forces had been withdrawn to Japan. But today, an assault across the 38th parallel (the North-South border) is tantamount to slow, grinding, probably explosive death. Moreover, they would also activate sleeper agents in the South to direct missile and artillery fire — South Korean intelligence estimates up to 200,000 special operators in the North Korean military, trained to fight Taliban-like insurgencies.
Eventually, The US air assets in the area would establish air superiority over the region, destroy air defenses, attempt to take out the artillery and missile batteries, and then destroy Northern command and control elements. After that, allied airpower would target infrastructure like bridges and roads, especially the unification highway linking the capital at Pyongyang with the border, to keep Northern forces from being able to move effectively inside their country. The US would also make humanitarian airdrops outside of major cities to draw noncombatants out of the cities and make targeting regime figures that much easier.

After the conventional fighting, the question is whether North Korea would use its nuclear weapons. It is estimated to have up to eight weapons and ballistic missile technology capable of reaching US and South Korean forces in the Korean Peninsula, Japan, and all the way to Guam. However, experts cannot confirm that the North has ever successfully used a warhead on any of its missiles. If the North were to use its nuclear arsenal, nuclear retaliation from the US wouldn't be a foregone conclusion, especially if US forces had the opportunity to capture most of the weapons.

In the end, the North, despite some early successes, would lose. It would be able to inflict massive devastation with conventional weapons in Seoul and near the border areas. The toll on civilians would likely be massive if it used its biological and chemical stockpiles, and even more so if it used the nuclear arsenal. Special Forces would likely use their nukes in the border areas for fear of being caught trying to move South.

Meanwhile, the US would quickly establish air superiority while ground forces bypassed the heavily defended DMZ area. Once the artillery and missile batteries were taken out, the advanced technology, mobile armor, helicopter support, and airpower would quickly overwhelm the large infantry formations and their associated WWII-era tactics. The hardest part of subduing North Korea would be unifying the Korean people and taking care of the North's backward and likely starving populace.

\textit{After The war}
The US and South Korean governments might want to keep the North at bay instead of overrunning the government. A 2013 RAND Corporation research paper estimated the cost of unification to be upwards of $2 trillion not only to pay for the war, but for food for the population and restoration of all the infrastructure the Kim regime neglected over the past 60-plus years. Gen. Marks believes the North and South will continue to only use short, contained attacks on each other.

**Conclusion**

The North Korea is a definite challenge to the world community. According to IR pundits it is probably the Rubicon of 21st century. Resolving the issue is not so easy. There are far too many variables to account for, though the odds are obviously against North Korea. In case of war, defeating its neighbor and the military might of the United States are non to slim. In this predicament, China and Russia remain key players in the conflict. It remains to be seen which side they would choose in the event of open hostilities. Externally, China continues to support North Korea, but its patience is stretching, specifically since heightened tensions between the Koreas have resulted in a rapidly growing American presence in the region. North Korea and South Korea have been feuding for decades. These feuds have escalated in recent years, making conflict a real, though unlikely, possibility. War or regime collapse, however, would dramatically alter the balance of power in the region. It could also result in the proliferation of arms, conventional and nuclear, destabilizing the region, if not the world. Hopefully cooler heads will prevail in this dangerous staring contest.