



# The Case for Diplomacy with North Korea

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Diplomacy is a necessary part of an overall strategy—including strong alliances, deterrence, pressure, and containment—for dealing with North Korea.

- **Progress will only be made through diplomacy:** High-level diplomacy is the only way to secure meaningful reductions in North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Given that Kim Jong Un sees his weapons programs as securing the safety of his regime, expecting North Korea to arrive ready to give up its programs is a fantasy.
- **Communication reduces the chance of crises:** Whether or not diplomacy yields quick results on denuclearization, there is an immediate need for regular, direct channels of communication between militaries and diplomats to avoid miscommunication in the event of a crisis.
- **Diplomacy advances U.S. interests:** The best way to secure American interests is to seize the initiative through diplomacy. The most significant diplomatic breakthroughs in recent decades—the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and the Iran nuclear deal—overturned previous third rails of diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> There is well-founded skepticism about what diplomacy with North Korea can produce, but there is also little cost to finding out what diplomacy could yield. As former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME) said of his success in negotiating peace in Northern Ireland, “I had 700 days of ‘no’... and one ‘yes.’”<sup>2</sup>

## Recommendations for diplomacy with North Korea

To test the possibilities of diplomacy with North Korea, the Trump administration should immediately take the following steps:

- **Develop a diplomatic game plan and empower diplomats to advance it:** The United States must develop a phased approach to denuclearization—such as missile and nuclear test freezes and curbs on proliferation—that would be necessary to create momentum in a diplomatic process. President Donald Trump should empower professional diplomats at the State Department take the lead in advancing a dialogue with North Korea.
- **Pursue a sustained, high-level dialogue:** One meeting alone will not solve the North Korean challenge. The United States must conduct a regular, high-level dialogue with North Korea led by empowered counterparts from each country who have the authority

to tackle a wide range of issues, including missile and nuclear programs, confidence-building measures, and searches for the remains of U.S. soldiers who died in North Korea during the Korean War, among other things.

- **Allow no daylight to come between allies:** North Korea wants to divide South Korea and the United States.<sup>3</sup> Any successful diplomacy will therefore require the allies to stay on the same page and coordinate diplomatic positions and moves closely.
- **Establish a military hotline:** The United States should offer a crisis communication channel between the United States, South Korea, and North Korea. A military-to-military hotline could ensure that in moments of crisis the militaries can immediately talk to one another to discuss any miscommunications or accidents and determine ways to de-escalate.
- **Do not let up on pressure:** Until North Korea makes genuine, verifiable progress in curbing its illicit programs, the United States and its allies should maintain economic sanctions and continue to strengthen regional U.S. military posture to deter North Korea.<sup>4</sup>

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## Endnotes

1 Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty," available at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-egypt%20peace%20treaty.aspx> (last accessed March 2018); U.S. Department of State, "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," available at <https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/> (last accessed March 2018).

2 Laura Rozen, "700 days of no, and one yes: George Mitchell on peacemaking," *Politico*, May 25, 2010, available at [https://www.politico.com/blogs/laurarozen/0510/700\\_days\\_of\\_no\\_and\\_one\\_yes\\_George\\_Mitchell\\_on\\_peacemaking.html?showall](https://www.politico.com/blogs/laurarozen/0510/700_days_of_no_and_one_yes_George_Mitchell_on_peacemaking.html?showall).

3 Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Decoupling is Back in Asia: A 1960s Playbook Won't Solve These Problems," *War on the Rocks*, September 7, 2017, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/decoupling-is-back-in-asia-a-1960s-playbook-wont-solve-these-problems/>.

4 Arms Control Association, "UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea," available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/UN-Security-Council-Resolutions-on-North-Korea> (last accessed March 2018).