

Political Breakthrough Possible on the Korean Peninsula

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On February 10 of the current year, the reception of the delegation of DPRK (the most representative one since the Korean War) by the South Korean President, as well as the subsequent negotiations of the parties became one of the most significant events of regional and world policy of the last few years.

Future historians will only marginally report the cause for it to be a certain event from the sphere of show business entitled “The Olympic Games”. For the process launched in Seoul may well lead to (under favorable circumstances) the healing of one of the oldest and dangerous wounds on the body of modern global politics.

This process definitely far outweighs the professional sports show, which is today taking on the role of gladiatorial combats during the declining period of the Roman Empire.

However, the positive developments on the Korean Peninsula can only be expected if the main external participants remain “sidelined” until the North and South Koreans reach some sort of resolution on various issues, which together form one common “Korean problem”.

It is obvious that such a (hypothetical) resolution should more or less satisfy the above mentioned “external participants”. These include the United States, China, Russia, and Japan, which together with both the Korean countries constitute the format of “Six-Party Talks” that were interrupted in 2008.

This seems to be an ideal continuation of the process started on February 10 in Seoul, which certainly will not be implemented as some of the “external participants” are very much interested in their own vision of the situation on the Korean Peninsula and precisely “will not step aside”.

First of all, this holds true for the United States and Japan, for whom (and it is the most important moment), not the “Korean problem” but the North Korean missile and nuclear program is relevant. It should be noted that for such an approach to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, they have formal grounds in the form of the UN Security Council resolutions, which are undoubtedly violated by the DPRK.

At the same time, Washington and Tokyo do not take account of the fact that North Korean missile and nuclear program itself is a consequence of the unsettled “Korean problem”. The initial joint position of the US and Japan is as follows: firstly, it is necessary to start the

process of solving the issue of missile and nuclear program and only then will it be possible to talk “about everything else” (lifting the sanctions against the DPRK, establishing trade and economic, diplomatic relations with it and etc.).

Such a position has not led to positive results. It should be noted that for Washington, the situation on the Korean Peninsula can only be considered “positive” if it allows the US to continue maintaining its military presence there.

Significantly, the first reports about the agreements between Pyongyang and Seoul to resume bilateral contacts have caused a noticeable stir both in Washington and Tokyo.

On February 3, a telephone conversation was held between **Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** and **President Donald Trump**. On February 7, **Vice President Michael Pence** made a stopover in Tokyo on the way to [Seoul](#). In the course of these contacts, the allies seem to have conducted a final “synchronization of watches” regarding both the current situation on the Korean Peninsula and the negotiation strategy of each of them with the South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

The outcome of US-Japan talks consisted of two memos, one of which -addressed to the DPRK- consists in the traditional “increase of pressure” on Pyongyang until it renounces its nuclear program.

However, the second one reflects the entirely new realities that have emerged on the Korean Peninsula with the resumption of inter-Korean dialogue. There were heard the words “about the need to prevent a split” in the “USA-Japan-South Korea” configuration. It should be emphasized that the only reason for its existence is “counteracting North Korean threat”.

Then a blunder occurred that was both obvious and difficult to explain. In spite of being in a difficult (euphemistically speaking) relationship with South Korea, for some reason, the Prime Minister of Japan took the responsibility to convey the US-Japanese position to the [South Korean president](#).

During negotiations with **President Moon Jae-in**, **Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** touched upon the topic which does not concern Japan, from a formal point of view. In particular Prime Minister Shinzo Abe interceded in favor of the resumption of the planned US-South Korean military exercises, which had been postponed for a month in connection with the holding of the Winter Olympic Games in the territory of South Korea. The answer to this initiative came in the expected form of “mind your own [business](#)”.

In the interpretation of [S. Abe](#), the main outcome of the Japan-South Korean talks in Seoul was the confirmation of the “pressure policy” on the DPRK. However, this thesis was not reflected in the public statements of the South Korean President. Therefore, there is a certain intrigue in the matters of both the said “pressure” and the resumption of the US-South Korean military exercises.

At the same time, two important circumstances, which significantly restrict the freedom of action of the South Korean leadership towards the DPRK, should not be overlooked. Firstly, Seoul is interested (for the moment) in maintaining a military-political alliance with the United States and therefore cannot completely ignore certain planned joint activities. Secondly, let us reiterate that the DPRK is a violator of the UN Security Council resolutions, the provisions of which must be implemented by all members of this organization.

Generally speaking, the denuclearization of the DPRK can be achieved by applying various schemes. But from the standpoint of the United States and Japan, no “options” exist, but there do exist resolutions of the “world community” that have to be strictly implemented. This approach, to be recalled, has not led to any positive development as yet.

Apparently, the inter-Korean talks in Seoul seem to have initiated an alternative approach when the problem of the North Korean missile and nuclear program is plunged into the context of a more general “Korean problem”. The preference for this “succession of actions” can hardly raise doubts.

But what can happen in reality, after the phase of “Olympic diplomacy” ended with the departure of the North Korean delegation to Pyongyang on February 11? This is roughly the question asked by the Chinese newspaper [Global Times](#).

It is important to note here that perhaps the main outcome of the negotiations was President Moon Jae-in’s acceptance of the invitation extended to him by the North Korean leader to visit the DPRK. For that, as the South Korean president puts it, “appropriate conditions must be created”.

However, it is unlikely that at present he himself has a clear answer to the question what precisely these conditions consist in. But one thing is clear for sure: in search for an answer, he will be actively assisted by “Elder Brothers” represented not only by Washington, but also by Beijing.

The illustrator for the above-mentioned article in [Global Times](#) depicted the American position in the form of “Uncle Sam” with a cudgel in his hand, viciously looking at the flying dove of peace with an olive branch in its beak.

It is possible, however, that the public “irreconcilable” rhetoric of Washington is intended to cover up a much more subtle game of American diplomacy. Pressure and sanctions against Pyongyang have also played a role in drastically changing its position.

Earlier, President Donald Trump repeatedly hinted at the possibility of Washington taking into account the interests of the DPRK in the process of solving the problem of missile and nuclear program. A somewhat similar statement was given by US **State Secretary Rex Tillerson** on January 17 at the Hoover Institute of [Stanford University](#).

The process of shaping the vector of the situation on the Korean Peninsula will not take place without participation of Beijing. More precisely, the positive direction of this vector can only be achieved by harmonizing the positions of the USA and China. And it is noteworthy that only one of the many components of the problems of US-China relationship is related to the Korean Peninsula.

The complex set of these relationships was once again discussed during a visit to Washington on February 6 by **Yang Jiechi** – a significant member of the current Chinese power hierarchy. During his talks with R. Tillerson, a wide range of issues was discussed. But, as reported by [Reuters](#), special attention was paid to the problem of North Korean missile and nuclear program.

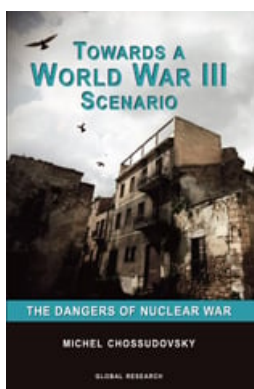
“Uncertainty” is the most commonly used word while commenting on the situation prevailing on the Korean Peninsula after the resumption of the inter-Korean dialogue. Let us just hope that this time there won’t be another “blank shot” in a series of attempts to

resolve the “Korean problem”.

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