

Antoine Bondaz, Ph.D.¹
Testimony before the European Parliament
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Dear Chair and vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Dear Chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence
Dear Members of the European Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to speak in front of you today in such a timely and important moment.

On November 29, the DPRK announced that it had “finally realized the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force”, a commitment its leader Kim Jong-un had taken earlier in September.

The day before, the regime had tested a new ICBM - so-called Hwasong-15 - that could, for the first time, reach any city on the U.S. mainland.

What should be considered as both a technical progress and a political success certainly fits in the DPRK’s survival strategy that aim at both strengthening deterrence and reinforcing Kim Jong-un’s internal legitimacy.

Yet, it could also signal a new opportunity for negotiation we should not miss if we want to contain the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic programs, a first step towards denuclearization. In any scenario, the European Union has an interest and a role to play.

North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic programs are deeply intertwined. The two programs cannot be disconnected. Under the leadership of Kim Jong-un, North Korea has radicalized its position on nuclear weapons.

First, the young leader mapped out, as early as 2013, technical priorities: improving miniaturization, making the weapons lighter, diversifying them, and increasing their precision. He also ordered four nuclear tests from 2013 to 2017, including what could have been a thermonuclear bomb, last September.

¹ A research fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research and an Associate Professor at Sciences Po, in Paris, Antoine Bondaz is a former visiting fellow at Korea University and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in their Beijing office.

Second, the regime has institutionalized these weapons. The Supreme People's Assembly revised the Constitution in early 2012 to refer to the country as a "nuclear-weapon state", a first in the world. Their development was also enshrined in the national strategy presented on March 31, 2013, the *Byungjin line*, which aims at "carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously", an evolution from Kim Jong-il's "military-first politics".

Third, the DPRK's ballistic program has considerably accelerated since 2014. Kim Jong-un ordered 20 ballistic missile tests alone in 2017, more than the 16 tests his father had ordered in 15 years, totaling more than 80 tests since Kim Jong-un took office. Then, the regime has diversified its missiles, testing for the first time intermediate-range (Hwasong-12) and intercontinental-range (Hwasong-14/15) missiles in 2017, missiles that threaten no longer only US interests in the Asia-Pacific but also US territories as well, for the first time. Eventually, the launch sites have multiplied to more than fifteen, as opposed to two under Kim Jong-il.

The regime now trains its ballistic units to combat, including at night or with simultaneous multiple launches, and therefore no longer only tests the technical characteristics of its missiles.

The goal is clear: to make the DPRK's nuclear capabilities operational as soon as possible to render its nuclear deterrence credible, increase Kim Jong-un's legitimacy and strengthen its negotiation leverage towards the U.S.

That radicalization fits its strategy of regime survival in both its external and internal dimension.

The external dimension relates to the regime security from outside threats. Nuclear weapons contribute to ease the North Korean regime's paranoia of what has been perceived, for decades, as U.S. enduring "hostile policy" and "nuclear threats".

Indeed, the possession of nuclear weapons by the DPRK levels up an already high deterrence threshold, since Seoul has already been hostage of the DPRK conventional capabilities for decades, by further raising the costs of any U.S. military intervention.

The internal dimension, even more important, relates to the regime security from inside threats. Indeed, nuclear weapons are political weapons that reinforce the legitimacy of Kim Jong-un and its regime.

First, they consolidate the hereditary system since they are considered as they have been inherited by Kim Jong-un.

Second, they increase his authority as the protector of the Korean nation who brought security to its people, a great achievement his grand-father and father had been trying to achieve for decades.

Third, they legitimize the decades-old sacrifices of the population being one of the rare successes of which the North Korean regime can boast toward its people.

Fourth, they strengthen internal cohesion and stimulate national morale, as depicted by massive demonstration in Pyongyang on December 1st, presenting the country as a great power despite international sanctions.

Nuclear weapons also fit perfectly into the nationalist narrative and ideology of the DPRK, the *Juche*, a search for political independence, which involves the creation of an autonomous economy and a self-defensive capacity.

Possessing nuclear weapons has been made an unmatched source of legitimacy for a regime that, according to its propaganda, stands for Korea's independence and autonomy after centuries of foreign influence and ill-willed decades of foreign occupation.

In this context, they are an indispensable tool for the political implementation of *Juche*. Their institutionalization make their abandonment even more difficult since they are no longer possessed by the regime, but have evolved as a part of its identity.

To abandon them in the short term would mean for the regime to question the rationality of its former policies, and of its former leaders, which would eventually weaken the legitimacy of Kim Jong-un.

Yet, paradoxically, for the young leader to acknowledge that the regime has “completed” its state nuclear force could pave the way to negotiation.

Let's be honest, the international community failed to prevent the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. And by continually doubting North Korea's capabilities, we only push them to prove otherwise.

We are now at a crossroads and it is a priority to sustain the UN and international community's credibility by making international law and UNSC resolutions enforced and respected by all.

Yet, adopting sanctions alone, even as a sign of international unity and coordination at the highest level, is insufficient.

First, the 1718 UN Panel of experts on North Korea clearly demonstrated that Pyongyang is flouting sanctions through trade in prohibited goods, with evasion techniques that are increasing in scale, scope and sophistication.

Second, as the Panel also underlined, North Korea's efforts have not yet been matched by the requisite political will, prioritization and resource allocation to ensure full and effective implementation.

Third, 2371 and 2375 UNSC resolutions recently adopted considerably reinforced sanctions, including targeting almost every source of exports. Yet, alone, they will not change the regime calculus.

The North Korean regime still considers that the military and political benefits of developing its dual program outweigh the economic cost and diplomatic isolation it entails.

It is however too early to say sanctions have failed since economic sanctions started last year. The usefulness of sanctions will be assessed only once they are thoroughly implemented, and if they are part of a broader strategy.

Military options are said to be on the table. They may deter the DPRK, but not coerce it into denuclearization.

If any country were to consider preventive strikes on North Korea the political, human and economic costs would be unbearable and chances of success limited.

First, there is no guarantee that military strikes would comprehensively neutralize North Korea's nuclear and ballistic facilities since most of them are buried deep underground. An intervention on the ground by special forces will be indispensable.

Second, North Korea's military retaliations on South Korea, even conventionally, would have dramatic consequences. The DPRK could also use nuclear weapons preemptively, relying on both "counterforce" strikes against military targets and "countervalue" strikes against civilian targets to avoid any decapitation strikes. Dozens of thousands of Europeans would become easy targets with no way to evacuate them all.

Third, China may assist the DPRK one way or another in due respect of the 1961 treaty or else China's credibility for decades to come will be affected.

Fourth, the economic impacts on stock markets and trade would be cataclysmic since a war would be triggered in the engine of the world economy.

More than ever, prosperity and security of the Europeans is linked to stability in the Korean Peninsula.

The coercive use of military threat might only legitimate DPRK's nuclear and ballistic programs internally and increase the risks of miscalculation, leading to unwanted catastrophes.

Yet, denuclearization is and must remain the objective of the international community.

A clear and realist short-term objective, and a first step towards denuclearization, could be to contain the threat before the regime further improves its capacities.

I mean a freeze of DPRK's nuclear and ballistic programs, while further reinforcing actions to prevent proliferation and sanctions evasion.

It was the essence of the 2012 Leap Day deal agreement between the U.S. and the DPRK, so it could not mean to recognize officially the DPRK as a nuclear power state.

A freeze would limit DPRK's technologies before rolling it back. It would not delegitimize the regime while not reducing the country's perceived security, yet it would first contain the threat before further negotiating the denuclearization of the DPRK.

Moreover, both the United States and the DPRK can come to the negotiating table from positions of strength: the DPRK due to its technical progress and the US due to its support from the international community.

China's support is essential but we need to further discuss the Sino-Soviet dual freeze offer (freeze of test for a freeze of military exercises) that is so far unacceptable for the U.S. and its allies.

Even far away, the European Union has a role to play.

First, by better implementing sanctions and fighting the DPRK's illicit activities, and assisting our partners in Asia, Africa and the Middle East to do the same.

Second, by fostering a direct dialogue with the DPRK and facilitating dialogue between key players, including between the DPRK and the U.S. Indeed, maximum pressure and dialogue work together.

Dialogue among parties remains vital to better understand North Korean motivations and convince the regime that should it change its behavior and respect international law, concrete concessions will be offered.

Some European member states have privileged access to Pyongyang compared to our Americans, Japanese and Korean friends. This kind of access should be fully used.

Third, everything about the EU is about post-conflict. Unfortunately, 64 years after the Korean war, the peninsula is still in a state of war.

The EU should help bring the Korean peninsula into a post-conflict phase by promoting the signature of a peace treaty in parallel of the denuclearization of the DPRK.

Thank you very much for your attention.