

UPF North America: US Panel Considers New Approach to North Korea

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Making Peace with North Korea
Diplomacy is the art of the possible

GUEST PANELIST
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Ambassador
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Security Issues commentator;
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There is no trust between Pyongyang and the Seoul/Washington alliance, but there may be a couple of pathways to the DPRK. One is China. Chairman Mao said China and North Korea "are as close as teeth and lips," but careful observers see indications this is not the case. Second, President Kim is not oblivious to economic incentives. Under the right conditions, Kim Jong Un might talk, if not with South Korea, then with the U.S. He certainly has before. It takes a president to speak to a president. A conflict on the Korean Peninsula would have no winners, only losers. Nobody wants war. Not the U.S. or South Korea. Not China and not even North Korea. The success of any outreach to the DPRK depends on the framing of it. And timing.

Washington, DC, United States - "A conflict on the Korean Peninsula would have no winners, only losers," warned Prof. John Delury, professor of Chinese Studies at Yonsei University Graduate School of International Studies in Seoul, South Korea. Prof. Delury, a widely respected commentator on China and Asia Pacific geopolitics, was speaking on the April 2, 2024 episode of the monthly webcast, The Washington Brief, sponsored by The Washington Times Foundation and UPF.

The professor was joined by former six-party talks envoy Amb. Joseph DeTrani as moderator, along with Georgetown University security studies professor Dr. Alexandre Mansourov and the host, Dr. Michael Jenkins, president of The Washington Times Foundation.

The panel addressed the prospects for U.S. and South Korean engagement with North Korea, which has been stalled since former U.S. President Donald Trump's failed efforts to negotiate with President Kim Jong-Un.

There is no trust between Pyongyang and the Seoul/Washington alliance, Prof. Delury said. But he also pointed out North Korea's relations with its strongest ally, China, were not as close as they might appear.

"The distrust and dislike that pervades China-[North Korea](#) relations is a condition of possibility, of peace and normalization, and real improvement of relations between [North Korea](#) and the United States," he said. "But this would require a pretty profound ... shift in U.S. foreign policy thinking."

Pyongyang's recent deepening of military and political ties with [Russia](#) seem to suggest that the regime has given up on better relations with the United States. Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, professor at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies, described the situation as [North Korea's](#) "pivot to the north," saying it was "a major new reality with which we have to deal."

Prof. Delury said this turn of events could provide an opportunity for the United States. "I do think, strangely, paradoxically, this fairly recent real uptick in [North Korea-Russia](#) relations actually gives something for them to talk about," he said. The U.S. side could ask whether there is a "way we could fill the gap" in what [Russia](#) provides to [North Korea](#).

The professor said that offering relief on economic sanctions, and other economic incentives, might persuade North Korea to curtail its relationship with [Russia](#). "I think there is an element there that could be used toward peace," he said.

"I still believe [Kim Jong-un](#) has ambitions to drag the DPRK out of economic backwardness," he added, referring to the North by the initials of its formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "If the Biden administration showed up with serious willingness to let the DPRK prosper, I'm convinced [Kim Jong-un](#) would be interested and start movement in a direction we haven't really seen," he added.

The panel concluded that a new approach is definitely needed in managing the situation on the Korean Peninsula, beyond the demand for North Korea's denuclearization. Former CIA official Joseph DeTrani pointed out that this approach has had no success. "We haven't deterred [North Korea](#) from building nuclear weapons. We haven't deterred [North Korea](#) from building more missiles to deliver those weapons," he said.