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Chief of Defence Staff,
Swedish Armed Forces



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Maintenance of the NPT regime should be the primary objective of the containment strategy

Need for a long-term strategy to cope with North Korea

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The breakout of the Korean War in 1950 indicated the global and military nature of the Cold War and the international role of China. The present North Korean threat reminds us of the global and military nature of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, and it makes us rethink China's role, too.

A long time has passed since North Korea's declaration to withdraw from the NPT, and since its first nuclear test. North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, defying the Framework Agreement of 1994 and the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks of 2005, and also ignoring the resolutions of the UN Security Council. It is even trying to have Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), which neither India, Pakistan nor Iran has.

Denuclearization of North Korea

Our purpose should not be slowing down North Korea's nuclearization, but its denuclearization. While international solidarity is a must in order to achieve this goal, China, North Korea's most important neighbor, is more concerned about the possibility of an inflow of refugees and also about a larger influence of the US over the entire peninsula in the aftermath of confusion. After all, China is the ally of North Korea. It is not certain how serious China is about pressuring North Korea. Russia, another important neighbor, is under international sanction because of its behavior in Europe, and thus it cannot be expected to be proactive on imposing sanctions. Russia is more concerned about being encircled by the missile defense systems of the US and of

its allies. As China and Russia are authoritarian states, it is too optimistic to think they would be willing to buttress the US-led international order against North Korea.

Donald Trump vs. Kim Jong-un

Meanwhile, the US has problems, too. President Trump's "America Firstism" is already weakening the US soft power. It will undermine even its hard power, by damaging US economy. The entire world is illegitimately challenged by North Korea, but this issue is often viewed as an issue between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump because of their exchange of colorful words. The false image does not contribute to the solution of this issue. In December 2017, President Trump released his administration's National Security Strategy, which articulated its resolve to "preserve peace through strength." The US should exercise its strong leadership for the solution of the North Korean problem in accordance with this strategy. The role of the US continues to be pivotal, as the security of the Asia-Pacific is still underpinned by the US-centered alliance network.

There are no short-term solutions

As it is a matter of time before North Korea possesses ICBMs with a nuclear warhead, this is an urgent issue, but there are no short-term solutions. As some experts from Japan and the US propose, a long-term containment will be the only viable option. The ideas of double suspension and freeze would end up benefiting North Korea. North Korea's intention to send its athletes to the Pyeong-chang Olympics should not be mistaken for its willingness for denuclearization. The US, Japan and South Korea must assume the central role of persistent and firm containment. These three countries must enhance their defense postures by strengthening the Japan-US and US-Korea alliances and their trilateral cooperation. Japan must show its strong resolve to bear some containment related risk in its next defense plan, expected later this year. Japan and South Korea must continue to cooperate in spite of their bilateral political difficulty.

The future Northeast Asian order

Maintenance of the NPT regime should be the primary objective of the containment strategy. Neither Japan nor South Korea have a nuclear option. The other objective is stability of Northeast Asia. Though military options should not be denied as a means to keep pressuring North Korea, the important thing is not to predict the scenarios for military operations, but to establish a vision for the future of the Northeast Asian order.

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Photo: private

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