

José Luis Juan Conesa
Pre-Doctoral Researcher, University of Murcia

Email: joseluis.juan@um.es

North Korea and the United States: An analysis from the theory of international relations.

Abstract

Tensions between the United States and North Korea have grown considerably since the arrival of the Trump Administration to power, forcing the Security Council to impose heavy-hitting sanctions on the Korean regime since it has continued with its nuclear programme, thus giving rise to an exchange of declarations that some are predicting as the preamble to a nuclear war. While the behaviour of these two international actors is generally limited to a purely psychological analysis in the media and even in the reaction of some political leaders, here we will try to explain from the perspective of the theory of international relations

Keywords

North Korea, United States, Kim Jong-un, Donald Trump, Nuclear Weapons, International Relations.

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Introduction

«The US has great strength and patience. But if it is forced to defend ourselves or our allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea», Donald Trump said in his speech to the 72nd United Nations General Assembly in September 2017¹. An inflammatory speech, which has not escaped criticism; some analysts have even described it as unprecedented, since the US president threatened the complete destruction of a UN member in the very podium of the Assembly². This was not the first time the US leader had threatened North Korea. Weeks earlier, he said that if necessary, he would respond with “fire and fury»³.

Ever since North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, the escalation of the conflict, especially between Pyongyang and Washington, has been steadily on the increase⁴. However, tensions between North Korea and the United States started decades ago, when the division of the Korean peninsula into two states after World War Two led to a socialist state in the north and a capitalist state in the south. The war between the two Koreas in 1950 led to this division and the protection that the United States granted to Seoul, which has survived to the present day⁵. Four US administrations in recent times (Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump) have had to deal with the problem of North Korean nuclear proliferation, mutually accusing each other of the mistakes made⁶. George Bush was quick to impose sanctions on the then regime of Kim Jong-Il. Barack Obama, for his part, opted for “strategic patience” seeking a cooling of existing tensions that failed to bring any tangible success. Since coming to power, however, the Trump Administration has shown its willingness to

1 Appointments Presidential actions legislation disclosures? the White House Office of the press secretary for immediate release September 19, 2017. Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, *The White House*, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/19/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly>.

2 MILANOVIC, M. «So has this ever Happened Before?». *EJIL TALK!*, 19.09.2017, available at: <https://www.ejiltalk.org>.

3 SEVASTOPULO, D. y DONNAN, S. «North Korea nuclear test raises challenges for Trump». *Financial Times*, 03.09.2017, available at: <https://www.ft.com>.

4 Although, as is widely known, the conflict dates back a long way and Pyongyang's flirtations with nuclear weapons were already evident in 1993 when it threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

5 Although Washington and Seoul disagree in their assessment of the threat. South Korea fears war on the Korean peninsula, while the United States is especially concerned over nuclear proliferation. (GUNTHER, H. y SUH, E. «Caught in the middle or mediating from the middle» en GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. *Facets of the North Korea Conflict: Actors, Problems and Europe's Interest*. Berlín: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2018, 18).

6 WINNEFELD, J. y MOREL, M. «Realism and North Korea». *Harvard Kennedy School. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*. 30.03.2017, available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org>.

take action and has even criticised the Obama administration's strategies. At the end of 2017 there were exchanges of declarations, with verbal threats and attacks from both sides, which suggested the possibility of imminent conflict. The trigger, on that occasion, was a test-flight with ballistic missiles that flew over Japan unleashing chaos for hours.⁷ (Tokyo warned its inhabitants to seek refuge from the possibility of an attack that never occurred; schools and public transport services were suspended). Kim Jong-un, meanwhile, did not shrink from the threats of «total destruction» and declared:

«...I will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged US dotard with fire [Donald Trump] [...] Now that Trump has insulted me and my country in the eyes of the world, and made the most ferocious declaration of a war in history [North Korea] is seriously considering the highest level of hard-line countermeasure»⁸.

In the wake of these statements, more characteristic of opponents in a «B» movie than two Heads of State, there was much discussion as to whether we were on the verge of a new nuclear confrontation⁹. Particularly surprising were the comments of some world leaders who described Kim Jong-un's behaviour as if it were a product of some form of madness. Donald Trump, in a leaked conversation with the President of the Philippines, stated: «We can't let a madman with nuclear weapons run on the loose like that». And Duterte replied that his mind was «not working well¹⁰. The former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, noted that Jong-Un was “an irrational leader” and “we should be worried”¹¹. Others, such as the former Prime Minister of Singapore, branded the North Korean regime a “psychopath”¹². Many Americans, in fact, as *Politico Magazine* states, have the impression that North Korea is a crazy country, led by a madman seeking global destruction¹³. 77 % of Americans even believe that Pyongyang is capable of launching a nuclear missile against the United States,

7 ESPINOSA, J. «Diez minutos para ponerse a salvo en Japón de los misiles norcoreanos». *El Mundo*, 29.08.2017, available at: <http://www.elmundo.es>.

8 «Kim Jong-un amenaza con “domar con fuego al viejo chocho” de Trump». *El País*. 04.10.2017, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

9 For example, this debate: RATNER, E., SMITH, S. y SNYDER, S. y ROSE, G. «What the U.S. Can Do About North Korea». *Foreign Affairs*. 10.08.2017, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com>.

10 «Trump calls Kim Jong-un “a madman with nuclear weapons” in a leaked conversation with Duterte». *RT*. 24.05.2017, available at: <https://actualidad.rt.com>. And this was not the only time that the American president described Kim Jong-un in these terms. In September, following missile tests, he claimed he was a madman who didn't mind killing his own people.

11 «Kim Jong-un is an “evil”, “irrational” leader and we should be worried: John Howard». *ABC News*. 31.08.2017, available at: <http://www.abc.net.au>.

12 «El líder norcoreano es un pobre viejo fofo». *ABC*. 02.12.2010, available at: <http://www.abc.es>.

13 WOLFSTHAL, J. B. «Why Kim Kim Jong-un Isn't Afraid of Donald Trump». *Politico Magazine*. 29.08.2017, available at: <http://www.politico.com>.

a view that has spread to part of the western world¹⁴. The truth is that Kim Jong-un has not done anything to alleviate this kind of panic; in fact he actually stated that they would soon have intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States (according to some analysts, their missiles could already reach North America)¹⁵. The US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, has responded to these claims by suggesting that they could carry out a pre-emptive strike. The hermetic nature of the North Korean regime has also endorsed this aura of madness. Nor has the Western press been slow to exaggerate behaviour patterns with accounts of purges or unorthodox methods of execution, such as when it was erroneously claimed that the North Korean leader had thrown his uncle to the dogs; the story was a «hoax» created by a Chinese satirical website, but reproduced by all Western media which seems to take for granted such forms of lunatic behaviour on the part of the North Korean regime¹⁶.

However, 2018 presented us with an unexpected scenario. Insults and paranoia gave way to understanding. We were confronted with statements (even ones that could be described as affectionate) between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un. We witnessed summits that appeared to be designed to come up with a solution, as if everything previously expressed was just a bad dream. So what happened?

The truth is that the conduct of international stakeholders has not always responded to the dictates of reason. In fact, according to a former Palestinian minister, George W. Bush once said that he invaded Iraq because God told him to¹⁷. But is Kim Jong-un someone who in all circumstances is engaging in irrational acts that jeopardize the survival of his country? Or is there another answer to the tug-of-war between the North Korean leader and the Security Council and the international community? Why is there room for consensus now? Some say that it is impossible to understand what North Korea is doing and that war between Washington and Pyongyang is highly probable¹⁸. We will try, nonetheless, to find an answer in the Theory of International Relations and in the recent history of the small Asian country both to the violent rhetoric of past decades and to the current situation.

14 «CNN poll: Two thirds of Americans see North Korea as a very serious threat». *CNN*. 08.08.2017, available at: <http://cnnespanol.cnn.com>.

15 GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. «Interests, Interdependencies and a Gordian Knot» in GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. *Op. cit.*, p. 7; GILSINAN, K. «North Korean Nukes and the Grand International-Relations Experiment in Asia». *The Atlantic*. 18.03.2017, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com>; BENDIX, A. «122 Nations Approve 'Historic' Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons». *The Atlantic*. 08.07.2017, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com>.

16 «De la jauría de perros que mató a su tío, a la amante resucitada: leyendas y verdades de Corea del Norte». *ABC*. 10.02.2016, available at: <http://www.abc.es>.

17 «Dios me pidió acabar con la tiranía de Irak». *El País*. 08.10.2005, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

18 MURRAY, R. «IR Theory and the DPRK». *E-International Relations*. 10.04.2013, available at: <http://www.e-ir.info>.

Theories of international relations have evolved over time, a logical occurrence if we consider that relations and conflicts between states are ever-changing, adjusting to man's technological, cultural and social advances. A century ago the North Korean issue could not have been dealt with by analysts, because the devastating effects of nuclear weapons had not been proven. Thus, traditionally, there are two basic frameworks to the theories of international relations: realism and rationalism¹⁹.

In general, rationalism recognises that situations of violence, inherent in life, can be avoided through understanding, dialogue and negotiation. These give a relevant role to the agreements reached between states, international Law and international organisations. Immanuel Kant, exponent of this school of thought (along with others such as Plato, Vitoria or Kelsen), understood that states with common democratic values, did not go to war against each other and that there could be no better scenario for relations than common understanding²⁰. Applying these assumptions to the present day, it is evident that the UN, through the Security Council and the General Assembly, would have a fundamental role in resolving disputes between states.

Realists, however, take a more pessimistic view. They understand, unlike rationalists, that war is inevitable. In the view of Hobbes, it is the «state of nature», a confrontation of everything versus everything that is inherent in the human race²¹. From this perspective, states are motivated by their own interests in an anarchic world and international organisations promote the interests of the most powerful or influential countries and do not have the capacity to resolve conflicts equitably. Aristotle, Hegel, Machiavelli or Vattel are some examples of realistic authors. This is a theory that became relevant after the outbreak of World War Two. The interwar period, which followed the conclusion of the First World War, was used to create a League of Nations with rules agreed between the powers, which sought to avoid a new conflict on a large scale. However, these rationalist initiatives, with the creation of international organisations and common rules, proved insufficient and the world entered a fresh global war years later, with consequences for the civilian population as serious as the previous one. This encouraged the thesis of those who viewed such pacts as inadequate and failing to reflect the reality and anarchy of international relations. Logically, these two categories (realism and rationalism) are insufficient to describe all the theories developed since then –functionalism, neo-realism, theories of interdependence, etc.– but they do serve as a general framework for analysing North Korean behaviour.

¹⁹ On international relations theories, see: GARCÍA PICAZO, P. *Teoría breve de las relaciones internacionales ¿Una anatomía del mundo?* Madrid: Tecnos 2013.

²⁰ See: KANT, I. *Hacia la paz perpetua. Un diseño filosófico*. Madrid: Ediciones Alamanda, 2018.

²¹ See: HOBBS, T. *Leviatán*. Madrid: Editora Nacional 2008.

North Korea's foreign policy in the light of Waltz's neo-realism

Among the realists, the American Kenneth Waltz, who developed highly controversial theories that were strongly criticised in the US, is especially relevant. Waltz analyses the world after the Second World War from what he himself described as a realistic perspective; in his view, agreement, is not the best option to solve the innumerable political conflicts that the world presents. As is well known, the World War Two and the creation of the United Nations gave way to a world described as bipolar in which the two major powers, the United States and the USSR, disputed power. Two totally opposite models faced each other: American economic liberalism, typical of the Western world, and Soviet socialism.

The coexistence of the two powers did not lead to direct armed conflict, but it did lead to blockades in the Security Council (the use by both powers of the abusive veto privilege) and proxy wars (in which both powers supported their governments or related armed groups in different parts of the world²²). However, if there is one thing that characterised this Cold War, it was the constant threat of nuclear conflict. At the end of World War Two, the USSR managed to develop nuclear weapons in defiance of US dominance. Both powers began an arms race, which would later spread into space (generating costs that, according to some, the USSR could not afford), in order to defeat their opponent. Finally, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and its disintegration, the USSR lost the battle. Capitalism prevailed over communism. Having defeated its enemy, the United States therefore emerged at the beginning of the 1990s as an unrivalled, dominant power.

Waltz understands that, despite the tensions (which became more evident than ever in Cuba's missile crisis), the United States and the USSR avoided direct armed conflict for decades. And, therefore, a perfect balance existed. This situation of equilibrium was achieved by the fear shared by both sides of unleashing a major tragedy with the exchange of nuclear warheads. In other words, it was the nuclear bombs, and their indiscriminate effects, that guaranteed that neither party would want to enter into armed conflict (at least not directly), thus creating a balance of forces between the two contenders. Waltz, therefore, believes in the paradox of the work of nuclear bombs as a pacifying force. And he doesn't stop at analysing the case of the Cold War²³.

Waltz relates this to the conflict between India and Pakistan. The two neighbouring countries are in a state of permanent tension. In fact there were border skirmishes recently, allegedly carried out by terrorist groups coming from Pakistan, to which India

22 Like U. S. support for the contras in Nicaragua; or Russian support for the Afghan government while the U. S. helped the mujahideen, who paradoxically would form the Taliban that the Bush Administration would fight. Or, as it happens, Korea's own war in 1950.

23 WALTZ, K. «Why Iran Should Get the Bomb. Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability». *Foreign Affairs*. Julio/agosto, 2012, pp. 2-5 (p. 2).

replied²⁴. Going back in time, following decolonisation, the two countries clashed in the conflict with Bangladesh. However, Waltz reminds us that from the moment they got nuclear bombs (both Pakistan and India, have this capacity, although it is not of major concern nor does it feature in the media), they have avoided direct conflict and the situation is peaceful, as was the case with the Cold War²⁵.

The last scenario Waltz analysis is the Middle East and the proliferation of nuclear weapons by Iran, which has been seen as a threat to the wider international community. A case similar to North Korea, with the exception that in this case an agreement has been possible²⁶. And while US politicians were even calling for preventive armed action to end Iran's nuclear capability, Waltz saw this as a new opportunity to stabilise the Middle East²⁷. Israel, although it attempts to conceal the fact, is another country with weapons of mass destruction: it possesses chemical and nuclear weapons. Once again, Waltz considers that if Iran were to accede to nuclear weapons, the equation would be rebalanced and there would be a prosperous peace in the East; given that Israel has attacked its adversaries as and when it deemed necessary (and with little proportional action): both with occupations (such as that of Lebanon in 2006; or Gaza in 2009) and with isolated bombings of a preventive nature (Gaza and Syria recently). If Tel-Aviv feared an attack from Iran, it might renounce those attacks and the situation, just like that of the United States and the USSR or India and Pakistan, could be balanced out²⁸.

Returning to North Korea, is this balance that Waltz advocates really possible? One has to determine what exactly the North Korean regime intends with its nuclear weapons and whether its intentions are defensive or offensive. The analysts have not reached a consensus. Pyongyang has its eyes set on the entire Korean peninsula. However, although North Korean propaganda tells its citizens that it was the United States that invaded North Korea in 1950, the truth is that it was Kim Il-Sung who attacked South Korea in order to unify the peninsula under a socialist banner. Some think that Kim Jong-un has the same ambition and hence his nuclear development. Many defend this theory, maintaining that a «Second» war between the two Koreas would be initiated by the northerners. These theories focus on the «madness» of the North Korean leaders and their expansionist leanings. This is a profoundly psychological thesis that obviously cannot be proven in the absence of hard evidence of the lack of common sense and reasoning (or excessive ambition) of the North Korean leaders.

24 «India bombardea territorio paquistaní en respuesta por el atentado que mató a 44 militares hace dos semanas». *El País*. 26.02.2019, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

25 WALTZ, K. *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

26 Pulled back by the Trump Administración Trump especially in recent times.

27 It is worth noting that Iran finances Hezbollah's Shiite militias and Hamas and is a declared enemy of Israel, constituting one of Tel Aviv's main threats in a regional context.

28 WALTZ, K. *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

«Discussions of irrationality do not take us very far. First, if a ruler truly is irrational or paranoid, it is impossible to make any a causal link between that psychological state and expected outcomes. Second, this approach is falsifiable [...] By resorting to an irrational demagogue as an explanatory variable, analysts appeal to a deus ex machina through which any North Korean action can be post-dictively explained [...] and any possible North-Korean action can be possible».²⁹

This simplistic reasoning which involves «demonizing» the enemy is not uncommon: it was used with other «unpleasant» leaders such as Saddam Hussein or Gaddafi³⁰. Although, in the particular case of the two Koreas, the truth is that since the conflict in 1950 there has been no armed confrontation between the two countries and peace has existed on the peninsula for nearly seventy years (no small feat). Moreover, despite the military displays of the North Korean regime, it is often obvious that this is a small country (with barely twenty million inhabitants and a military capacity, with conventional weapons, similar to that of South Korea) that would have absolutely no place in an armed confrontation (even nuclear) with Washington and Seoul³¹. Although its nuclear capacity could cause major casualties (it is estimated that a nuclear missile would arrive in Japan in just ten minutes), this is derisory in comparison with that of the United States³². Despite this, as they recently confessed to *The New Yorker*, some members of the Trump

Administration's national security team still doubt that North Korea has the weapons simply to use in self-defence and they do not rule out an invasion of the South³³. However, most analysts believe that North Korea's intentions are defensive rather than hostile and are focused on seeking a balance similar to that described by Waltz in the previous scenarios: peace (or survival in the face of threats from the United States)

29 KANG, D. «International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War». *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 47, Issue 3. 2003, available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2478.4703001/full>.

30 One only has to pay heed to the following press headlines: «Gaddafi, un paranoico». *El Mundo*, 27.02.2011, available at: <http://www.elmundo.es>; «El embajador de la ONU dice que Gadafi está loco». *Europa Press*, 25.02.2011, available at: <http://www.europapress.es>; DEPETRIS, D. «Bashar al-Assad: A Clever Sociopath». *The National Interest*, 11.02.2015, available at: <http://nationalinterest.org>.

31 KANG, D. *Op.cit.*, available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2478.4703001/full>.

32 The United States has between 6,800 and 7,000 warheads and North Korea, in contrast, is estimated to have between 10 and 20. The country with the most in its power is Russia, as a result of the Cold War arms race, with more than 7,000 warheads. France has 300; China 260; United Kingdom 215; India and Pakistan have similar numbers, between 120 and 130; and Israel closes the list with 80. («Nuclear Arsenals». *International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, available at: <http://www.icanw.org>; «Which Countries Have Nuclear Weapons and How Big Their Arsenals Are». *The New York Times*, 23.12.2016, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com>).

33 OSNOS, E. «The Risk of Nuclear War with North Korea». *The New Yorker*, 18.09.2017, available at: <https://www.newyorker.com>.

that could only be granted by the possession of nuclear weapons. An invasion of the south could go against the interests of the north, which would be forced to impose a feudal system on a society that has lived under a liberal regime that would prove very difficult to alter. Therefore it seems more realistic to consider that North Korean operations are aimed at «preserving what they already have»³⁴. In this sense, the former US Secretary of State, William Perry, pointed out that North Koreans are cognizant of the fact that their nuclear weapons are valuable only if they «do not» use them, since the consequences of using nuclear arsenal would be devastating for the country, which could be completely destroyed.³⁵

Pyongyang's refusal of rationalism

But one might wonder why the North Korean regime, at least until quite recently, has resorted to such a tactic, which could be defined as extreme, in order to secure peace in its region. Would it not be simpler to sit down with the United States and negotiate the terms of an agreement that would please all parties? This is probably where the close link between the North Korean regime and realistic theories becomes apparent, since its nuclear proliferation policy would appear to derive from a profoundly pessimistic understanding of international relations and their mechanisms for resolving conflicts (whether the United Nations Assembly or the Security Council). Some analysts, therefore, do not see the North Korean leader's behaviour as that of a madman, but that of a most rational mind, taking into account the circumstances of his country, and acting in accordance with the tenets of realistic theses³⁶. Theories that conceive enemy leaders as hostile by nature are arguably over-simplistic and should be replaced by others which, without justifying the conduct of the actors involved, would at least explain it from a rational point of view³⁷. In other words, it is not a question of morally justifying the conduct of these leaders, but of analysing them in more detail, without starting from the premise that they are mentally ill³⁸.

More traditional realist theses did not believe in diplomacy within an anarchic world of states acting only in their own interest. North Korea welcomes this reality

34 KELLY, R. «There's a Lot of North Korean Alarmism». *Asian Security Blog International Relations of Asia & US Foreign Policy*. 14.06.2017, available at: <https://asiansecurityblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/14/theres-a-lot-of-north-korean-alarmism/>.

35 AZIZ, A. «The Logic in North Korean Madness». *Astute News. Science of News and Analysis*. 18.07.2017, available at: <https://astutenews.com>.

36 MURRAY, R. *Op. cit.*, available at: <http://www.e-ir.info>.

37 MALICI, A. «Thinking About Rogue Leaders: Really Hostile or Just Frustrated?». *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*. 2007, p. 8.

38 «North Korea, Far From Crazy, Is All Too Rational». *The New York Times*. 10.09.2016, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com>.

and until recently refused to negotiate with the United States. But a crucial aspect requiring clarification and one that often escapes analysis is that this has not always been the case. At the end of the Cold War, Kim Il-Sung was open to negotiations, but at that time neither the United States nor South Korea were up for the task. In 1999, the Clinton administration did take a step forward and began a very serious rapprochement with North Korea under the leadership of Kim Jong-Il. Moreover, in 2000 the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, spent more than twelve hours in Pyongyang with Kim Jong-Il negotiating the terms of an agreement on her missile programme³⁹. Some historians even claim that had the Clinton agreements been maintained, North Korea would not currently have nuclear weapons⁴⁰.

Months later, however, the situation deteriorated with the arrival in power of George Bush, who did not continue the line of his predecessor⁴¹. South Korea's own foreign minister at the time, Yoon Young-kwan, said he had had great difficulty convincing the Bush administration to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea⁴². In fact, in the year 2002, straining relations even further, President George Bush included North Korea in his well-known «Axis of Evil», a name by which he described the states that, in his opinion, supported terrorism, which included Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Cuba and the North Korean regime itself⁴³. That list, as one might imagine, is essential to understanding North Korea's behaviour.

First of all, three of the six countries named were attacked by different US administrations (Iraq, in 2003, by the Bush Administration; Libya, in 2011, by the Obama Administration; and Syria, in 2017, by the Trump Administration). Francis Fukuyama even pointed out that the «Axis of Evil» represented a significant change in US foreign policy from a policy of deterrence to a policy of active prevention against terrorism⁴⁴.

39 OSNOS, E. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://www.newyorker.com>.

40 AZIZ, A. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://astutenews.com>.

41 Evidence of the good relations between the Clinton administration and Kim Jong-Il lies in the fact that the former American president, in 2009, mediated the release of two American journalists who had been arrested by the North Korean regime and sentenced to forced labour. Clinton travelled to Pyongyang and obtained their release by meeting personally with Kim Jong-Il, who openly acknowledged that the relationship with the previous US administration was better. A Wikileaks cable, in fact, revealed that Kim Jong-Il stated that the United States could have had a good ally in Southeast Asia. George W. Bush, however, in 2006 tried to restore relations with the North Korean regime (which deteriorated, apart from the inclusion in the Axis of Evil, after the US president literally said that he would not negotiate with the devil). (KAPLAN, F. «China Won't Stop Kim Jong-un. The U. S. Must Stand Up to Both of Them». *Slate*. 13.09.2017, available at: <http://www.slate.com>).

42 YOUNG-KWAN, Y. «Realism on North Korea». *China US Focus*, 05.04.2013, available at: <https://www.chinausfocus.com>.

43 «President Delivers State of the Union Address». *The White House*, available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

44 FUKUYAMA, F. «Occidente puede resquebrajarse». *El País*. 17.08.2002, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

Starting with Iraq, George Bush's invasion turned the country into complete chaos, with a sectarian war that seems to have no end and that has undoubtedly left the country in worse conditions than under Saddam Hussein's regime. North Korea draws various lessons from this invasion that embrace realism and deviate from idealism. In the first place, not even the opposition of the United Nations Assembly and the Security Council prevented the United States from deploying its troops. And secondly, international law likewise failed, as there was no legal authority in international law to justify the US invasion. Neither the United Nations nor legality stopped the United States. The route to agreement, therefore, had failed completely for Iraq, which allowed UN inspectors to check until the very last moment whether they really had weapons of mass destruction, without the fact that none appeared (at the time or later) serving the US Administration. Pyongyang would have to ask itself why the United States would be any way more benevolent towards the North Korean regime.

The second significant case is Libya, and perhaps even more relevant than Iraq; in fact CIA advisers have pointed out that it is the scenario that North Koreans cite most when discussing the issue of a possible abandonment of nuclear weapons⁴⁵. In 2011, under the Gaddafi leadership, Libya suffered the same fate as Iraq after the protests resulting from the Arab Spring. The United States and its allies branded Gaddafi a madman and began a constant campaign of air strikes that did not let up until the Libyan regime and leader were removed. On that occasion there was consensus in the Security Council and military actions had legal and political backing. However, the Security Council resolution did not authorise a regime change or the elimination of Gaddafi⁴⁶. The interests of the Council members who had participated actively in the intervention (France, the United States and the United Kingdom) prevailed over the will of the United Nations, which opted for a more limited mandate.

Curiously, years earlier, the international community, led by the United States, managed to convince Gaddafi to give up his nuclear programme. These demands were accepted by the North African leader and probably turned out to be his downfall. Thus, the North Korean regime assumed that if Gaddafi had continued with his nuclear proliferation and had not heeded the pressures of the international community, he would probably still be alive today and, faced with the threat of nuclear weapons, no one would have dared to attack the country.

A case that bears many similarities to the latter is that of Ukraine, although without the participation of the United States. Kiev renounced its nuclear weapons in 1994 through the Budapest Memorandum, signed by Ukraine, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, with the commitment that these countries would respect Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, as is well known, years later Russia reneged on its promise and annexed Crimea. Already then, some analysts, like the researcher, Felix Arteaga, wondered what message was being sent to the prolifera-

45 AZIZ, A. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://astutenews.com>.

46 S/RES/1973 (2011), March 17, 2011.

ting countries (North Korea, Iran) if all those who had renounced nuclear weapons (Ukraine, Libya or Iraq) were being «attacked»⁴⁷.

What, then, is North Korea trying to do? Survival is logical. Not ending up like these countries. Pyongyang, in pursuing a realistic interpretation of international relations, is seeking to dissuade its enemies, mainly the United States, from a possible attack or invasion in the face of the threat of possible nuclear retaliation. From Pyongyang's perspective, the arms race is not something «suicidal» but precisely the element that will allow them to achieve survival: that balance defended by Kenneth Waltz. For as long as South Korea and Japan⁴⁸ have the support of the United States, the North Korean regime will feel threatened. And it has learned two lessons: first, if the major powers (the US, Russia) want to attack, they will do so; second, the countries that abandoned nuclear proliferation were completely exposed. The regime, therefore, is contemplating a threat to American troops located in South Korea, which, they understand, only serve to maintain US dominance in the region⁴⁹. It is estimated that North Korean casualties caused by US bombing in the Korean War were counted in the hundreds of thousands (an estimated 20 percent of the Korean population died during the intense bombing, which, according to some, was more brutal than the entire US air campaign during World War II⁵⁰). That conflict did not end with a peace treaty, but with an armistice agreement, and tensions have been constant ever since⁵¹.

Moreover, as we have seen, when the United States decides to challenge Pyongyang's adjustment to international law, despite the justifications from its Administration, it has often been compromised. In fact, North Koreans are particularly critical of the work of the Security Council, which they accuse of double standards and serving the particular interests of a few countries; since the members of the Council were very concerned about sanctioning North Korea over its nuclear programme while they remained silent and imposed no sanctions of any kind on the US invasion of Iraq (2003) or Israel's invasion of South Lebanon (2006)⁵². The Secretary of State for the Clinton Administration, William J. Perry, pointed out, in relation to this double standard, that the North Koreans did not understand why the international community accepted

47 «Ucrania, la lección más dura del desarme nuclear». *ABC*. 10.04.2014, available at: <http://www.abc.es>.

48 The country accused of being a mere puppet of the United States in the region.

49 SEONGJI WOO. «Pyongyang and the World: North Korean Perspectives on International Relations under Kim Jong-il». *Pacific Focus*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (August 2011), 188–205 (p. 198).

50 «Trump's threats are perfect propaganda for North Korea». *CNN*. 12.04.2017, available at: <http://cnnspanol.cnn.com>.

51 POTTS, M. «The Koreas, Bastion of Cold War Realism». *The Diplomat*. 25.06.2015, available at: <https://thediplomat.com>.

52 SEONGJI WOO. *Op. cit.*, 196. For this reason, North Koreans were involved in expanding the number of non-permanent members of the Security Council, with the aim of ensuring that non-aligned countries would have a say in important deliberations.

Saudi Arabia with its flagrant violations of human rights and yet did not tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea⁵³.

Nor, as he pointed out, does the United States' respect for legality inspire great confidence in Pyongyang: unilateralism that has manifested itself not only in the scenario of warfare but also in agreements relating to climate change, the refusal to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court and the treatment of Guantánamo prisoners⁵⁴. If the Washington's behaviour in its international relations can only be analysed according to realistic theses, it seems understandable that the North Korean regime should react with a similar response. Recently, in fact, the North Korean regime openly acknowledged this defensive nature through its official newspaper:

«The United States has exaggerated when it states that we pose a serious threat to the entire world (...) we will not initiate or threaten a nuclear attack on any country in the world, unless it participates in the anti-Korean military actions of the United States [...].(North Korea) has not secretly carried out the development of its nuclear weapons and rockets, but all processes of weapons reinforcement have been clearly revealed as part of Pyongyang's efforts to prevent a war (with the US)»⁵⁵.

This statement was reiterated after the US bombing of Syria in 2017 with a communiqué from the North Korean Foreign Minister: "The reality of today proves our decision to strengthen our military power and stand against force with force was a wise choice a million times over, we were right to increase our nuclear force in a remarkable way⁵⁶". And they also insisted that their nuclear development was a means to curb the use of arbitrary US force in their international relations, as «successive US administrations have attacked those countries that did not have nuclear weapons»⁵⁷.

The Trump Administration has similarly employed this argument and threatened to adopt unilateral measures, as in previous instances, if it fails to reach an agreement with Pyongyang; in such a scenario it would renounce the necessary authorisation to use the force of the Security Council, as required by the United Nations Charter⁵⁸.

53 AZIZ, A. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://astutenews.com>.

54 FUKUYAMA, F. «Occidente puede resquebrajarse». *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

55 «Corea del Norte dice que sus armas nucleares no amenazan a otros». *HispanTV*. 19.08.2017, available at: <http://www.hispantv.com>.

56 ESPINOSA, J. «Corea del Norte dice que el ejemplo de Siria justifica su armamento nuclear». *El Mundo*. 09.04.2017, available at: <http://www.elmundo.es>.

57 The Minister of Foreign Affairs said the following: «Our tremendous military muscle with a nuclear force as its axis serves as a valuable sword of justice capable of thwarting the shameless and arbitrary practices of the United States».

58 If the Security Council considers that the measures referred to in Article 41 may be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate [those relating to the peaceful settlement of disputes or the adoption of sanctions or coercive measures not involving the use of armed force], it may take such action through

This would not even be the first time that North Korea has been subjected to such behaviour from the United States, since the American invasion during the Korean War in 1950 also took place in violation of international law. On that occasion, the United States obtained an authorisation from the Security Council to use force, but it did so taking advantage of the absence of the Soviet representative at the Council session, who, had he been present, would have vetoed a resolution to that effect⁵⁹.

The United States has not been slow to respond to these «dissuasive» theories and has contradicted Waltz by pointing out, in the words of Rex Tillerson, that nuclear weapons «are not instruments of mutual deterrence or strategic stability, but tools of destabilization»:

«While North Korea has shunned the international community and let its people starve while it relentlessly pursues nuclear weapons, South Korea has opted not to pursue nuclear weapons and is fully engaged with the international community. As a result, South Korea has grown into one of the world's great economic powers, with a GDP over 100 times that of its neighbor to the north. By contrast, though North Korea may assume that nuclear weapons will ensure the survival of its regime, in truth, nuclear weapons are clearly only leading to further isolation, ignominy and deprivation. Continued threats against us, the United States, and now the entire global community will not create safety for the regime, but will instead stiffen our collective resolve and our commitment to deterring North Korean aggression»⁶⁰.

In fact, Rex Tillerson was calling on North Korea to take a more idealistic view of the world: placing them in a position to integrate commercially with other countries, to adhere to international norms and treaties, and participate in humanitarian activities⁶¹. One cannot overlook the North Korean regime's responsibility for this increase in mistrust either, for in 2003, when it announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it stated that it had no intention whatsoever of manufacturing atomic bombs and that its nuclear activities would be limited to peaceful purposes such as the manufacture of electricity⁶². These claims have not stood the test of time. Nonetheless, some analysts have

air, naval or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockades and other operations carried out by air, naval or land forces of Members of the United Nations.

59 S/RES/84 (2011), July 7, 1950.

60 S/PV.8053, September 21, 2017, 5.

61 Ibid.

62 The North Korean agency KCNA stated: «Even if we leave the NPT, we do not intend to manufacture atomic weapons and our nuclear activities at this time will be limited to peaceful purposes such as the production of electricity». («Corea del Norte lanza otro pulso y abandona el Tratado de No Proliferación Nuclear». *El País*, 11.01.2003, available at: <https://elpais.com>).

pointed out that the change of discourse comes as a direct consequence to events in Iraq in 2003⁶³.

North Korea and Strategic Conflict Theory

But if North Korean weapons are strictly defence-related, as Pyongyang argues, one might ask why the North Korean regime publicly exhibits its weaponry, worshipping it, as if it were a television show, spreading images across the globe of its missile launches and its troops parading proudly with their deadly toys.

What is certain is that these practices are not new either in history or in the theory of international relations. A current of realism is the strategic theory of conflict, developed during the Cold War. This theory is based precisely on the assumption of rational behaviour on the part of the agents involved in the conflict⁶⁴. The main focus of this theory is deterrence and not «all-out war» between the actors; so, although the name would appear to evoke belligerent activity, the theory is not based on aggression, war or resistance, but on «war threats» and how these influence the enemy.

Some of these dissuasive practices have a strong psychological element: for example, the exhibition of weapons and technological development in order to show off to the enemy their new and improved capabilities and weaponry. These are practices that Washington and the Kremlin made regular use of during the Cold War to dissuade the enemy from attacking. And that is precisely what the North Korean regime is doing now: presenting a full display of its armaments to dissuade the United States from carrying out pre-emptive strikes and in doing so to obtain greater popular support. Curiously enough, analysts point out that, since the end of the Cold War, there has been less reliance on deterrence, but clearly the country that most frequently uses it is the United States⁶⁵ (in the last two years alone it has threatened Venezuela, Syria, North Korea and Iran⁶⁶).

One might still wonder whether this somewhat heterodox staging of nuclear capacity is necessary. Related to compulsive deterrence is the «madman» theory, which

63 BALLBACH, E. «North Korea: Between Autonomy-Seeking and the Pursuit of Influence» en GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

64 VAHABI, M. «A Critical Review Of Strategic Conflict Theory And Socio-Political Instability Models». *Revue d'économie politique*, 2009/6, Vol. 119, 817-858 (p. 822).

65 MORGAN, P. «The State of Deterrence in International Politics Today». *Contemporary Security Policy*, 33:1, 2012, 85-107 (88). This has been helped by the fact that Washington has kept its military bases worldwide completely intact (like the one it maintains in South Korea), which, added to its intelligence capability, allows it to maintain wars anywhere on the globe. Such a capacity level is something that a country like North Korea clearly lacks.

66 «The New Axis of Evil: Why Donald Trump focused on Venezuela, Iran and North Korea in his speech at the UN». *BBC*. 20.09.2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.com>.

became famous thanks to Richard Nixon. This theory consisted of adopting irrational behaviour so that the enemy would think that any military action, regardless of its size, would be possible. Thus, Richard Nixon, with aggressive and threatening statements, made the North Vietnamese leaders think that he was capable of launching a nuclear bomb in order to triumph in the US invasion of Vietnam; when such action was not really part of his plans and the statements were therefore merely dissuasive. The Nixon Administration did the same in 1969 in its confrontation with the USSR: it sent nuclear bombers to the Soviet border and raised its DEFCON level⁶⁷; a fact that frightened Soviet officials into believing that nuclear conflict was imminent. Richard Nixon's Secretary of State, Melvin Laird, pointed out that with this tactic the American president intended that the Soviets would never be able to guess what their next step would be⁶⁸. Richard Nixon himself was more explicit when commenting on the characteristics of his own theory:

«I call it the Madman Theory. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can't restrain him when he is angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace⁶⁹».

Using madness to achieve peace – a theory easily associated with Kim Jong-un's behaviour, but similarly applicable to the behaviour of Donald Trump⁷⁰. Following in the footsteps of Nixon, Trump mobilised his fleet (without any offensive manoeuvres) and sent a fighter-bomber over North Korean airspace (once again, without attacks). Similarly, taking his cue from Nixon, Kim Jong-un has threatened to «carry out an all-out war»⁷¹.

The two of them have continued with these threats for a whole year and the truth is that absolutely nothing has happened, not even a minor skirmish. Some observers have even pointed out that Donald Trump, the businessman, is clearly well acquainted

67 The defence readiness condition is an alert state used by the United States Armed Forces, with DEFCON 5 representing the lowest state of readiness in situations of complete calm and peace and DEFCON 1 employed in situations of imminent nuclear conflict.

68 BAILEY, D. «Method to Madness: North Korea and the 'Madman' Theory». *Australian Institute of International Affairs*. 10.08.2017, available at: <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au>.

69 GARVER, R. «What Game Theory tells us about Trump's 'madman' approach to North Korea!». *Business Insider*. 12.08.2017, available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com>. The phrase is picked up by Bob Handelman in his book «The ends of power».

70 In fact, the North Korean representative on the Security Council defined the American leader as a «mentally deranged person full of megalomania». («Corea del Norte asegura que está por completar su sistema nuclear». *Centro de Noticias ONU*. 23.09.2017, available at: <http://www.un.org>).

71 «Corea del Norte estudia atacar las bases militares de EE. UU. en Guam». *El País*. 09.08.2017, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

with this theory, as it is common practice in the business world. In fact, both before and after his election campaign, Donald Trump pointed out that he likes to be unpredictable in his negotiations⁷². As for Pyongyang, what good would it do the North Korean regime to have nuclear weapons if no one thought it was capable of using them?

Economic Sanctions and the end of history?

Francis Fukuyama, in his book *The End of History?* analysed global trends after the end of the Cold War and came to the conclusion, shared by many, that Western ideals had imposed themselves on the world⁷³. In other words, economic liberalism and democracy were universal values to which every state should aspire. Fukuyama does not refer to the end of history in the strict sense, as the conclusion of relevant facts of humanity, but as the end of development in search of the society in which «any individual would like to live»⁷⁴. Thus, a struggle developed throughout the twentieth century came to an end. First with the confrontation between economic liberalism and fascism which culminated at the close of the Second World War and the end of Nazism and the belief that authoritarian regimes were the best system to control a dispersed European population. Communism was the next enemy capitalism had to face. In this case, contends Fukuyama, the struggle was more intense. However, the fact that the two great banners of communism, China and the USSR, have ended up opening up to the market economy has once again turned the tide in favour of capitalism and economic and political liberalism. All this evolutionary process in contemporary society, therefore, has reached a conclusion and states have to assume that they must aspire to the realisation of those values (liberal democracy and market economy), enshrining—even protecting—democracy as a universal value within the United Nations.

North Korea, however, is a state that resists the —end of history— and —with an authoritarian regime concentrated in the figure of its leader, which denies both democracy and the free market economy in its wildest form— in the opinion of some analysts still maintains a communist regime, although such assertions are quite questionable. In fact, the Korean peninsula is a faithful reflection on a small scale of the gap that separates North Korea from the rest of the world. With South Korea open to capitalism and sharing language and ethnicity with the North Koreans, it distinguishes itself in its political and economic system. Transnationalism characteristic of the twenty-first century, in which states are losing ground in favour of multinationals and the flow of money has not yet reached Pyongyang, which has its largest trading part-

⁷² GARVER, R. *Op. cit.* available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com>.

⁷³ FUKUYAMA, F. «The End of History?». *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), 3-18.

⁷⁴ Fukuyama himself had to face the criticisms that his article received after September 11, as some authors accused him that the attack was clearly a relevant historical fact, to which the author responded in terms similar to what I have repeated here. FUKUYAMA, F. «Seguimos en el Fin de la Historia». *El País*, 21.10.2001, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

ner in China⁷⁵ (almost 90% of North Korean imports and exports) that is under pressure from the West to curb, with its economic coercive power, the nuclear escalation of Kim Jong-un⁷⁶. The secrecy surrounding the regime, with a perfectly controlled society, says Fukuyama, makes it very difficult for change leading to democracy to reach North Korea⁷⁷. In fact, one of the factors that analysts see as key to understanding nuclear development is the internal legitimacy of the North Korean regime: as long as citizens have the United States as the common, implacable enemy, they will not question either their leader or the nuclear proliferation necessary for survival. So an internal revolution that leads the country to democracy, despite the fact that the Security Council denounces food and aid insecurity among the North Korean population, seems unlikely⁷⁸. Nevertheless, as Pacheco Pardo points out, the North Korean regime, following the example of China, Taiwan and Singapore, could accept an opening of the economy that is not necessarily accompanied by enhanced rights and freedom for the people⁷⁹.

However, there are countries that have seen the economic route as an option to exert pressure on the North Korean regime to abandon its nuclear programme. Such measures are not without precedent, and we have seen in scenarios like South Africa, Iran and Libya how economic sanctions imposed by the international community have caused such serious damage in the affected countries that their leaders, like Gaddafi or Khamenei, have been forced to reconsider their positions and abandon their nuclear programmes⁸⁰. The rationale behind economic sanctions is to impose measures

75 And even more so since Japan (in 2006) and South Korea (2010) cut their trade links with the North Korean regime. China, for obvious reasons, is not at all interested in a collapse of the North Korean regime: first, because the unification of the two Koreas (or an eventual war) could bring US influence to its doorstep; and second, because a war could trigger an avalanche of North Koreans into the country. BYUNG-SEONG MIN: «What game theory says about dealing with North Korea». *The Conversation*. 31.05.2017, available at: <http://theconversation.com>. However, the possession of nuclear arms by the North Korean regime is a worry for Beijing, as it would end its nuclear monopoly in the area and, furthermore, the tests carried out by the North Koreans could result in natural catastrophes that would affect the Chinese economy.

76 As we know, China already played a key role in 1994 when the North Korean regime threatened to abandon the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Beijing mediated between Washington and Pyongyang and succeeded in bringing about a consensus, although it is true that the agreement then reached has become completely ineffective over time. BOC, A. y WACKER, G. «China: Between Key Role and Marginalisation» in GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

77 S/RES/2375 (2017), September 11, 2017. Pregnant women, infants and five-year-olds are believed to be at serious risk of malnutrition and a quarter of the population is chronically malnourished.

78 FUKUYAMA, F. «Fukuyama Gives U.S. Foreign Policy Talk at SNU». *OhMyNews*. 11.09.2006, available at: <http://english.ohmynews.com>.

79 PACHECO PARDO, R. «North Korea and the US: no deal towards a workable and sustainable deal?». *Real Instituto El Cano. Royal Institute*, ARI 36/2009, 27.03.2019, 1-7 (p. 2).

80 LEVKOWITZ, A. «North Korea: A New IR Theory?». *The Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*. Paper n.º 551, August 2017, 1, available at: <https://besacenter.org>.

gradually until the pressure is so intense that governments are forced to change their policy (in the case of North Korea, abandon its nuclear programme).

However, this practice has not worked with North Korea: neither the sanctions imposed by the Security Council⁸¹ nor those adopted bilaterally by states, especially Washington, have deterred the North Korean regime. Some believe that China is not implementing the measures agreed; a fact that would hinder the overall blockade of the regime. Although it seems evident that in a situation of food crisis like the one the country is currently experiencing, the application of sanctions could deepen the problem even further and lead to internal revolts (from people who cannot explain military spending when basic necessities are needed). However, the regime's isolationism perhaps makes it less vulnerable to these sanctions.⁸² Moreover, North Korea does not believe that the climate of regional tension has changed substantially since the Cold War. They see imperialism as a widespread phenomenon –with the United States as its main exponent– that in regional terms has expanded to neighbouring countries, such as Japan and South Korea, which are seen by Pyongyang as satellites of Washington. And they consider it vital to maintain their independence in the face of this political and economic imperialist tendency⁸³. In fact, the North Koreans cited the economic crisis of 2008 as an example of the failure of Western ideas on the world. Others, such as the Russian president Vladimir Putin, rule out an internal revolt despite the sanctions and see another explanation that is related to previous points. Asked about the crisis with North Korea, the Russian leader had this to say:

«All of you remember well what happened to Iraq and Saddam Hussein. Hussein abandoned the production of weapons of mass destruction. However, under the pretext of seeking these weapons, Saddam Hussein and his family were killed during the famous military operation. Even children died then. I believe that his grandson was shot. The country was destroyed and Saddam Hussein was hanged. Everyone knows and remembers this. The people of North Korea also know it and remember it. Do you think that by imposing sanctions on North Korea it will abandon its production of weapons of mass destruction? Russia condemns these practices on the part of North Korea. We think they are provocative. But we cannot forget what happened in Iraq and Libya. North Korea will not forget. Sanctions of any kind are useless and ineffective in this case. They [the

81 Even sanctions recently imposed by resolution 2375 (2017), and defined by South Korea as the toughest since the sanctions began, have not stopped the North Korean regime.

82 Some analysts in Washington believe that the new willingness of the North Korean regime to negotiate is precisely due to the imposition of sanctions, but this has not been borne out, since, as Pacheco Pardo points out, internally the situation has not changed despite the imposition of sanctions. PACHECO PARDO, R. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

83 SEONGJI WOO. *Op. cit.*, p. 198.

North Koreans] will prefer to eat grass before abandoning their nuclear weapons program, unless they feel safe ⁸⁴».

Putin offers a solution to the problem: diplomacy and the restoration of international legality, an offer that, as we shall see (and as you know), has been picked up by Pyongyang and Washington.

Rationalism and the change experienced with the Trump Administration

When the violent rhetoric between Washington and Pyongyang could hardly get any more heated, out of the blue, after years of realism, both countries began to demonstrate a degree of rapprochement. The truth is that at that time it was difficult to imagine any convergence on the basis of statements that had been made previously. For example, in November 2017 the Trump Administration again described North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism. And in February 2018 President Trump, in response to statements by Kim Jong-un who had said that the Nuclear Button was on his desk at all times, tweeted that he possessed a much bigger and more powerful «Nuclear Button» than the one handled by the North Korean leader⁸⁵. Yet only a month later, in March 2018, this rhetoric changed completely and officials from both countries announced a meeting between the two main leaders.

After that, two unusual meetings were held in June 2018 and January 2019. Donald Trump, having described Kim Jong-un as a madman, indicated that he was an intelligent man who loves his country, even praising him for his toughness and pledging to help him to see him prosper⁸⁶. Here was a completely new (and unexpected) script. In fact, these changes of register prove that the gems previously uttered by both leaders only constituted a strategy to handle the situation. But what do these changes ultimately mean?

First of all this marked a change in the relationship between the two Koreas that had been developing since early 2018. Some even interpret the seeds of this change having been laid in Kim Jong-un 2018 New Year's address, in which he called for peace between the two countries⁸⁷. Thus the announcement of the March meeting between Washington and Pyongyang led to Kim Jong-un's visit to South Korea the following month and the signing of the Panmunjom Declaration in which the two Koreas pled-

84 These declarations are available on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lf-lhsR_ae8.

85 «North Korean Nuclear Negotiations». *Council on Foreign Relations*, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/north-korean-nuclear-negotiations>.

86 «Trump: Kim Kim Jong-un es un tipo astuto y bastante inteligente». *La Razón*. 01.05.2017, available at: <https://www.larazon.es>.

87 KLINGNER, M. «Why Does North Korea Want Nukes?». *Heritage*. 13.08.2018, available at: <https://www.heritage.org>.

ged, among other things, to improve their relations, unite efforts to minimise military tension and the risk of war on the Korean peninsula, resolve the humanitarian problems arising from separation, participate jointly in the Olympics, denuclearise the Korean peninsula and build a stable peace regime⁸⁸. In September 2018, a further meeting was held between Seoul and Pyongyang, continuing the same course of action and reaffirming the terms of the Panmunjom Declaration. In the agreement, North Korea undertook to close the missile test site in Dongchang-ri, allow the entry of international inspectors and relaunch economic cooperation between the two countries⁸⁹. However, while these green shoots were hailed as a positive move forward, they do not constitute a cause for any major celebration: in the wake of the three summits it was revealed that the South Korean conservative forces were not in favour of these movements.

Secondly, other, more minority sources point out that North Korea's "openness" can be explained by its growing attempts to reduce its dependence on China. Beijing's economic power has increased in recent years and, according to some forecasts, it could soon surpass the United States as a global economic power. This would generate a lack of trust in Pyongyang, which could seek to overcome this relationship of dependence by approaching other countries such as South Korea and the United States. According to these analyses, there would be no better way to combat China than with the backing of a nuclear power such as the United States⁹⁰.

For its part, the United States must have seen that the «strategic patience» deployed with the Obama Administration over those eight years only led to an increase in the military power of the North Korean regime⁹¹. Donald Trump, after his initial aggressive line, switched to a more rationalist approach and thus demonstrated a capacity for mediation and conciliation that had hitherto been called into question. Thus, after the rapprochement between the Koreas, a meeting was announced between Washington and Pyongyang. That meeting, however, was in danger of being cancelled in May 2018. Following statements by Kim Jong-un relating to Mike Pompeo, Donald Trump sent a letter to the North Korean leader cancelling the meeting scheduled for June. The text, however, showed clear changes in the US president's attitude. For, although he cancelled the meeting, he did not use the kind of aggressive language employed against the North Korean leader in the past (and as recently as two months previously); he even thanked him for

88 «Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula». *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, available at: <http://www.mofa.go.kr>.

89 «Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018». *The National Committee on North Korea*, available at: <https://www.ncnk.org/node/1633>.

90 See: SIGAL, L. «A U. S. Alliance with North Korea?». *The National Interest*. 24.04.2019, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org>.

91 HUESSY, P. «North Korea: How the Discussion Was Changed». *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*. 06.03.2019, available at: <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org>.

releasing American prisoners and pointed out that they were building a «wonderful dialogue»⁹².

Despite the letter, the meeting was finally not even suspended. The meeting in June 2018 between the United States and North Korea was the first time that their leaders had met in eleven years, a clear sign of how relations had cooled over the period. At this meeting, a joint declaration was signed between the two leaders, which, broadly speaking included the following terms (some already outlined in the meeting between the two Koreas):

- Both countries committed themselves to maintain new relations with the desire of their citizens to find peace and prosperity.
- They would join efforts to build a stable peace on the Korean peninsula.
- They would work for the complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.
- They would seek the repatriation of prisoners of war and recover the remains of those killed in the war between the two states⁹³.

The terms of the declaration completely changed the scenario, although no concrete measures were established, which seemed to be set aside for future meetings. These advances, however, suffered a major setback with the new February 2019 meeting between Washington and Pyongyang. The second summit between the two countries ended without agreement and gave credence to the more pessimistic onlookers. The reason: Washington was looking for the North Korean regime to take greater steps towards denuclearisation and Donald Trump pointed out that North Korea had offered to dismantle its main nuclear facility (located in Yongbyan), but not to surrender its arsenal of nuclear weapons. In addition, Washington pointed out that the regime had called for a lifting of «all» sanctions. The North Korean regime, however, denied such claims and pointed out that only a «partial relief» from the sanctions had been requested⁹⁴. The North Korean foreign minister pointed out that it was quite clear that Washington was not willing to accept his proposal⁹⁵.

Thus, the formal negotiations between the two countries seem to have cooled down since the failed meeting in February 2019⁹⁶. Kim Jong-un, in fact, acknowledged last

92 «Trump's Letter to Kim Canceling North Korea Summit Meeting, Annotated». *The New York Times*. 24.05.2018, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com>.

93 See: «Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit». White House, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov>.

94 VIDAL LIY, M. «El diálogo nuclear EE. UU.-Corea del Norte busca una vía para continuar». *El País*. 01.03.2019, available at: <https://elpais.com>.

95 «North Korea contradicts Trump's account of negotiations. State Dept. official says NK is 'parsing words'». *USA Today*. 01.03.2019, available at: <https://eu.usatoday.com>.

96 On the second summit, see: ESTEBAN, M. «Lecciones de la fake summit de Hanoi». *Real Instituto El Cano*. 01.03.2019, available at: <https://blog.realinstitutoelcano.org>.

April 2019 that the last meetings with the United States had relaunched relations between the two countries, but recalled that the US style of dialogue, consisting of imposing unilateral conditions, was of no interest to North Koreans⁹⁷.

The situation was aggravated by the recent military tests conducted by North Korea. The North Korean foreign minister had himself previously warned, following these misunderstandings, that nuclear tests could be resumed at any time, although relations between Trump and Jong-Un were good. And he kept his word. So from Pyongyang it was announced that a new test would be carried out⁹⁸ and that they were vetoing Mike Pompeo's presence in the negotiations⁹⁹. North Korea's execution of the test elicited contradictory verdicts from the US Administration. John Bolton pointed out that they represented a clear breach of the agreements reached and the Secretary of Defence Patrick Sanahan, pointed out in the same vein that they violated the resolutions of the Security Council. But these words clashed with Donald Trump's version, so, while the press analysed the facts as a new provocation, the President pointed out that Kim Jong-un had «kept his word» which he considered «very important». He contended that Kim Jong-un had pledged not to test long-range missiles while the tests were carried out on short-range missiles. Trump even dared to acknowledge that his «people» thought there might be a violation of the terms of the agreement, but he saw it differently¹⁰⁰. The American leader interpreted the suspension of the tests as affecting only intercontinental warheads and directly threatening the United States. However, short-range missiles can easily reach the territory of other US partners such as Japan or South Korea and US soldiers located in the Asian region. And Washington cannot be held accountable. *Foreign Affairs* advised that the North Korean test was conducted after the United States and South Korea conducted joint military exercises¹⁰¹, which Kim Jong-un interpreted as a violation of the terms of the agreement signed at the first Summit¹⁰².

However, this has not led to a complete breakdown of previous efforts, as direct correspondence between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump has been ongoing. In June

97 «Supreme Leader Kim Kim Jong-un Makes Policy Speech at First Session of 14th SPA», pp. 2-5, available at: <https://manage.thediplomat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/thediplomat-supreme-leader-kim-jong-un-makes-policy-speech-at-first-session-of-14th-spa.pdf>.

98 «North Korea announces firing of tactical guided weapon». *The Washington Post*, 17.04.2019, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

99 «North Korea: If US wants to talk, put someone 'more mature' than Pompeo in charge». *CNN*, 18.04.2019, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com>.

100 «Trump says Kim has 'kept his word' hours after Bolton said he hasn't». *CNN*, 12.06.2019, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com>.

101 PANDA, A. y NARANG, V. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com>.

102 «Supreme Leader Kim Kim Jong-un Makes Policy Speech at First Session of 14th SPA», pp. 2-5, available at: <https://manage.thediplomat.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/thediplomat-supreme-leader-kim-jong-un-makes-policy-speech-at-first-session-of-14th-spa.pdf>.

2019, Donald Trump said he had received a «beautiful» letter from the North Korean leader –although, to date, he has not disclosed its contents– and left open the possibility of holding a third summit. The American president replied with a letter to the North Korean leader whose content, from the North Korean news agency, was described as «excellent», while appreciating the «courage» of the American leader¹⁰³. So it seems that there is a certain chemistry between the two presidents that has not extended to the relations between their respective governments. Kim Jong-un even got involved in the US presidential race with the North Korean news agency voicing its criticism of the Democratic candidate Joe Biden¹⁰⁴. This state of harmony was acknowledged by Kim Jong-un himself in his April 2019 speech: «but as President Trump continues to say, the personal ties between him and me are not hostile like the relations between the two countries and we still maintain good relations, as to be able to exchange letters asking about health anytime if we want»¹⁰⁵.

All in all, the for the moment the encounters have only resulted in ambiguous statements¹⁰⁶, that reflect a degree of good will on both sides, but by no means clarify what the outcome could be. It certainly does not appear that Kim Jong-un –especially in the light of what has gone on before– is prepared to willingly sell off North Korean cheaply¹⁰⁷. Some analysts even point out that the legacy left by Kim Jong-un is nuclear weapons, which provide a guarantee of defence against the outside world. In fact, the North Korean agency KCNA stated in 2013 that if the Democratic Republic of North Korea were to sit at a table with the United States, there would have to be a dialogue between the two nuclear powers, without either party being able to force the other to dismantle its nuclear weapons¹⁰⁸. Moreover, on this point, Kim Jong-un is likely to come up against opposition from the hard liners within his bureaucratic apparatus who would urge him not to renounce nuclear weapons - and in fact the recent missile tests or the announcement of the construction of a nuclear submarine

103 «North Korea: Kim Kim Jong-un Received 'Excellent' Letter From President Trump». *Time*, 23.06.2019, available at: <https://time.com>.

104 «Biden urged to watch his mouth». *KCNA Watch*, 22.05.2019, available at: <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1558515649-516874058/biden-urged-to-watch-his-mouth>. It was indicated by the news agency that he had insulted and provoked Kim Jong-un, which, they pointed out, would never be forgiven. It also listed some of the most controversial points in the Democratic candidate's career.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

106 «Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit». *White House*, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov>.

107 Some analysts point out that perhaps the North Korean leader is hoping for some compensation that will allow him to match his grandfather's achievements. ESTEBAN, M. «Cumbre Kim-Trump: ¿adiós al último vestigio de la Guerra Fría?». *Real Instituto El Cano*, 13.06.2018, available at: <https://blog.realinstitutoelcano.org>.

108 BALLBACH, E. «North Korea: Between Autonomy-Seeking and the Pursuit of Influence» in GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

would have been carried out, among other reasons, to satisfy this sector¹⁰⁹. What is emanating from Pyongyang is that they do not like the manoeuvres of Mike Pence and John Bolton, a stance that has been endorsed by the declarations of the North Korean foreign minister to the effect that they had created a «hostile» and «suspicious» atmosphere¹¹⁰.

And the analysts generally agree that, in order for the negotiations to reach a successful conclusion, the North Korean regime would require:

- First, an end to the military Alliance between the US and South Korea.
- Second, the withdrawal of American troops from the Korean peninsula.
- Third, that Japan and South Korea cease to be «nuclear satellites» for Washington.
- Fourth, the lifting of economic sanctions (as well as the reinstatement of economic and diplomatic concessions), which, in the opinion of the North Koreans, are hindering the country's development (especially those imposed by the UN that affect raw materials, as well as the technology transfer and coal sectors).
- Fifth, the disappearance of criticisms of the North Korean regime and its institutions, and especially the accusations of human rights violations against Kim Jong-un and his family.
- Sixth, the cessation of military exercises involving flights of US B-52 bombers near the North Korean border.
- Seventh, the «formal» ending of the Korean War (1953) which is only governed by an armistice agreement¹¹¹.

On the other hand, some analysts including B. R. Myers, consider North Korea's rationalist stance to represent a mere facade, because the regime's ultimate aim is to take over South Korea. He contends that the Western media focus is wrong in its interpretation of North Koreans as nationalists and for that reason lacking in expansionist ambitions. If this were the case, he argues, they would also seek to conquer the south, a challenge that, in the current scenario, seems difficult to reconcile with main-

109 PANDA, A. y NARANG, V. «Why North Korea Is Testing Missiles Again». *Foreign Affairs*. 16.05.2019, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com>. On the construction of the nuclear submarine: «North Korea announces new submarine, sending message to Trump». *The Washington Post*. 23.07.2019, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

110 GRAMER, R. y HIRSH, M. «It's not personal. It's just diplomacy». *Foreign Policy*. 15.03.2019, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com>.

111 See: HERZOG, S. «After the Summit: A Next Step for the United States and North Korea». *Arms Control Association*. 2018, 1-9; WERZ, D. «The U. S., North Korea, and Nuclear Diplomacy». *The National Committee on North Korea*. 2018, pp. 1-24, p. 2; LEE, J. H. «Q&A: Can North Korea and the U.S. strike a nuclear deal?». *Wilson Center*. 25.06.2019, available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org>; ROGERS, P. *Op. cit.*, p. 3; DALTON, T., LEVITE, A. y PERKOVICH, G. «Key Issues for U.S.–North Korea Negotiations». *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 04.06.2018, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org>.

taining good relations with the United States¹¹². But this interpretation is maintained only by a small minority.

For its part, the United States would demand a halt to the production of tritium and plutonium, the completion of all nuclear and missile tests, the suspension of all uranium enrichment activities outside the Yonbyong nuclear power plant and, in general, other measures aimed at reducing North Korea's nuclear capacity. In any case, Washington, for the time being, does not seem inclined to renounce sanctions or the presence of troops in South Korea either. Precisely the lifting of certain sanctions (such as a travel ban or the supply of humanitarian products) could be the first step towards unleashing negotiations, but at the second summit no agreement was reached on this point either¹¹³.

One of the biggest problems raised is that there seems to be no agreement between the parties on what is meant by «denuclearisation». Admittedly, both have agreed that this is the goal to be achieved, but there is no consensus on its scope. For the US government, denuclearisation would consist of North Korea withdrawing its current programme and any possibility of its regeneration in the future. For its part, in Pyongyang «denuclearisation» would be the withdrawal of all Washington's nuclear capacity in the region and the withdrawal of all US forces from South Korea and the islands of Japan¹¹⁴.

In short, the situation remains stagnant. The South Korean President Moon Jae-in recently announced that the United States and North Korea had decided, at least informally, to hold a third summit. But Kim Jong-un has made this summit conditional on a lifting of sanctions or a new attitude on the part of Washington regarding the negotiations¹¹⁵. Even so, while misunderstandings and frustrations continue to accumulate, it is not inconceivable that, in the blink of an eye, the sweet words of recent times could revert to the violent rhetoric of past years. The process is thus long and complex. The mediation of other countries, like Russia¹¹⁶ or China¹¹⁷, also appear essential in guiding the situation towards a successful conclusion. In fact, Kim

112 «North Korea's Unification Drive— B. R. Myers», available at: <https://sthelepress.com/index.php/2017/12/21/north-koreas-unification-drive>.

113 SEO, J. «Here are Some Economic Incentives That Could Help Move North Korea's Kim Toward Denuclearization». *Atlantic Council*. 26.02.2019, available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>.

114 ROGERS, P. «North Korea and The United States - Who is in Charge?». *Oxford Research Group*. September, 2018, pp. 1-5.

115 LANDAU, E. B. y STEIN, S. «How to Prepare for a Third U.S.-North Korea Summit». *The National Interest*. 02.05.2019, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org>.

116 The Kremlin is one of the main stakeholders in the absence of conflict on the Korean peninsula, as the consequences could be felt on its own territory. KLEIN, M. «Russia: a possible mediator» in GUNTHER, H. and MEIER, O. *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

117 Washington, for its part, is adopting a somewhat strategic position with Beijing: at times it has pointed out that it must be part of the solution to the crisis and at other times it has described it as

Jong-un, after the failure of negotiations with Washington, has arranged meetings with these countries to show his people that if the situation does not improve, he will continue to have powerful allies¹¹⁸. And of course the influence of Japan, which is adopting a somewhat ambiguous position, cannot be ignored: on the one hand it has condemned the recent tests (despite their short range), but on the other hand, Prime Minister Abe has shown his willingness to meet with Kim Jong-un, which would also be historic after the cooling of relations between the two countries¹¹⁹. The European Union is not an agent that has any direct impact on the conflict, but it can wield its economic and political influence¹²⁰. Other analysts have also pointed out that it would be interesting to involve the International Atomic Energy Agency in the process¹²¹. We are still waiting.

North Korea with nuclear weapons accepted by the international community?

The North Korean leader's strategy, however, does not need to be perfect. Some analysts think that in his attempt to develop a nuclear weapon capable of reaching the United States, with the aim of achieving a balance of power that leads to peace, Kim Jong-un could miscalculate and cross a red line that would provoke a US pre-emptive strike¹²². In any case, what seems to be North Korea's main objective is to become a legitimate (recognised) nuclear power in order, from this relatively balanced position, to establish diplomatic relations with all countries¹²³. Some analysts even understand that Pyongyang would be adopting, in the current scenario, a position similar to the one maintained in its day by India and Pakistan. Fully aware that they were violating the non-proliferation norm they nevertheless continued with tests –conducted secretly– until they normalised their position as nuclear powers¹²⁴.

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 one more factor in the problem. (see: ALBERT, E. «The China-North Korea Relationship». *Council on Foreign Relations*. 25.06.2019, available at: <https://www.cfr.org>).

118 Although unsuccessful, according to some, see: LEE, J. «The Wooing of Kim Kim Jong-un: Love Letters and Lavish Banquets». *Australian Institute of International Affairs*. 27.06.2019, available at: <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au>.

119 In this regard, see: KING, R. «Japan and North Korea: Summitry, Missile Fears, and Abductions». *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. 19.06.2019, available at: <https://www.csis.org>.

120 GUNTHER, H. y MEIER, O. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

121 DALTON, T., LEVITE, A. y PERKOVICH, G. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org>.

122 FRIEDMAN, U. «Can Trump Make a Deal With North Korea?». *The Atlantic*. 17.08.2017, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com>.

123 «North Korea v the US: how likely is war?». *The Guardian*. 09.08.2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com>.

124 ROGERS, P. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

Is this demand excessive? The Non-Proliferation Treaties, which North Korea signed and did not comply with at the time (although it withdrew in 2003), seem to tell us that it is; however, the world map shows us that there are other countries with nuclear capabilities, some of which enjoy seats on the Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, China, France and the United Kingdom) and others named above, (India, Pakistan and Israel), have nuclear weapons that escape the criticism of the international community, which seems to have forgotten their status. Although it is also true that the case of Stanislav Petrov shows that not even the most powerful countries in the world have the necessary capacity to control nuclear dangers and only Petrov's intuition¹²⁵, when everything seemed to indicate that a nuclear attack by the United States on the USSR (a fact that evidently did not correspond to reality but was a mere computer failure, which had confused the solar rays reflected in the clouds with the engines of nuclear missiles¹²⁶), saved humanity from a possible nuclear holocaust. This is a risk factor that Waltz did not take into account in his studies, whereby a simple computer failure could have made «allegedly stabilising» nuclear weapons have precisely the opposite effect and devastate an entire region¹²⁷. One can also say, in Waltz's favour, that notwithstanding Petrov's exploits, there has never been a nuclear attack resulting from an error.

One of the arguments frequently used to deny Third World countries (such as North Korea) possession of weapons of mass destruction is that dictators are dangerous because they are more «prone» to carrying out attacks. This judgement has a strong psychological element: it presumes that Western leaders are more disciplined and democratic than the leaders of Third World countries. And, if truth be told, it is a judgment that is hardly sustainable from a historical viewpoint. France, the United Kingdom, Israel and the United States have never submitted such an important issue as the acquisition of nuclear weapons to public debate. By contrast, India and Pakistan have done so¹²⁸. With regard to the use of weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological and nuclear), there is no difference in their use between Western countries

125 Instead of informing his superiors of the events in preparation for a counter-attack, Petrov reported a system failure. This proves the enormous risk factor that still exists when it comes to nuclear weapons.

126 «Stanislav Petrov dies, the man who saved the world from a nuclear war». *El Mundo*. 19.09.2017, available at: <http://www.lavanguardia.com>.

127 In fact, this is one of the criticisms of Third World countries in possession of nuclear weapons: not having the necessary technology. In particular, India and Pakistan were accused of not having warning systems. Some authors, however, have criticised this argument. Others have pointed out that even if hostilities remain in the realm of rhetoric, there may be situations (because of mistakes) that could trigger a conflict. Such would be the case of a power outage in North Korea that is confused with a pre-emptive strike or the United States making a miscalculation in the demilitarised zone between the two Koreas. GUSTERSON, H. «A Double Standard on Nuclear Weapons». *MIT Center For International Studies*. 2006, pp. 1-6 (p. 3).

128 GUSTERSON, H. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

and countries belonging to the Third World¹²⁹; in fact, in terms of harmful effects on the civilian population, the balance continues to be in favour of the former¹³⁰.

Nor do recent events help to dispel this «double standard» in the possession of nuclear weapons. In fact, the real strategy (and the game of alliances) of many countries has been completely uncovered. The United Nations General Assembly (with the support of more than 120 countries) adopted a resolution promoting the conclusion of a treaty to prohibit the use of nuclear weapons¹³¹. However, the same NATO members who are demanding disarmament from North Korea, as well as other nuclear-weapon states, refused to support the text (a total of 38 votes against). NATO's reason for not supporting the text, which was another breakthrough in achieving a world without weapons of mass destruction, was that it contravened NATO's policy of deterrence. In other words, NATO does not seem to trust the United Nations either in the event of armed conflict. China, India and Pakistan, for their part, abstained. Another fact (equally surprising): North Korea did vote in favour (and Iran, too)¹³². In effect, all the negative votes came from NATO countries and trading partners or countries with common interests. (Japan¹³³ and South Korea on account of their ties with the United

129 The «Third World» is understood as the group of countries which, after the end of the Second World War, did not belong either to the «First World», made up of Western countries, or to the «Second World», made up of the states comprised in the USSR.

130 REBEHN, M. «The Long History of Weapons of Mass Destruction». *Open Democracy*, 07.02.2003, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net>. France and the United Kingdom used chemical weapons during the First World War. Winston Churchill stated unequivocally that he was in favour of using chemical weapons. Germany also used mustard gas during the war. Asia did not remain alien to WMD and Japan used biological weapons in the war it waged with China in the 1930s. In the Second World War, despite treaties prohibiting the use of chemical and biological weapons (nuclear weapons had not yet been launched), they continued to be used. Nazi Germany used the Zyklon-B in its gas chambers. The United States dropped its nuclear bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima (being the only country to date that has used nuclear weapons, apart from tests carried out by the owner countries). The United States, was later accused of using chemical weapons in the Vietnam War. Until the early 1980s, therefore, weapons of mass destruction were used exclusively by world powers. The Iran-Iraq war opened up a new scenario. Saddam Hussein used mustard gas and nerve agents against the Iranians (also against the Kurds on their own territory). Since then other countries, such as Syria, Southern Sudan or Yemen, have been accused of using chemical weapons. The balance, therefore, for the time being, continues to be in favour of the world powers, but there is an increase (especially with chemical weapons) in small countries.

131 A/C.I/71/L.41, 14 de octubre de 2016, available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.I/71/L.41&Lang=S. The Treaty was supported by «Third World» countries: Austria, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Kenya, Liechtenstein, Malawi, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, New Zealand, Nigeria, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Samoa, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Thailand, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Zambia.

132 «Voting on UN resolution for nuclear ban treaty». *International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*, available at: <http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/results/>.

133 All the more paradoxical if we consider that it is the only country to have suffered the terrible effects of this weaponry.

States; and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, in view of their expectations of joining the EU)¹³⁴. Almost a year later, the Treaty was put to the vote in the General Assembly, repeating the same scene, although on this occasion Pyongyang joined the countries that neither supported the regulatory text nor participated in its drafting (Iran, for its part, continued to vote in favour)¹³⁵. Among the countries that did not support the resolution was Spain, which, in a somewhat strange development, while refusing to support a treaty banning nuclear weapons, expelled the North Korean ambassador precisely on account of this issue (consequences of the alignment with NATO and the imminent visit of Mariano Rajoy to Washington). If NATO adopts an obviously realistic stance, which probably entails remaining protected from Russia and not renouncing its Waltzian balance, Kim Jong-un himself might wonder why the North Korean regime cannot have weapons to protect itself from NATO members (together with Russia) who have shown no respect for international law or the mechanisms for resolving conflicts provided for in the United Nations Charter and who, moreover, solely for self-interest, do not renounce nuclear weapons. Such attitudes certainly do not help to win North Korean confidence.

Returning to the initial question: If Kim Jong-un is a «madman», it would certainly not be appropriate, under any circumstances, to make any concessions to him. However, Professor Robert Kelly, an expert on international relations between the United States and North Korea states in this regard:

«One of the laziest tropes of pop North Korean analysis is that the Kim family is ‘crazy,’ ‘insane,’ and so on. [...] Were the Kim family suicidally mad, they have had many chances to launch a cataclysmic war. They never have. Crazy people do not rise to the top of powerful states, and if they were to somehow by quirk, they would not last long in the brutally competitive and dangerous politics of most autocracies. We may loathe Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Pol Pot and the rest, but they were not mentally ill (except perhaps at the end). This is part of why they are so frightening. Their atrocities –which required scale, planning, and complexity– would have been hard to perpetrate if they were insane. The Kim family would not have survived in the unforgiving northeast Asian neighborhood, nor against internal threats, were they not viciously rational, cutthroat survivors»¹³⁶.

134 «UN votes for global nuclear weapons ban negotiations in 2017». *Independent*. 02.11.2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk>; «La OTAN se opone a la resolución de la ONU de prohibir las armas nucleares». *El Diario*. 03.11.2016, available at: <http://www.eldiario.es>.

135 «More than 120 nations adopt treaty to ban nuclear weapons at UN meeting». *The Independent*. 07.07.2017, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk>; «The U.N. just passed a treaty outlawing nuclear weapons. That actually matters». *The Washington Post*. 17.07.2017, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

136 KELLY, R. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://asiansecurityblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/14/theres-a-lot-of-north-korean-alarmism/>. And he added: «Similarly, the Kims are not nihilists. They are dangerous norm-breakers, prone to violent outbursts, and have little concern for other people's lives. But there

The truth is that the behaviour of the North Korean leader, given the history of international relations, is not unusual. So Washington will have to choose whether it wants a completely denuclearised North Korea or whether it chooses to recognise its status as a nuclear power. That is the question that, according to some analysts, is being debated right now within the US administration. For the time being, according to Pacheco Pardo, voices calling for a complete denuclearization are gaining ground¹³⁷, which will clearly make it difficult to reach a consensus.

Conclusion

Our research presented here permits us to confirm that the actions of the North Korean and American leaders have not the slightest hint of madness and are based on theories developed earlier. One might ask, of course, whether these are the soundest of policies. The truth is that as they insist on reminding the North Korean leader that countries like Kazakhstan or South Korea itself opened up to the world and improved their alliances and their economy. Pyongyang could follow the same path and thus find a solution to the basic demands of its people. The dismissal of the «end of history» could be seen as a fear that an ultimately cosmopolitan North Korean society would not accept the regime in power. Although, on the other hand, North Korea's fears of US unilateralism cannot be described as unfounded, all the more so given that the majority, of the countries included on Washington's «black list» back in 2002 have, for one reason or another, finally been attacked. Nor is it helpful to insinuate that the United States is exaggerating propaganda (overstating the purges carried out by the regime) or that its political leaders are relying on the idea that the North Korean leader is not in his right mind. It is evident that within the US Administration they know that these behavioural patterns are not the result of impulses or instincts, but of a reasoned strategy. North Korea embraced a Waltzian neo-realism to dissuade the attacks of the United States, accompanied by certain actions that also remind us of the strategic theory of conflict –for the deployment and publicity given to nuclear weapons– and the theory of the «madman» capable of doing anything with his military material. There is no denying that if the North Korean regime was simply seeking survival, its methods have undoubtedly worked. A different matter is the price of this economic isolation and the setbacks to its international relations as a result of its nuclear proliferation (including sanctions by the Security Council), or indeed, in the

is much evidence that they value their own lives and indeed use their position at the top of North Korean society to live quite indulgently. Suicide bombing is indeed a frightening element of the war on terror, but there is little to suggest that that applies here. In fact, the Kims are quite crafty and tactical – pushing when they can, pulling back when they must, playing their neighbors against one another for gain, and so on.

This is not a suicidal, ideological, ISIS-like state bent on apocalyptic war but rather a post-ideological gangsterish dictatorship looking to survive».

¹³⁷ PACHECO PARDO, R. *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

final analysis, whether the US threat of attack was close to materialising and made up for the investment and the setbacks. But, in any case, the positions were not irrational, as demonstrated by the recent rapprochement between Washington and Pyongyang, the consequences of which –and characteristic of the entire North Korean crisis– are highly unpredictable.

For the time being, there is less chance of a nuclear war or conflict in the Asian region. The historic encounters between Moon and Kim Jong-un and between Washington and Pyongyang –and probably too between Abe and Kim Jong-un– bear witness to this. Something seems to be changing in the Asian region. But the distances between North Korea and the United States remain enormous. It does not appear that Pyongyang is going to sell denuclearisation cheap and the imposition of unilateral conditions by the US is by no means appealing to the North Korean regime. It is true that the mediation work of South Korean President Moon has been essential in turning the situation around¹³⁸. However, Seoul's decisive role in relations between Pyongyang and Washington is at times generating mistrust, as Pyongyang would prefer to hear directly from the US that it is willing to fulfil certain conditions. The withdrawal of US troops from the Asian region and the denuclearisation of Washington's satellite countries do not appear to be acceptable demands for the time being either. And all the more so at a time when Washington is not only seeking to protect itself against North Korea but also against China, which is in the midst of economic and military escalation.

Both the North Korean and US governments share a common enemy when it comes to negotiations: their own internal divisions. As alluded to earlier, the North Korean government has a group of hard liners who reject any initiative towards denuclearisation; while there are those within the US Administration –and especially in the wake of the latest tests– who wish to impose fresh sanctions against the North Korean regime¹³⁹; and others still, who from time immemorial would defend military intervention. Other voices, however, contend that with every day that passes without an agreement the capabilities of the North Korean regime will be on the increase, which would threaten the United States even more. It seems clear, therefore, that these contradictory perceptions within the governments themselves will make any kind of agreement difficult. It is undeniable, however, that progress in recent months has been substantial: from war rhetoric to building bridges towards reconciliation (such as the suspension of tests and the release of prisoners). But it is similarly true that for the moment negotiations at the highest level have not had the expected results. Except, of course, for the good chemistry generated between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump, which sentences the negotiations to language of a personal nature. It is paradoxical, therefore, that those who once delivered the most audacious messages now seem to

138 Pacheco Pardo, así, sostenía que Moon había sido el principal impulsor del proceso diplomático (véase: PACHECO PARDO, R. «Llegó la hora de Moon». *El País*. 01.03.2019, available at: <https://elpais.com>).

139 PANDA, A. y NARANG, V. *Op. cit.*, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com>.

have the best chance of resuming negotiations. In fact, after the failure of the second summit, the US Treasury Department imposed new sanctions on Pyongyang which were immediately withdrawn by the US president, who justified the withdrawal by claiming, according to his spokesman, that he liked President Kim and therefore considered that «these sanctions are not necessary»¹⁴⁰.

In short, it is difficult, for now, to see the North Korean regime giving up its nuclear weapons and the United States lifting sanctions and vacating its military bases in the region. Some analysts have pointed out that this could go through a «gradual procedure»: North Korea would stop exporting nuclear technology in exchange for lifting some sanctions. Others have pointed out that perhaps economic incentives could make the regime surrender its nuclear weapons¹⁴¹ - the opening of an economic account for the development of North Korea's economy, resources and infrastructure; or Washington guiding Pyongyang by the hand into international trade and IMF and WTO membership. For the moment, however, this is mere conjecture.

The case of North Korea thus constitutes a major test for the two classic branches of international relations. If progress continues, Kim Jong-un will remain a «patriotic» and «intelligent» man. If they fail, the media will be quick to recommend that he needs psychiatric care. For if at any time it is necessary to carry out a pre-emptive strike on the Korean peninsula¹⁴², and minimise the damning effects of public opinion (increasingly important, as shown by the cases of Vietnam, Somalia and Iraq), who would not want to put a stop to an evil madman with nuclear warheads?

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