

## UPF USA: U.S. Experts Discuss Catalyst for Conflict on the Korean Peninsula

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January 2, 2024  
From Compiled Reports



Washington, DC, USA - The monthly Washington Brief webcast, in its episode for January 2, 2023, featured retired U.S. Navy Admiral Harry Harris on the theme, "Catalyst for Conflict on the Korean Peninsula." Adm. Harris headed the U.S. Pacific Command, currently the Indo-Pacific Command, an umbrella unit that oversees the 28,500-strong U.S. Forces Korea. He later served as U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, from 2018-21.

The Washington Brief is a monthly webcast on Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia security issues, co-sponsored by the Washington Times Foundation and UPF.

The latest webcast carried the subtitle, "A belligerent North Korea aligned with Russia, China and Iran creates a volatile chemistry," and dealt with North Korea's increasingly bellicose rhetoric and insistence that the North will no longer pursue Korean reunification, as they consider South Korea to be only a vassal state of the United States.

Regular panelists included former six-party talks envoy Amb. Joseph DeTrani as moderator, along with Georgetown University security studies professor Dr. Alexandre Mansourov.

The tone of the discussion was somber based on the recent firing of Hwasong-18 ICBM missiles that can hit anywhere in the United States, and that are on mobile launchers that can travel undetected by satellite. In addition, North Korean president Kim Jong-un's recent pronouncements that he is no longer interested in peaceful reunification with the South is pushing the United States and its allies to devise new ways to address North Korea's nuclear weapons.



The days of trying to "negotiate away" [North Korea's](#) nuclear weapons program through diplomacy alone are over, Adm. Harris said, arguing that the U.S. and its Pacific allies must "up our combined game" in the face of growing threats from [Pyongyang](#).

He said it is becoming increasingly clear North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has no intention of abandoning his nuclear programs despite years of diplomatic and economic pressure. His comments come just days after [North Korea](#) fired three short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast, and Mr. Kim spoke of an "exponential" expansion of his nation's nuclear arsenal in the coming year.

The Biden administration and U.S. Pacific allies fear that Mr. Kim may soon order another nuclear weapons test, which would be the country's first since 2017. Adm. [Harris](#) said that threat must be taken seriously.

"Why is [North Korea](#) ... a challenge for the entire world? The answer is simple: Kim Jong-un's missiles point in every direction," he said. "The North's unrelenting pursuit of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, and its unmitigated aggression toward the South and to the United States should concern us all."

"I believe our heretofore U.S. policy goal of negotiating away [North Korea's](#) nuclear program has reached its useful end," Adm. [Harris](#) continued. "We must up our combined game. Deterrence by appeasement is not deterrence at all."

The use of direct diplomacy with Mr. Kim reached its peak during the Trump administration, when then-President Donald Trump held three unprecedented in-person meetings with the North Korean leader, including a historic joint visit to the Demilitarized Zone. But those talks failed to produce an agreement to end [Pyongyang](#)'s nuclear program or ease U.S.-backed sanctions on the North's economy. Mr. Kim has steadily ramped up his provocations since then, while ignoring all diplomatic overtures from the Biden administration.

Last year alone, for example, [North Korea](#) carried out more than 70 ballistic-missile launches.

"Another disappointment for me from the last year was the fact that the United States and [South Korea](#) failed to entice, or compel ... [North Korea](#) to return to the denuclearization talks," Alexandre Mansourov, professor at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies, said.

"The way it looks to me now, diplomacy is dead. I don't see any prospects for the resumption of the six-party talks, to be honest, or any other initiatives."

The six-party talks were multilateral negotiations involving the U.S., [South Korea](#), [North Korea](#), Japan, Russia and China. The initiative ended more than a decade ago.

But [Pyongyang](#)'s missile tests aren't the only cause for concern on the Korean Peninsula. North Korean drones have also crossed over the DMZ into [South Korea](#) in recent weeks, sparking fears that direct conflict between the two nations is inching closer.

Adm. [Harris](#) said the U.S. and [South Korea](#) must ramp up defensive systems to counter such uncrewed craft.

"Any drone warfare systems have to be in place in [South] Korea," he said. "We clearly need to have them there, and the rules of engagement need to be discussed and war-gamed so the commanders on the ground at the tactical level know how to respond and not have to seek permissions, which could take hours, if not days, to get. And by then it's too late."

Even as the United States and [South Korea](#) work together to counter [Pyongyang](#), confusion emerged this week over whether the nations may hold joint nuclear exercises. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol reportedly said earlier this week that such drills are under discussion.

President Biden shot down that idea Monday, offering a one-word answer when asked by reporters whether the U.S. was weighing joint nuclear exercises with Seoul. "No," Mr. Biden said.

A spokesman for Mr. Yoon said the president's words had been misinterpreted and said that instead of exercises the two allies are "discussing information-sharing, joint planning and joint execution plans regarding the operation of U.S. nuclear assets, in order to counter [North Korea](#)'s nuclear threats."

Harris also expressed concerns over South Korean Foreign Minister nominee Cho Tae-yul's recent remarks in pursuit of improved relations with China.

"He seeks to strike an equivalency between China and the United States," Harris said. "There is no equivalency. South Korea has only one ally that will have its back if North Korea invades, and China is not that country."





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