

The workshop participants returned to the concern that North Korea was an unpredictable and dangerous state. Provoking the Kim regime in any way seemed to many to be unwise and counterproductive. Some felt it was important to separate longer-term concerns about unification and shorter-term concerns about security discussions and negotiations. There clearly was some virtue to the strategy of letting the Kim regime do what it wanted short of outright attack while attempting to provide minimal economic assistance. As some observed, there might be no quid pro quo for economic aid but that might not be a relevant consideration. Performance-tied aid would likely lead nowhere, with the Kim regime either rejecting it or failing to abide by conditions. The short-term objective, according to many participants, must be to survive the Kim years and hope that the successor regime in the North will be more reasonable. To this end, providing some level of economic aid — without strings — might be the best and only real option. More aggressive options would be too likely to cause conflict, possibly even drawing a reluctant China into a broader crisis.

This laissez faire approach, however, ran the risk of undermining the NPT and of encouraging other regional states — most notably Japan — to go nuclear. One participant observed, as well, that the eventual unification of Korea would see the continued presence of a nuclear Korea in the region, but presumably under South Korean control. Thus, the nuclearization of North Korea could be a problem of long-lasting implications, even if the Kim regime collapsed and a new Korean state emerged to replace the North and South Korea of today. While this new regime might rapidly denuclearize under international observation there was no guarantee that the new government would see this as the best course to pursue.

Finally, a participant noted that a number of the states in the region, including especially China, possessed what amounted to a 19th century view of the nation state and nationalism, one that made them less susceptible to outside pressure or influence than some non-regional policy makers and analysts appreciated. When combined with an inward-looking or self-centred national character, this state-centric view could be quite limiting. This notion that the nation state was supreme and that international organizations and multilateralism were not very important suggested that European ideas about international relations might not fare too well in the region. Other participants echoed this concern and wondered just what role Western-based arms control ideas might play in regional relations. Perhaps conventional arms control would not work. It certainly was clear that analysts ought not to assume that approaches developed in the European context could be exported without great care, if at all, into new political cultures. Combined with existing concerns about the volatility and imperviousness to outside influence of the Kim regime in North Korea and the limited options available to the rest of the world, this realization was a salutary warning to avoid simple-minded optimism. Nevertheless, as the rest of the workshop indicated, there were real options with real promise to be pursued in the region, even if they were more long-term in character.