

While Trump's Tweets Fuel US-North Korea Tensions, Boston Global Forum Scholars Call for Soft Power Diplomacy, and Bank Sanctions

To avert crisis or out-and-out war with North Korea, and leader Kim Jong Un, Boston Global Forum scholars and diplomats gathered at Harvard University to air alternative strategies to include bank sanctions and soft power diplomacy. The Boston Global forum was founded in 2012 by former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis and Nguyen Ahn Tuan, who is best known for bringing a free and open Internet to Vietnam. The think tank's mission is to advance peaceful solutions to some of the world's most volatile conflicts between nations.

October 1, 2017 (FPRC) -- Scholars and international relations authorities gathered recently at Harvard University recently to urge a diplomatic solution to the US-North Korean conflict and an end to the maelstrom of threats and personal insults.

The symposium, organized by the Boston Global Forum (BGF) and the Michael Dukakis Institute for Leadership and Innovation as part of its annual World Reconciliation Day events here and in Japan, was moderated by former Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, who cofounded the Boston Global Forum think tank in 2012.

Among the international relations authorities were Prof. Joseph Nye, Asst. Secretary of Defense during the Clinton Administration, who called for employing soft power diplomacy to reduce tensions with North Korea, and Professor Sung-Yoon Lee of the Fletcher School of Diplomacy, Tufts University, who offered his analysis of North Korea.

Gov. Michael Dukakis told the delegates, when rhetoric overshadows reason, 'a single misstep can turn political brinksmanship into a global conflagration. Nowhere is there a greater risk today than with North Korea.'

Nye told 20 delegates and journalists, 'Reconciliation with friends means one thing, but in the case of North Korea, there is similar second level of reconciliation possible that means reduction of enmity, which is extraordinarily difficult when the President talks about turning North Korea into a sea of fire and fire and fury.'

He added, 'We must be careful not to mistake reality for rhetoric. The North Koreans are not suicidal. North Korea is extremely rational — and has chosen a set of means to get to an objective of preserving the current regime.' He emphasized that while there is a low probability of nuclear war one must then ask. 'is there a probability of conventional war?'

While political hawks may be tempted, a decapitating strike against North Korea that seizes the nuclear weapons or kills Kim Jong Un does not seem realistic observed Nye.

Is reconciliation possible?

Cultural commonality and exchanges can contribute to enemies becoming friends, or at minimum a

reduction of enmity. North and South Koreans, for example, compete on the same soccer teams, and Kim Jong Un is enamored of American movies and presumably American popular culture.

Is it like the Cuban missile crisis?

'When The US and Soviet Union came close to war during Cuban missile crisis – the positive outcome was to demonstrate that the path we were on could potentially lead to disaster.' John F. Kennedy responded by delivering a speech in which he said we cannot continue on the path of extreme hostility with the Soviet Union and this resulted in the eventual signing of a treaty to reduce underground testing of nuclear weapons, followed by nuclear nonproliferation pacts with the Soviets such as the SALT and START talks.'

Tufts University Prof. Sung-Yoon Lee of the Fletcher School of Diplomacy and an authority on the Korean Peninsula stated that he is not so sure Kim Jong Un will be satisfied with the status quo. 'North Korea is a revisionist state whose greatest threat is the fact that across the border we have a legitimate, pleasant alternate Korea that serves as a magnet for 30,000 North Koreans who have escaped to the South. This enormous wealth disparity between two countries sharing a border is the challenge North Korea cannot overcome.'

Said Lee, 'We have spoiled and conditioned North Korea to feel it can get away with murder. We have not put pressure on the regime sufficient to reduce its aggression.' The regime even managed to hold the US hostage by effectively censoring a satirical movie about the assassination of its leader.

Post 9/11, the US Treasury found alternate ways to choke off the money supply to Iran by targeting the banks it dealt with in a bid to get their leaders to the bargaining table. The strategy worked and Lee suggested employing the same treatment with banks doing business with North Korea. Simply put, the US gives the bank a choice, continue doing business with North Korea or face the prospect of not being able to business in US dollars. The banks invariably agree to cooperate and those that cheat, face crushing fines.

Both the banks and North Korea favor the US dollar over other currencies giving the US tremendous leverage on this score and we have seen some progress on the financial front. Lee also believes China is likely to support these measures. 'Awareness that this will work is no guarantor of sustained financial pressure. There is always the risk that Trump will accept political expedience over sanctions that will take at least three years to be effective.'

Established in 2012, The Boston Global Forum brings together, in an open and accessible public forum, an eclectic and engaging spectrum of highly regarded academic leaders, real-world experts, thought leaders, media experts and promising young leaders.

BGF's mission is to identify emerging threats to peace and stability around the globe, suggest realistic solutions, and identify possible actions that can be taken to avert armed conflict. The Forum's ultimate goal is to lessen tensions, promote peace and security, and foster conditions that lead to greater social justice and broader economic prosperity.

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