

Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

Babafemi A. Badejo, Ph.D.

We tend to easily sensationalize and fail to examine history very closely. I don't know if I am alone but we are, in my view, far from the euphoric commentaries on developments on the Korean Peninsula. Rounds of high-level meetings are not holding for the first time in or on the Korean Peninsula. They are taking place after the ones of 1994 and 2000.

In 2000, roughly six years after he had taken over the full reins of power from his father Kim Il Sung who died in July 1994, Kim Jong Il, the father and predecessor of Kim Jong Un in office, actually realised a Framework Agreement with the US under Clinton in October 21, 1994. Under this agreement, the US was to build two light water reactors for North Korea; supply it with heavy fuels before the reactors are built; normalise political relations by realising a peace treaty instead of the armistice agreement that followed the US coalition of the willing (using terminology of today) that fought North Korea in the early 50s; remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism etc., in exchange for North Korea abandoning its quest for nuclear weapons. But the US largely did not meet its part of that deal.

However, there was Kim Dae-jung who had assumed power in South Korea as President in February 1998 and like current South Korean President Moon Jae-in, pursued a reconciliatory policy towards North Korea and indeed was rewarded with the 2000 Nobel Prize for Peace. He visited North Korea from June 13-15, 2000 and met Kim Jong Il with both agreeing on the need to reunify the Korean Peninsula that had been split by the America led Korean war. The resulting armistice from that war still sees about thirty thousands US troops battle ready at the border point where the new declaration between North and South Korea took place last Friday, April 26, 2018.

Definitely, it is in the interest of the United States to reverse what the visit of Madam Madeleine Albright as the first woman Secretary of State failed to achieve after she met Kim Jong Il in October 23, 2000: dismantle North Korea's ICBM and denuclearize the Peninsula.

Today, in spite of Pompeo's secret visit and Moon Jae-in welcome fanfare, is the US/West about to realise a dismantling of the North Korean ICBM and denuclearize the Korean Peninsular? Maybe not so fast. Kim Jong Un has achieved more than what his father was on to when he signed the Geneva Framework Agreement with the Clinton administration. With an ICBM and even limited numbers of nuclear warheads, he is now a credible power that, rhetoric apart, must have respect from the Americans - Trump or not. Why on earth would he dismantle his nuclear strength accompanied by ICBM when he saw the end of Gaddafi who relatively had very little?

It is highly likely that Trump as a realist will follow Xi, Putin and others in accepting that a new kid has joined the restricted game. We saw all the hullabaloo that followed the entry of India and Pakistan into the elite club.

Importantly though, this may augur well for peace since demonization of North Korea will reduce as the West realistically looks the other way and allow the two Koreas to decide on if they want to be re-unified.