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Back to North Korea. Other things being equal, it might be expected that an exhausted poor nation, even one under a proto-religious, familial and cultist dictatorship, would slow down its relentless search for status and national security once its nuclear capability had risen to the level of an effective threat. That seems to have become a working understanding within the existing nuclear club, at least until recently.

This could even be extended to the thought that effective deterrence reduces threats from the US or China or more certainly South Korea, and it allows a more relaxed political strategy and even — for the first time in a long, long while — some economic growth and a greater focus on social welfare.

Does the present thaw represent any measure of this? Almost certainly not. Rich nations such as the US or Britain have been prepared to increase nuclear capabilities in the face of slowing economic growth and growing social inequality. And, despite the tiredness of their institutions and the tiresomeness of their leaderships, they are indisputably democracies.

However, the real reason that we might not expect a result for North Korea that is even loosely in conformity with history since 1945 is that the global context of its new nuclear capability has changed so radically in the past few years.

For at least the last decade or so, developments of information technologies that have spread information flows not only geographically, but geopolitically — excluding almost no one from learning of very recent statements, events or intentions; destroying thoughtful diplomacy everywhere — have removed the room to move and to adjust to nuclear newcomers. Secondly, over the past year or so this feature has combined with the even more rapid deterioration of global governance (institutions) and political leadership (a handful of hot-spot political groups headed by relative outsiders to diplomacy).

James Clapper, a former US director of national intelligence and a normally cautious public servant, recently described US President Donald Trump's behavior and actions in diplomatic matters as "downright scary and disturbing." This immediately introduces as a major component of any thoughts on North Korea what is now best seen as a first phase of global post-diplomacy.

At the beginning of the nuclear arms race, the leaders — the US, the USSR, the UK and France — were also the leading conventional weapons powers, and had long been the largest economies of the world, the exception being the non-nuclear and treaty-bound Japanese. They had much to lose from a nuclear war, and the task of diplomacy was to safeguard global checks and balances.

Today, nations are driving themselves into abject poverty to gain nuclear status. The underdevelopment of conventional weaponry among lesser economies is indeed a major cause of the rise of global terrorism — on the one hand, there is nuclear capability; on the other, sporadic terrorist attacks, with far less of conventional warfare in between.

During that long period of Cold War, itself dependent upon and an outcome of nuclear arms races, the enemy was relatively well defined and was located spatially; now it is ill-defined and free of space in that terrorists might appear on the bus or in the cinema and might be acting under an ideology far removed from their place of birth. Previous outbreaks of war meant international declarations in advance and actual deaths in the field were the principal measures of success, rather than today's degrees of civilian terror.

In the new circumstances, diplomacy and the reaching of long-term understandings are much more difficult to attain within a widening group of nuclear-capable nations, and the addition of the fractious and recalcitrant North Korea merely brings this all out into the open more clearly. When we add to this the excitability of Trump and the lethargy of Europe and the UN, we cannot forecast the balance of events for even the next few months.

From last year we live in a unique conjuncture — exemplified, but not defined in both the coming of age of North Korean military status and the coming of Trump. We are fast moving toward post-diplomacy in which relations within the old comity of nations are being replaced by emergencies caused by strategically placed leaders. This leads to a situation where now a premature stupid action might become a last action before nuclear war, in contrast to an old world wherein even stupid actions by thoughtless leaders could be resolved within a quieter world of the diplomats, and where their failures resulted in more limited conventional warfare.

At the present thaw we can all doubt the depth of North Korea's sincerity and the extent of South Korea's sagacity. However, where in earlier cases of nuclear transition there has been some modicum of interpower understandings, where potential rogue elements could be challenged and inhibited by treaty or by commercial blackmail, or even by non-nuclear force, today's North Korean nuclear capability has emerged in an era wherein governance is unstable and where rogues are everywhere.

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