

## Tasks ahead beyond the North Korea-U.S. Summit

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THE US AND NORTH KOREA HAVE CONCLUDED A FIRST, HISTORIC summit after remaining enemies for 70 years since the Korean War divided the Peninsula. The June 12<sup>th</sup> North Korea-US Summit in Singapore, which was held following a series of events including the special South Korean envoy's visit to North Korea in early March after North Korea participated in the PyeongChang Olympics, and the exchanges of special envoys between North Korea and the US, concluded with a short and abstract joint statement. The essence of the statement is that both parties need to make efforts to build a new permanent and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and that North Korea must work to completely denuclearize the Korean Peninsula by reconfirming the Panmunjom Declaration. Optimists may argue that the North Korean nuclear issue will be fully resolved and a peace regime will be established on the Peninsula. On the other hand, pessimists feel that the agreement lacks specific roadmaps and a timeline to denuclearize and remains at the basic step of merely emphasizing the importance of the principle of establishing a peace regime. This discord between the two views produces conflicting interpretations of the meaning of the summit as well as the future prospects for North Korea's complete denuclearization. What is absolutely necessary at this point, however, is to move beyond the simple dichotomy of optimistic or pessimistic views and to critically analyze and explore the chances of solving the problem beginning with the North Korea-US summit.

### The Hidden Dilemmas Underlying "Complete" Denuclearization

The key point of the summit was whether or not North Korea would agree to the U.S. demand for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear weapons and related capabilities. Prior to the summit, serious negotiations augmented the prospect of resolution. These negotiations spanned discussions between Chairman Kim Jong Un and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, meetings between Secretary Pompeo and Vice Chairman Kim Yong Chol, and at the final stage, several arrangements between Ambassador Sung Kim and Vice Minister Choe Son-hui of the North Korean Foreign Ministry. At a press conference on the eve of the summit, Secretary Pompeo said that verification is the key focus of the summit, putting pressure on North

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Korea indirectly. Secretary Pompeo is reported to have negotiated with Vice Chairman Kim Yong Chol just before the summit started to have North Korea consent to CVID as a condition. However, he failed to obtain North Korea's consent, and President Trump reportedly decided to proceed with the summit anyway. Ultimately, President Trump was the essential decision maker for the process, and had to work hard to persuade the public of the summit's success.

Basically, the two leaders reaffirmed the April 27<sup>th</sup> Panmunjom Declaration to denuclearize the Peninsula using the expression 'the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.' The US was not able to reach a consensus with North Korea to use the term CVID, nor could they establish a specific roadmap for completing North Korea's denuclearization. The US did not have a chance to declare the termination of the Korean War and offer measures to guarantee the security of North Korea's regime in a concrete fashion. The summit did not result in any tangible progress on denuclearization as the joint statement used the same language as the Panmunjom Declaration rather than offering a new agreement on denuclearization.

Just after the summit, Secretary Pompeo visited South Korea, stating that the US stance on denuclearization had not changed, and that the US commitment to the US-ROK alliance remained equally firm. He also explained that the expression "complete" denuclearization includes the requirements of verification and irreversible measures, with the clarification that combined military exercises will be stopped only while productive negotiations based on trust are taking place. Even though CVID is not explicitly included in the joint statement, both sides are supposed to understand that it will be the basis for future negotiations. He also emphasized that North Korea understands that sanctions will be lifted only after complete denuclearization has been achieved. Therefore, according to the Secretary, it is understood that there has been no change in the conception of what denuclearization entails: verification and

irreversible measures for the removal of all nuclear weapons, nuclear materials, and nuclear facilities.

North Korea's genuine strategic intentions and its approach to the negotiation with the U.S. are critical at this point. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, during the Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, North Korea declared that "the historic tasks under the strategic line of simultaneously developing the two fronts set forth at the March 2013 Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Party have been successfully carried out." North Korea also announced a "new strategic line on channeling all efforts into the economy." It is critical to note that the new strategic line is neither the past *Byungjin* strategy of pursuing economic development with nuclear development, nor the most desirable strategy that puts the economy first and includes the total dismantlement of nuclear weapons. North Korea will reduce its nuclear arsenal to achieve a minimum level of deterrence and, at the same time, devote major resources to the pursuit of economic development. It is also important to note that North Korea is not ready to accept the verification process that the US is pushing for. If North Korea accepts CVID as proposed by the US, then it has to give up all the nuclear weapons that it has produced thus far to guarantee a minimum level of nuclear deterrence forces. North Korea will adopt the nuclear-free economy-only strategy when it is confident that the so-called U.S. hostile policy toward North Korea has completely disappeared, meaning that North Korea must be convinced that the US-North Korea relations are as strong as US-South Korea relations. Despite the initial agreement between the U.S. and North Korea, North Korea will stick to its own version of denuclearization that is both reciprocal and staged, responding to the US to establish a peace regime, normalize relations and lift economic sanctions. North Korea confirmed the aforementioned recognition through its official comment on the summit: "We had a mutual understanding that it is important for both parties to simultaneously follow



the principle of concerted action in the process of achieving the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and the denuclearization of the Peninsula.”

As Secretary Pompeo has said, even if North Korea itself understands the inevitability of inspections and verification measures, the regime will maintain extreme caution in accepting the outside inspections and verification desired by the US. North Korea will push for a certain form of self-verification in the first step towards denuclearization. Self-verification will be a bid to evade the US demand of having outside inspectors and permitting intrusive inspection measures. Rather than accepting an international inspection team composed of the US or third country-led specialists, North Korea will prefer to advance denuclearization after completing their own voluntary reporting and inspections. No matter how much the US pressures North Korea with economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, North Korea will want to keep the military option of using its nuclear weapons as giving up the last resort of minimum nuclear deterrence and agreeing to complete denuclearization is a life or death decision.

While it is highly likely that North Korea will unilaterally rapidly implement the first step of confidence-building measures towards arms reduction, the second step of the denuclearization process touching on the minimum nuclear deterrence capability will proceed very slowly and cautiously. Moreover, if North Korea is going to complete the final third step of complete, irreversible, and verifiable denuclearization confirmed by outside inspectors to the satisfaction of the international community, Kim Jong Un will require another new strategic determination by North Korea in addition to the one made on April 20<sup>th</sup>. As the new strategic line adopted by North Korea on April 20<sup>th</sup> was a conditional decision to pursue step-by-step, mutual nuclear arms reduction made in response to the international community, particularly the US, North Korea will have to confront once again the choice to pursue a new

version of the *Byungjin* line of economic development based on reform and opening, with genuine, complete denuclearization.

### **The Difficulty of a Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Guarantee for North Korea**

It still remains questionable whether the US will be able to offer concrete measures that conform to North Korea’s demand for a complete guarantee for its regime. North Korea’s *Rodong Sinmun* has briefly reported that at the summit there were in-depth, comprehensive discussions regarding the establishment of a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. According to the *Rodong Sinmun*, Chairman Kim Jong Un stated that the deep-seated mistrust and animosity between the two sides has resulted in numerous issues over the years, and put forth that in order to achieve real peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, the two sides must promise mutual understanding and not regard one another as the enemy. He also called for the implementation of legal and institutional measures in order to ensure security. Furthermore, he said that establishing a permanent peace regime on the Peninsula would be a very meaningful security guarantee, and that the two sides must cease taking hostile and provocative military actions towards one another.

For a long time, the idea of declaring the end of the Korean War or negotiating a peace agreement to guarantee the security of the North Korean regime followed by the withdrawal of US troops was proposed by North Korea as part of a unification strategy, and accepted as such by international society. Obviously it is critical that these two countries which have long had hostile relations with one another establish mutual efforts to resolve this mistrust. Regarding this, North Korea has stated “If the US implements confidence-building measures in an effort to improve DPRK-US relations, we are of the opinion that we will also be able to respond and implement corresponding good-



faith measures so that we can continue to move forward to the next stage.”

President Trump reportedly had a good-faith discussion with the DPRK, offering to suspend the joint US-ROK military exercises that North Korea regards as provocative. He also suggested that he provide a guarantee for the regime’s security, and expressed a willingness to lift economic sanctions depending on how much cooperation improves between the two countries.

At the press conference, President Trump stated that Chairman Kim Jong Un pledged to pursue total denuclearization and promised a moratorium on the development of nuclear weapons and ICBMs in the future, reminding the audience of the fact that he had already destroyed the *Punggye-ri* nuclear and missile engine test site. At the same time, President Trump referred to the joint ROK-US joint military exercises as “war games” and brought up the problem of deploying fighter aircraft from Guam, as well as his dissatisfaction over how costs are shared. He also stated that South Korea-US joint military drills will be suspended for the time being as he believes that it is inappropriate to engage in such “war games” while comprehensive and complete negotiations are ongoing. While he made references to hopes that the US and DPRK could establish diplomatic ties as soon as possible and the likelihood of providing a security guarantee through future peace negotiations, a controversy arose regarding the United States Forces Korea (USFK). While in principle President Trump’s ultimate goal is the withdrawal of USFK from the Peninsula, he added that at the current stage of the process it is not being discussed in negotiations with North Korea. However, he said that at some point in the future he hopes that it will be. As he has consistently raised the issue of cost sharing, it is hard to know whether or not he addressed the issue of USFK during the summit. The US has maintained its position through other channels that a USFK withdrawal is not the current target of discussions on

security guarantees.

President Trump places a particular emphasis on the cost of engaging in joint US-ROK military exercises and stationing US troops on the Peninsula. However, a short-term calculation made from an expense-driven perspective within Korean Peninsula may bring about a significant loss to the US geopolitical interest in the Asia-Pacific region from a long-term and comprehensive perspective. If 21<sup>st</sup> century America wants to build a new architecture in the region without retreating from its isolationist philosophy, this new regional architecture will be inevitably be centered on military power. No matter how quickly revolutionary military technology changes the landscape it is clear that having a network of military bases overseas will be the most cost-effective option. Moreover, in contrast with the Obama administration’s stance that the Chinese were potential partners, the Trump administration views China as a strategic competitor. In this situation a unilateral reduction of US forces stationed in Asia will automatically increase the influence of a rapidly rising China within the Asia-Pacific region.

### The Tasks Ahead

First, the DPRK will quickly engage in the first step of confidence building by declaring a moratorium on the future development of nuclear weapons and ICBM-related capacity. Then the problems arise. The second step requires complete denuclearization including the dismantlement of existing nuclear weapons for minimum deterrence, but North Korea will be extremely cautious and move slowly. The last step should be to make a strategic decision to embrace complete denuclearization and economic opening to satisfy all members of the international community.

South Korea and the surrounding countries must push for a co-evolutionary policy towards North Korea at each stage of the process to accompany North Korea’s self-help efforts. In the first step, there must be concrete and systematic support for North Korea’s



security and prosperity and a blueprint for North Korea to stand on its own two feet. There must also be continued pressure so that if trust-building measures prove insufficient and the situation begins to look dim, North Korea does not backslide as it has in the past. South Korea and the US, as well as other neighboring countries such as China and Japan must participate to the fullest extent possible until denuclearization is achieved, forming a strong cooperative partnership to apply pressure until this occurs. President Trump implied during his press conference following the summit that once North Korea was engaging in the process of CVID (step two) sanctions relief might be possible, while Secretary Pompeo more cautiously stated that sanctions relief would only come once total denuclearization had been achieved. Therefore, more predictable and coordinated responses are required.

Second, if North Korea's demand for a complete regime security guarantee is to be satisfied, it is imperative that a long period of confidence building between the US and DPRK come first. A peace regime requires a complex of political, legal, institutional, and military confidence-building measures. The US-DPRK summit was the first step towards political confidence building using dialogue and cooperation to resolve issues instead of military measures. Ultimately, this type of effort can lead to the creation of US-DPRK diplomatic ties. The focus of institutional and legal confidence building is the declaration of the end of the Korean War and the conclusion of a peace treaty. As there exists a historical precedent of North Korea pushing these measures as a unification strategy to realize the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean Peninsula, mutual efforts to reduce mistrust are critical. North Korea also needs various types of support to secure its international position. However, as military strength continues to be an important policy tool, it is always possible that such promises may turn out to be no more than "a pile of paper" in the realm of international politics. Thus, military confidence building is also an extremely critical part of this

process. As North Korea denuclearizes, the US needs to fulfill its pledge to eliminate its nuclear threat while North and South Korea engage in simultaneous arms reduction and other military confidence-building measures in order to drive the process forward. The first steps in this type of confidence building should include transparency in military information, advance notification regarding US-ROK joint military exercises and the opportunity to observe them, followed by verifiably reducing offensive weapons systems and measures to reduce the total number of arms. As the USFK copes not just with North Korea's nuclear weapons but also with conventional threats, the US and the ROK should cooperate closely to discuss the future role and scale of USFK through multiple levels of military talks with North Korea. Finally, in order to offer a comprehensive security guarantee, there should be a global cooperation plan to offer economic support and support North Korea's self-help efforts.

Third, in order for North Korea to completely denuclearize, there must be a new effort to push for a North Korean-style opening and reform policy to overcome the limitations of the new strategy line declared on April 20<sup>th</sup>. In order to further develop North Korea's reform and opening measures, which are more desirable and realistic than the present strategic line, the surrounding countries must also cooperate to create a co-evolutionary North Korea policy that goes hand in hand with North Korea's efforts to affect changes from within.

Fourth, the issue of North Korea's denuclearization and security guarantee is not limited to creating a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula; it involves creating a peace regime throughout the whole Asia-Pacific region. North Korea's nuclearization poses an insurmountable threat to the Asia-Pacific region as it has the potential to escalate an arms race. The instability of the North Korean regime has a significant influence on both the US and China, whose aim is to form an Asia-Pacific architecture favorable to their own interests. Thus, if we are to successfully achieve



the total denuclearization of North Korea, we must make a joint effort to build not only a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, but also a peace regime in the Asia-Pacific. North Korea's complete denuclearization will require international sanctions and international economic support. Furthermore, a complete security guarantee for North Korea should be done at combined levels including the bilateral level with the US, China, and South Korea; the multilateral level with the members of the Six-Party Talks; and the global level with the United Nations. ■

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