

『North Korean Nuclear Issue and Regional Security Challenges in the aftermath of Trump-Kim Summit』

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1. The Outcome of Singapore Summit

- President Trump's sum-up in his tweet
 - "Just landed - a long trip, but everybody can now feel much safer than the day I took office. There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea. Meeting with Kim Jong Un was an interesting and very positive experience. North Korea has great potential for the future!"

- Some headlines and titles in US media
 - "Trump and Kim have just walked us back from the brink of war" (NYT) "Trump says four-hour summit was fantastic" (WSJ) "Senator Risch: Singapore summit was incredible accomplishment" (Fox News) "Scaramucci: Media being 'dishonest' about Singapore summit" (Fox News) "Gorka: Singapore summit went beyond all expectations" (Fox News) "Trump praises Kim Jong Un as 'strong,' 'funny,' 'smart,' and a 'great negotiator' in Hannity interview (Fox News)
 - "Trump was outfoxed in Singapore." (NYT) "A summit without substance" (WP) "Kim Jong Un pulls off a magic trick" (WP) "No more concessions" (WP) "The unexpected winner from the Trump-Kim summit: China" (WSJ)

- At first, many who have followed the North Korean nuclear issue were surprised since the outcome, especially the nuclear part of the Joint Statement, was, to put it mildly, underwhelming.

- KJU's commitment to "work towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" was not much more definitive than his commitment as contained in the April 27 inter-Korean Panmunjom declaration. In Panmunjom declaration, "South and North Korea confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula."

- Many had hoped prior to the summit that:
 - CVID as the goal of negotiations would be stated in the Joint Statement;
 - If spelling out CVID proves unattainable, KJU's unequivocal promise to give up nuclear weapons would be stated in mutually agreeable but clear wording,

considering that in 2005 Six Party Talks Joint Statement, North Korea “committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs”;

- Key concepts of a denuclearization roadmap such as timeline and verification would be discussed and duly stated in the Joint Statement. It would make follow-on negotiations much easier.

- But it was not to be to the disappointment of many. While media hoopla was even greater than anticipated, the summit has not given us much clarity on KJU’s intentions and whether the nuclear threat would be finally resolved through negotiations and, if so, how. In a nutshell, bulk of the work was relegated to follow-on negotiations.

- Instead, the summit gave us a number of surprises many have not foreseen.

- US (decided to / agreed to) suspend ROK-US joint military exercises while good faith negotiations are under way.

“We will be stopping the war games which will save us a tremendous amount of money, unless and until we see the future negotiation is not going along like it should. ... plus I think it’s very provocative.”

- President Trump states his preference to withdraw US forces in Korea.

“I want to bring our soldiers back home. ... but that’s not part of the equation right now. At some point I hope it will be but not right now.”

- President Trump said he had mentioned NK human rights situation but gave the impression he did not stress it very strongly.

“... it’s rough in a lot of places by the way. Not just there.”

- President Trump said other countries would pay.

“(regarding the cost of denuclearization) I think that South Korea and ... Japan will help. ... We won’t have to help.”

- NK’s concessions prior to the summit – return of three American hostages, suspending nuclear and long-range missile tests and destroying Punggye-ri nuclear test site – and those during the summit – a promise to destroy missile engine test sites and agreement to return remains of POW/MIA – are positive and so noted. But they are either easily reversible or not relevant to the central issues.

- In addition, the Singapore summit certainly elevated KJU’s stature both internationally and among NK people, helped NK get out of isolation and gave KJU ample space for manoeuvre (e.g. three visits to China, China FM and Russia FM’s visit to NK), and made the strict sanctions implication more challenging.

- China gained much as its proposal of dual suspension came to fruition, pulled NK back into its orbit, and saw that joint exercises and USFK became issues between allies.

- Russia welcomed the US-NK dialogue and became active in diplomatic interaction

involving NK and ROK.

- Korea's diplomatic profile was raised as it played a role in setting up the Singapore summit but the prospect for denuclearization remains uncertain and uncoordinated announcement of the suspension of exercises exposed the need for stronger alliance management. Those who had been acutely concerned about a possible military clash gave much higher marks to the summit's outcome.
- Japan was successful in having President Trump bring up the abduction issue with KJU – crucial test for Japan. But it should have concerns similar to those of Korea.

2. The Prospect of North Korean Nuclear Negotiations

- After the initial surprise, assessments have become more neutral. Yes, the summit was not very substantive, but who believed that one summit would solve everything in the first place. If the Trump administration keeps insisting on NK's accepting something close to CVID or its newer version FFID (final, fully verified denuclearization) and if the US can become more focused and better prepared, we may have credible leadership-involved follow-on negotiations. Therefore, jury is out until follow-on negotiations come to a conclusion.
- Recent reports, though, are not very encouraging. US media reported that "in recent months, North Korea had stepped up production of enriched uranium for nuclear weapons," "North Korea has more than one secret nuclear site in addition to its known nuclear fuel production facility at Yongbyon," "There is absolutely unequivocal evidence that they are trying to deceive the U.S.," "U.S. intelligence officials ... have concluded that North Korea does not intend to fully surrender its nuclear stockpile, and instead is considering ways to conceal the number of weapons it has and secret production facilities."
 - In addition, there were reports that might suggest insufficient coordination within the US administration, For instance, on July 1, National Security Advisor Bolton reportedly said that the bulk of North Korea's weapons programs could be dismantled within a year. However, the following day, State Department spokesperson denied that the US would present any timeline to NK.
- After 23 days after the Singapore summit, Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo finally travelled to Pyongyang July 6-7, his third trip to NK this year.
 - Secretary Pompeo said he had "made progress in every element of our discussion." And the State Department announced the establishment of a working group consisting of Amb. Sung Kim and other EAP and nonproliferation officials.
 - However, Secretary Pompeo did not meet KJU this time and NK Foreign Ministry issued a strongly worded statement accusing the US of making "gangster-like" demands over "CVID, decalration and verification."

- Details of discussion are not fully known. But this episode shows that NK has not changed and still goes by its old playbook – 1) pursuing not fast but drawn-out negotiations, 2) pursuing salami tactics, that is, offering small action in return for compensation 3) issuing a tough statement following a meeting to throw the other side off from the comfort zone and to show that NK is not afraid to walk away.
- As NK nuclear negotiations have been attempted on multiple occasions, parameters of successful negotiations are relatively well established.
 - Scope must be complete. It must cover both Pu and HEU tracks of programs, secret enrichment site (or sites), weapons and weaponized fissile materials and facilities. The critical initial step is NK's submission of a complete and accurate declaration (reporting). In addition to nuclear weapons, there are demands to include in the scope for negotiations entire range of missiles as well as chemical and biological weapons.
 - Robust verification regime must be established. Importance of having the ability to ascertain the completeness and accuracy of NK's declaration cannot be overstated. Unfettered access and challenge inspection are essential. From technical perspectives, verification is the toughest hurdle to overcome. Hence, verification has always been deal-breakers in past negotiations.
 - Irreversible is not technical terms and can entail truly daunting tasks. To achieve genuine irreversibility, we must tackle not only physical aspects of the program but also address the weapons scientists, research infrastructure and academic systems. What was closest to this was tried in the 1990s within the framework of Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. And then again, it might not be enough. Apparently, Secretary Pompeo decided the use the term FFVD instead of CVID. Whether dropping "irreversible" means more than a rhetorical brush-up remains to be seen.
- KJU reportedly assured Trump in Singapore that his policy was different from past NK policies. Everyone hopes that KJU indeed had made a fundamental strategic decision to forgo nuclear weapons.
 - However, until proven otherwise, we must assume the worst and prepare for it. North Korea has yet to give us clarity on the final destination of the negotiations (what does 'denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula' mean?), how and how fast we get there (roadmap and timeline) and how we ensure no cheating (verification). The Singapore summit outcome needs major fleshing out and Pompeo visit is all the more important.
- Some of the factors that can contribute to the successful negotiations include:
 - Accelerated negotiations are important, an early breakthrough essential. Even after a breakthrough, challenging phase of implementation awaits us. Maintaining the

momentum through US political schedules including November mid-term elections and 2020 presidential elections will be difficult. All bets will be off in 2020.

Furthermore, NK is known for its salami tactics.

- Accelerated negotiations are important for another reason. We must remember that while negotiations are under way, NK's threat remains unabated along with its claim that NK is already a nuclear power.
- Timeline, deadline or red line are usually bad ideas as they put greater pressure on those imposing them rather than those supposedly on the receiving end. But, given the above, the US may want to set at least an internal timeline.
- Indeed, if the effectiveness of the sanctions diminish, so does the US' bargaining power. The Trump administration did the right thing by emphasizing that sanctions remain in place and all countries must continue to implement the sanctions rigorously.
- CVID or FFVD must be adhered to as an objective. Outcomes below this standard can have significant implications on alliance relationship, on regional security landscape, and on global nonproliferation regime.
- Agreement must be in written form. In the past, unwritten agreement or understanding with NK did not mean much.
- In-house organizing is important. The US needs a professional team who can offer capable advices to Secretary Pompeo and other principals within the entire duration of the negotiations. The US also needs to maintain internal unison so that American negotiators can focus only on those across the negotiating table. Easier said than done in any government, of course.

- We do not know how the nuclear negotiations will fare this time. Therefore, while Korea and Japan endeavor to support and coordinate with the US while it is negotiating, it will be prudent for them to continue their efforts with the US to deter and defend them against NK threat.

3. Singapore Summit and Regional Security Challenges

- Especially for US allies, the Singapore summit presented new important challenges beyond the NK nuclear threat. It laid bare President Trump's unorthodox notion of the alliance and international relations in general which is deeply transactional and money-centric.
- Suspension of joint exercises probably is an excessive and premature concession at this stage. But, as suspension is conditional on NK's conducting good faith negotiations, possible reinstatement of the exercises can be constantly used to increase the US bargaining power.
 - President Trump's statement about the suspension - a tremendous waste of money

- and being provocative - however, made it less credible as a tool for bargaining.
- More problematic is broader strategic implications. Everyone now knows President Trump's thinking and it can be exposed to malicious strategic manipulation. In addition, to blindside allies on such important decisions has serious implications.
 - As a practical question, if the ROK-US joint exercises remain suspended, how does USFK maintain adequate preparedness. If US continues to insist that unprepared troops cannot be deployed, how the stationing of under-trained USFK is justified.
 - This is not a present issue, but if cost is central concern, will the FON operations in the South China Sea and other exercises be affected?

- Trump's stated preference for the withdrawal of USFK presents potentially daunting challenges. Not only NK will be tempted to place this issue on the negotiating table especially if peace negotiations begin in earnest, but also others will look for opportunities to take advantage. In addition, when possible USFK withdrawal, probably the weightiest of all alliance issues, can be mentioned publicly and almost casually, can we be sure if other important issues, say, extended deterrence and nuclear umbrella are safe. And, this has implications beyond this region. No wonder this year's NATO summit, held days before Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki, draws greater interest.

- If negotiations proceed smoothly, we can face peace negotiations. If indeed a peace treaty replacing the armistice agreement is to be concluded, a number of serious security issues will have to be dealt with.
 - Normalization of US-NK relations. It will probably happen if peace treaty is signed. It is a huge issue in itself. But it will be one of the more straightforward issues to be dealt with.
 - USFK. A peace treaty certainly does not necessarily mean USFK withdrawal. But this will be raised. And given what transpired in Singapore, NK may be tempted to demand the withdrawal more strongly. NK may even be tempted to take issue with the alliance treaty itself. What if NK demands the abrogation of US-ROK alliance treaty arguing it will do the same with NK-China friendship treaty? ROK-US position during 1990s four party talks was that these were non-starters. We should not give any more encouragement to NK to think otherwise.
 - UNC. Peace negotiations will make us revisit UNC and UNC-related arrangements. Given UNC's important war-time contribution, ROK and US must have close coordination.
 - What makes the situation more complicated is the fact that these issues will be handled as a transfer of wartime operational control to ROK is proceeding. Juggling multiple balls in the air, Korea and the US have all the more reasons to maintain thorough coordination.

4. Conclusion

- Singapore summit poses numerous questions relating both to NK nuclear issue and to regional security.
- NK nuclear negotiations are evolving, a work in progress. Even after the Singapore summit, we are still in the dark as to whether KJU had made a strategic decision and whether this attempt at negotiated solution will be more successful. The outcome of Secretary Pompeo's visit to Pyongyang hopefully gives us a clearer sense of what will transpire in the coming months. In terms of timeline, the US mid-term election in November will be important as the Trump administration will have a strong desire to show tangible results to American voters. And then there will arise a military need to decide whether they begin planning for joint exercises for 2019, or maintain suspension. Realistically, we will need a breakthrough by the end of this year if we are to maintain the momentum of diplomacy. So all in all this fall seems a crucial time.
- It seems that maintaining strong alliance has become a priority issue after Singapore. For Korea, along with US-NK negotiations, inter-Korean interaction and other NK policy coordination, alliance issues relating to preserving combined preparedness in the absence of joint exercises will be important and requires seamless mil-mil coordination. In addition, ongoing burden-sharing negotiations, administrative arrangements following USFK move to Pyongtaek and preparations for wartime operational control transfer must be handled capably so that the alliance does not have unnecessary troubles at this critical time.
- But, ultimately, the alliance must be above transactional and we must work to preserve the core strength of the alliance which stood the test of time.

(For reference)

NK government spokesman statement (excerpts, July 6, 2016)

- ▶ a recent example containing NK's standard position
- "Denuclearization we demand ... includes dismantlement of SK's nuclear (weapons) and denuclearization of the area surrounding the Korean Peninsula."
- "If ... nuclear (weapons) of aggression is the first to be removed and furthermore imperialist nuclear threat ... is completely removed on earth, then ... our nuclear problem is to be resolved naturally."
- "The US and SK must first accept ... our principled demands."
- "First, ... make public US nuclear weapons ... in SK ... which the US neither confirms nor denies (NCND)."
- "Second, ... dismantle all nuclear weapons and their bases ... in SK"

- “Third, ... make commitment not to introduce means of nuclear strike that the US has often deployed on the Korean Peninsula and its surroundings.”
- “Fourth, ... make commitment not to threaten NK with nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons-involved actions of war, and not to use nuclear weapons on NK.”
- “Fifth, ... announce the withdrawal of US forces from SK ...”
- “If such security assurance is achieved, we will make corresponding measures and ... breakthrough will be made in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”