



Towards a Successful Third US-North Korea Summit: Finding Convergence between Two Denuclearization Calculations

Young-Sun Ha (East Asia Institute, Seoul National University)
Translated by Jinkyung Baek and Younghyun Lee

After the second US-North Korea summit, which failed to result in a final agreement, North Korea clarified its denuclearization calculation during a late-night news conference. First, when the US lifts some of the UN sanctions which impede the civilian economy, especially the people's livelihood, North Korea will completely and permanently dismantle the production facilities of all nuclear materials, including plutonium and uranium, in the Yongbyon complex, through a joint project involving technicians from both North Korea and the US in the presence of US inspectors. Second, North Korea will make a written pledge to permanently halt nuclear weapon tests and long-range missiles test launches. Third, the most important issue is security guarantees in the process of denuclearization. However, as it would be more burdensome for the United States to take military-related measures towards such guarantees, North Korea suggests a partial lifting of sanctions as a corresponding measure. Fourth, for complete denuclearization, this early stage process is unavoidable and North Korea must implement this process at the current stage. Fifth, as the United States continued to insist at the talks that North Korea must take one more measure beyond the dismantlement of the Yongbyon nuclear facilities, it seems clear that the United States is not prepared to accept North Korea's proposal.

Meanwhile, the United States explained its own calculations with relation to North Korea's denuclearization at a press conference right after the summit. First, for North Korea to fully denuclearize, it is not sufficient to permanently dismantle its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon- it must include additional nuclear facilities which are designated by the United States. Second, the core sanctions that North Korea wants lifted cannot be removed in exchange for the dismantlement of the

Yongbyon nuclear facility alone. Third, North Korea currently has a different vision of denuclearization than the United States. But over the past year, the gap between the two visions has been reduced to some extent, and the US expects to ultimately share the same vision with North Korea. Fourth, if North Korea chooses to denuclearize, it will seek international support to become an economic power.

The greatest achievement of the second North Korea-US summit was to clearly prove that there is no potential for convergence between the current North Korean and American trajectories towards North Korea's denuclearization. Since the Singapore Summit, there has been a deep divide among domestic and foreign policymakers and experts between the optimistic and pessimistic views on the possibility of convergence between the two different calculations. EAI has voiced ongoing criticism of the dichotomy between these two views and pointed out that North Korea has been seeking to implement a three-step negotiation strategy for the North Korean vision of complete denuclearization, which differs from the vision shared and pursued by the US and South Korea. In the first phase, North Korea proposed the voluntary destruction of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site as well as the Tongchang-ri missile facility and missile engine test site in exchange for a suspension of the joint ROK-US military exercises as a confidence building measure. In the second phase, North Korea will demand, based on the principle of "action for action," an end to the US hostile policy against North Korea; a security guarantee for the regime; and an easing of economic sanctions in exchange for the permanent disposal of the Yongbyon nuclear facility. In the third phase, North Korea will propose nuclear disarmament talks which will include the disarmament of the Korean Peninsula as well as the surrounding regions ([EAI Issue Briefing](#) (2018.6.21)/[Global NK Commentary](#) (2019.1.4)).

The second summit clearly showed that neither the optimists who believe that North Korea will accept complete denuclearization nor the pessimists who argue the opposite have the solution to this problem. Rather, it demonstrated the accuracy of prudent analysis which asserts that North Korea will negotiate present and future denuclearization through confidence building and corresponding measures, but that North Korea will not give up the nuclear weapons which are necessary as a minimum deterrence for its survival. Therefore, the nuclear facilities of Yongbyon can be dismantled if the United States offers an appropriate corresponding measure, but North Korea is not willing to report its complete nuclear facilities as the US demanded.

North Korea currently faces a difficult challenge. The North's Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho said at the press conference "our principled position won't change in the slightest degree, even if the United States proposes negotiations again in the future. Our measures will not change." However, as

long as North Korea continues along its current trajectory, it is hard to expect that the other side will be willing to provide the corresponding measures of an easing of sanctions and a security guarantee that the North wants. Moreover, as Kim Jong Un said during his 2019 New Year's Address, if the North seeks "a new way for defending the sovereignty of the country and the supreme interest of the state and for achieving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula", the regime will still not have a guarantee and sanctions will be strengthened. As a consequence, North Korea will face a second "Arduous March." Thus, North Korea must recalculate its current trajectory and seek "a new way for guaranteeing the regime and achieving prosperity without nuclear weapons."

In order to see tangible results towards achieving the North's complete denuclearization at the third summit, the United States must seek to complement the calculations which have played into its own trajectory in these negotiations. First, the United States should push forward a discussion through close cooperation with South Korea and China on a security guarantee for the regime which encompasses both diplomatic and military aspects. The guarantee must be so powerful that North Korea becomes willing to place its trust in such a guarantee rather than in its nuclear weapons. Only then will North Korea be able to recalculate its trajectory to aim for complete denuclearization. There is an urgent need to hold immediate discussions on how to build multiple-layered regime guarantees on a bilateral level, such as between North Korea and the US, North Korea and China, and South Korea and North Korea; on a multilateral level such as through the Six-Party Talks; and on an international level including the UN. Second, there must be international discussions regarding how to provide sanctions relief and support for the economy in steps which correspond to the reporting, inspection and destruction of all of North Korea's nuclear facilities, nuclear materials and nuclear weapons, including those at Yongbyon. North Korea can demonstrate its sincere willingness to engage in the process of complete denuclearization by taking these steps.

South Korea, from a perspective of prudence beyond both optimism and pessimism, must also recalculate its own trajectory so that it may converge with those of North Korea and the US to achieve a successful third North Korea-US Summit. More importantly, there must be recognition that the third summit will be totally different from the first summit. The first summit was held at the level of confidence building based on North Korea's three phases of negotiation. The second summit proved that the existing North Korean and American denuclearization trajectories will never converge. Through the third summit, both North Korea and the US should reach an agreement by establishing new trajectories that can encompass the needs of both parties. Therefore, unlike the past two summits, the role of South Korea in the third summit matters. South Korea must induce North Korea to recalculate its trajectory to aim for the complete denuclearization of North Korea and, at the same

time, create a new path towards denuclearization which includes a more attractive security guarantee and economic prosperity together with the United States. In this way, the trajectories of the three countries may hope to converge at the third meeting.

North Korea's complete denuclearization is moving rapidly towards the moment of truth. While the last two summits were exploratory forays, the third summit should be a historic meeting between all of the winners in the ring.

- *Young-Sun Ha* is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the East Asia Institute, and also a Professor Emeritus at Seoul National University. Dr. Ha received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Washington.
- *Jinkyung Baek* is a Program Manager and Research Associate at the East Asia Institute.
- *Younghyun Lee* is a Program Manager and Research Associate at the East Asia Institute

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For inquiries:

Jinkyung Baek, Research Associate / Project Manager
North Korea and National Security Research Group
International and Domestic Public Opinion Survey Group

Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 108)

Email. j.baek@eai.or.kr

The East Asia Institute
#909 Sampoong B/D, Eulji-ro 158, Jung-gu,
Seoul 04548, South Korea
Phone 82 2 2277 1683 Fax 82 2 2277 1697
Email eai@eai.or.kr Website www.eai.or.kr