



Tasks Ahead beyond the Stalemate

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The Stalemate following the June 12th North Korea-US Singapore Summit

Following the June 12th North Korea-US Summit in Singapore, expectations that the process of denuclearization of North Korea would be accomplished in a short period were high. However, the negotiations between the two parties has since stagnated. As discussions progress over the detailed steps that must be taken to achieve denuclearization and establish a peace system, underlying mistrust and conflicts of interest have also grown. North Korea has argued that a renewed relationship with the United States is a prerequisite for denuclearization, while the United States has stood firm that irreversible steps towards denuclearization must be made before an end-of-war declaration or partial sanctions relief can be entertained. The fundamental cause for this stalemate stems from the differences in understanding and intentions regarding the summit between North Korea and the United States.

The main takeaways from the June 12th North Korea-US Summit in Singapore are that both parties need to work 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. Following the summit, optimists argued that the North Korean nuclear issue would be fully resolved and a peace regime established on the Peninsula in due time. Pessimists, however, felt that the agreement lacked specific roadmaps and a timeline for denuclearization. In other words, the agreement reached remains at the basic step of merely emphasizing the importance of the principle of establishing a peace regime. This discord between the two views has produced

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 is to move beyond the simple dichotomy of optimistic or pessimistic views and to critically analyze and explore the chances of actually solving the problem, beginning with a review of the North Korea-US summit.

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.

Basically, the two leaders reaffirmed the April 27th 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 in the agreement, nor were they able to 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 concrete measures to guarantee the security of North Korea's regime. 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.

North Korea's genuine strategic intentions and its approach to the negotiation with the U.S. are critical at this point. On April 20th, 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. Rather, North Korea will reduce its nuclear arsenal to 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 or FFVD (Final, Fully Verified Denuclearization) as proposed by the US, then it must give up all of the nuclear weapons that it has produced thus far to guarantee a minimum level of nuclear deterrence. North Korea will adopt a nuclear-free, economically focused strategy when it is confident that the so-called U.S. hostile policy toward North Korea has completely disappeared. This means that North Korea must be convinced

that 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, which stated, “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.”

Since the summit, it has been demonstrated that even if North Korea itself understands the inevitability of inspections and verification measures, the regime wants to maintain extreme caution in accepting the outside inspections and verification desired by the US. North Korea is currently pushing for a certain form of self-verification as the first step towards denuclearization. Self-verification is 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 American or third country-led specialists, North Korea prefers 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. This is because giving up the last resort of minimum nuclear deterrence and agreeing to complete denuclearization is a life or death decision for the regime.

While it is likely that North Korea will unilaterally rapidly implement the first step of confidence-building measures towards arms reduction, as was done in Punggye-ri and Dongchang-ri, the second step of the denuclearization process, which touches on 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 a new strategic determination by North Korea in addition to the one made on April 20th. As the new strategic line adopted by North Korea on April 20th was a conditional decision to pursue step-by-step, mutual nuclear arms reduction in response to the wishes of 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.

It still remains questionable as to whether the US will be able to offer concrete measures that conform to North Korea’s demand for a complete guarantee for its regime. 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.

The Tasks Ahead

The DPRK took the first step of confidence building by declaring a moratorium on the future development of nuclear weapons and ICBM-related capacity as well as dismantling parts of nuclear and missile engine sites. It is the second step where 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 other countries in the region must push for a co-evolutionary policy towards North Korea at each stage of the process to accompany North Korea's efforts towards internal transformation. 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.

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 instead of military measures to resolve issues. 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. Meanwhile, North and South Korea have been successful during the subsequent inter-Korean summit meetings in engaging in simultaneous arms reduction and other military confidence-building measures in order to drive the process forward.

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. In order to offer a comprehensive security guarantee, there should be a global cooperation plan to offer economic support and support North Korea’s internal transformation.

Third, in order for North Korea to completely denuclearize, there must be a new push for a North Korean-style opening and reform policy to overcome the limitations of the new strategy line declared on April 20th. 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 work together 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 both 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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