



Prospects & Perspectives



In the Panmunjeom Declaration, the leaders of both Koreas declared “there will be no more war” and they agreed on the goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula through “complete denuclearization.” Source: Republic of Korea, *flickr*, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/koreanet/41728369601/>>.

The Evolving Regional Situation in Northeast Asia after the Moon-Kim Summit: Implications for the Forthcoming Trump-Kim Summit

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North Korea’s Supreme leader Kim Jong-un and South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in held a summit at Panmunjeom on April 27. This event was in the limelight of the global media and viewers for a couple of reasons. The primary reason is whether this summit will bring about peace and stability on the Korean peninsula after a turbulent year of 2017. A nuclear war seemed imminent when U.S. President Donald Trump

and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un were competing with each other over whose nuclear weapons’ button was bigger. Another reason that the summit caught world attention is that this was the debut of the young North Korean top leader on the international arena after he came to power in December 2011 after his father Kim Jong-il passed way.





In the Panmunjeom Declaration, the leaders of both Koreas declared “there will be no more war” and they agreed on the goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula through “complete denuclearization.” The declaration was mainly focused on peace and elimination of concerns of war, including establishment of a peace regime that will end the war in Korea and replace the 65-year-old armistice. A survey in South Korea shows that more than 35% interviewers think the biggest achievement of this inter-Korea summit is the commitment to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Their satisfaction with President Moon rose to 86%, a historic high among South Korean presidents in their first year or so of office. In addition, Kim Jong-un seized the opportunity of this summit and conducted a very successful public relations campaign. His image in South Korea has been changed from negative to positive, from that of a reckless young man to a mature, humorous and sincere person. According to a local poll immediately after the inter-Korean summit, 78% of South Korean interviewers believe the Junior Kim is honest, a sharp increase from 10% before the summit. As a result, South Korean media have already discussed future economic cooperation between the two Koreas such as Hyundai Asan’s preparing for the resumption of North Korea’s Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) and the Mt. Kumgang Tourist Project. Other projects are the renovation of Trans-Korean Railway (TKR) railways, namely the western Kyongui Line (京義線) and the east coast Donghae Lines (東海線), the construction of gas pipelines from Russia to South Korea via North Korea as well as joint development of rare earth minerals in North

Korea and building a high-speed railway line linking Dalian in Liaoning Province, North Korea’s Rajin and South Korea’s North Chungcheong Province (忠清北道) under President Moon’s “New Economic Map” initiative.

However, the key to peace and prosperity of the Korean peninsula lies in the forthcoming Trump-Kim summit in mid-June. This is going to be a real test for Kim Jong-un who has so far acted as a talented diplomat, because U.S. President Trump is a successful businessman and tough bargainer, in particular he is very emotional and changeable. At this moment, both North Korea and the US have attempted to increase their bargaining chips for their coming summit. President Trump recently declared that the US was withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, sending a warning signal to Pyongyang that there is no chance for North Korea to play any games. In the meantime, Trump sent US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to visit North Korea to nail down details of the upcoming summit between the two countries. This marks Pompeo’s second visit to Pyongyang. Obviously Trump is very serious about the coming summit. His aim is to get rid of the North’s nuclear weapons as soon as possible. Pompeo indicated the US has no interest in following a step-by-step process, which, under past administrations, failed to end the North’s nuclear ambitions. “We’re not going to relieve sanctions until such time as we achieve our objectives,” he said.

On the North Korean side, Kim Jong-un has met China’s Xi Jinping twice in about 40 days



respectively in March and in May, aiming at showing Trump that he has China's backup ahead of their coming summit. During the talks in Dalian, Xi expressed China's support for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and U.S.-North Korea talks leading to the resolution of issues on the peninsula, while Kim emphasized, "North Korea has as its consistent position the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." "North Korea no longer needs to possess nuclear weapons, and denuclearization of the peninsula can be realized through phased and synchronous measures, if only some [countries] stop implementing hostile policies toward North Korea and remove security threats against the DPRK. Alternatively, to create a positive climate for his summit with Trump, Kim also released three American detainees in the North and let Pompeo take them back to the US.

What is worth noting is that unlike the previous inter-Korean summits held in 2000 and in 2007, this year's inter-Korean summit was proposed by North Korea, while the previous two summits were driven by South Korea, under its former liberal Presidents Kim Dae-jong and Roh Moo-hyun. This is largely due to Kim Jong-un's goal-oriented foreign policy. With the brinkmanship of successfully connecting long-range missiles and nuclear bombs together and skillful diplomacy, Kim Jong-un is about to bring the US to the negotiation table. Now, he is seriously considering denuclearization in exchange for the establishment of diplomatic ties with the US and Japan. If that is the case, then he has achieved his grandfather's and father's wishes to address the imbalance on the Korean

peninsula, to turn North Korea into a normal state and to concentrate on economic construction. On the other hand, Trump is looking forward to a big deal with North Korea, given facing mounting challenges from the Russiagate investigation, the midterm Congress election in November and the 2020 presidential election. In addition, both China and South Korea also have high hopes for a peaceful Korean peninsula and North Korea's opening-up.

In conclusion, even though there are many variables in the way, chances for a landmark breakthrough in the Trump-Kim summit are more likely than ever. If so, the international situation in Northeast Asia is likely to be transformed from a traditionally strategically and politically driven orientation to a more economically oriented one centering on North Korea's economic development. The acceleration of Northeast Asian economic integration will follow. We had better prepare for a coping strategy to meet this huge change and maximize our national interest be prepared for North Korea's opening-up.

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Editor's Note: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Prospect Foundation.

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