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Although Trump and Kim reached some agreement regarding denuclearization on June 12, most of this is about principles rather than any specific content or timetable. Thus, a continuous, uncertain and dynamic security structure in Northeast Asia could become a new norm in the near future.

Source: The White House, *facebook*,

<<https://www.facebook.com/WhiteHouse/photos/a.1709578419129884.1073741881.1191441824276882/1710062552414804/?type=3&theater>>.

An Analysis of the Trump-Kim Summit: Perspectives from China, Japan and South Korea

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Since people all over the world have been paying attention to the summit, held in Singapore on June 12, between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and guessing the rationale for it, it is necessary to understand how Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul think about this event.

Most observers believed that China hoped the Trump-Kim summit would be held because it represents a relaxation of tension, which is beneficial for China's national interest. Furthermore, there is significant concern in China about China being marginalized should Kim strike a deal with Trump that would change





the strategic status quo on the Chinese border. From China's perspective, the worst outcome might be the reconstruction of a new security structure in the region that does not meet China's strategic interests. We can be sure that China is worried about Pyongyang drawing closer to the US as a way of balancing between China and the US. In addition, the two Koreas might merge into a single nation allied with the US. For China, that is much more undesirable than living with a state armed with a nuclear weapon.

The Japanese government has expressed a wish to hold a Japan-North Korea summit. Before the Trump-Kim summit, Kim held separate talks with the leaders of South Korea and China. And Japan, at least at that stage, had been left out. In addition, Japan hopes North Korea will completely dismantle all of its ballistic missiles. Furthermore, North Korea and Japan are divided over how to achieve complete denuclearization. Kim prefers to take a step-by-step approach, calling for rewards for each step he takes, while Japan says the sanctions should not be relaxed until North Korea halts its nuclear program completely. On the other hand, there are scenarios the Japanese government is fearful of, such as an easing of sanctions against North Korea while progress is made only on the nuclear issue, and not on the abduction issue. And Japan has maintained the stance that it will not normalize diplomatic ties with North Korea unless the abduction issue is resolved.

For South Korea, the nightmare scenario is a summit failure and a preemptive US military strike on North Korea's nuclear facilities. The Pentagon at least has 28,500 troops stationed in

South Korea, which Kim demanded be removed as one of the conditions for giving up its nuclear program. For most officials in Washington and Seoul, the issue of US troops stationed in South Korea is unrelated to any future peace treaty with North Korea. They believe that American forces should stay even if such an agreement is signed. For South Koreans, living with an uncertain denuclearization of North Korea is not an alternative to living without American troops, because many South Koreans consider the US military presence as not only necessary to realize North Korea's denuclearization, but also as a symbol of national security and a regional stabilizer.

Although Trump and Kim reached some agreement regarding denuclearization on June 12, most of this is about principles rather than any specific content or timetable. Even though Trump promised Kim to stop the joint US-South Korean military exercises, this does not mean that the joint military exercises will not be resumed when new developments call for them. Clearly, North Korea is not interested in unilateral nuclear abandonment, which means North Korea might not give up its nuclear program without a corresponding change in the US military posture as a guarantee of security. Thus, a possible outcome of the North Korean nuclear issue could be foreseen — a long-term multistage and reciprocal arrangement in which Kim offers phased denuclearization for real proof that the US is not going to destabilize him.

I have repeatedly stressed that North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles are not the aim of Kim Jong-un, but only the tools and



means by which he may achieve North Korea's economic development. Moreover, after the Trump-Kim summit, North Korea's relations with the US, Japan, and South Korea may unveil a new page of North Korea's history, which may have influence over China and thus cause China to no longer treat North Korea as its "exclusive property (禁臠)." Therefore, in my opinion, Kim Jong-un has been taking high reward yet risky measurements to create a new diplomatic dialogue with the West through nuclear weapons and missiles.

Another issue that should be noted is that the costly US military presence overseas is being questioned by Trump. With the prospect of an end to the North Korea's nuclear program, South Korea may face a reduction or withdrawal of US troops. And this could reshape the balance of power in Northeast Asia. Both South Korea and Japan are fearful that Trump's "America-first" diplomacy will leave them fending for themselves as China asserts its military prowess. Under Abe's administration, Japan has stepped up its own show of military force, and Abe has sought to revise the pacifist clause in Japan's Constitution. If Trump succeeded in pulling troops from the Korean Peninsula, Abe could push through a constitutional change while citing the reduced American military presence in the region. Therefore, if the US releases a message that it may withdraw its troops from South Korea, even if the authenticity of the message is not high, it may cause an arms race among South Korea,

Japan, Taiwan, and the ASEAN countries. This will in turn reconstruct East Asian security, and thus create a new challenge for China.

In sum, the US, China, Japan, South Korea and North Korea have different interests in terms of the North Korean nuclear issue. To curb China's contention for leadership in East Asia, Trump could use North Korea's nuclear and missile issues to create a security environment conducive to the US and its allies. However, China may also adopt a policy of interest exchanged with North Korea to boycott the security cooperation between the US, Japan and South Korea. While China and Japan both fear marginalization, South Korea's goal is to see a peaceful, denuclearized Korean peninsula. Thus, a continuous, uncertain and dynamic security structure in Northeast Asia could become a new norm in the near future, which will bring more complicated challenges as well as opportunities to China and other Indo-Pacific countries.

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