

The Panmunjom Summit and Confidence-building in Korea

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Twelve hours in Panmunjom -- a location that symbolizes division, war and protracted conflict in Korea -- produced an unexpected miracle of peace on Friday, April 27. Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un, the leaders of South and North Korea, adopted the Panmunjom Declaration that underscores "there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula and thus a new era of peace has begun." As epitomized in the slogan of the South Korean government, "Peace, a New Start," the two Koreas have now ventured into a daunting Odyssey to end the state of war and build a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. Given the acute sense of crisis that haunted South Koreans throughout the last year, such a miraculous reversal indeed looks surreal.

The summit was successful in restoring normal inter-Korean relations. The two leaders agreed to "hold dialogue and negotiations in various fields including at a high level, and to take active measures to implement the agreements reached at the Summit." In that context, it was agreed to establish a joint liaison office with resident representatives from both sides in the Kaesong region. More active cooperation, exchanges, visits and contacts at all levels were also encouraged in order to rejuvenate the sense of national reconciliation and unity. Most importantly, they agreed to proceed with reunion programs for the separated families on the occasion of the National Liberation Day on August 15 this year. Practical steps are expected to be taken to connect and modernize the railways and roads on the eastern transportation corridor as well as between Seoul and Sinuiju, as agreed in the 2007 October 4 Declaration.

The declaration stipulates both Koreas "make joint efforts to alleviate the acute military tension and practically eliminate the danger of war on the Korean Peninsula." Both leaders agreed not only to completely cease all hostile acts against each other in every domain, including land, air and sea, that are the source of military tension and conflict, including the transformation of the demilitarized zone into a peace zone, but also to adopt a practical scheme to turn the areas around the Northern Limit Line in the West Sea into a maritime peace zone to prevent accidental military clashes and guarantee safe fishing activities. They also agreed to military measures to ensure active mutual cooperation, exchanges, visits and contacts, and frequent meetings between military authorities, including the Defense Ministers Meeting.

The two Koreas agreed to cooperate to establish a permanent and solid peace regime on the Korean Peninsula by ending the current unnatural state of armistice. As part of these efforts, they agreed to carry out disarmament in a phased manner through the reduction of military tensions and confidence-building measures. They also decided to pursue three-party meetings involving North Korea, South Korea and the U.S., or four-party meetings involving North Korea, South Korea, the U.S. and China within this year, which marks the 65th

anniversary of the armistice. The aim would be to declare an end to the war and to turn the armistice into a peace treaty, ultimately leading to the establishment of a permanent peace regime. Most importantly, the South and North Korean leaders confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear weapons-free Korean Peninsula.

The goal of the Panmunjom declaration is bold and audacious because it expresses the desire of the two leaders to end the Korean War and to begin a new era of peace and prosperity. Equally critical is the adoption of a written agreement on complete denuclearization and nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula. I believe the Panmunjom declaration laid foundation for military tension reduction, confidence-building, gradual disarmament, and a peace-regime on the Korean peninsula with profound implications for peace and stability in Northeast Asia.