

Joint ROK-Japan Workshop
“FROM PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA TO NORTHEAST ASIA
NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE”

Session 3 “Future of the Korean Peninsula—What are the possible scenarios and conditions to transform the Korean Peninsula to a peaceful and nuclear-threat-free place? How do we overcome the stumbling blocks?”

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1. The unique opportunity created in 2018 is not yet lost, but the window of opportunity is closing. Thanks largely to an unprecedented direct engagement between US President Donald Trump and DPRK Chairman Kim Jong Un, as well as the meetings between Chairman Kim and ROK President Moon Jae-in in January-December 2018, significant progress was achieved in reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The three heads of state, through their personal engagement, created a unique window of opportunity for making progress in resolving the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula and making the region free of any nuclear threats.

I believe that the potential created by the series of summits in 2018 is not yet exhausted, but the window of opportunity is starting to close, and urgent efforts are required from all the interested parties.

2. The progress achieved on denuclearization in 2018 has not been lost. Important steps were made in 2018 towards denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The DPRK has announced a moratorium on ICBMs and nuclear tests. Steps were taken to render the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri inoperative. Following the Inter-Korean Summits, in the Panmunjom and Pyongyang declarations – as well as in the joint statements by President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un following the summit in Singapore – the parties reiterated the goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. As a result of the Pyongyang Summit, the DPRK agreed to permanently dismantle the Dongchang-ri missile engine test site and launch platform under the observation of international experts; it also expressed its willingness to permanently dismantle – on certain conditions – the nuclear facilities at the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center.

It is safe to say that the commitments Pyongyang undertook in 2018 – particularly the moratorium on nuclear tests and long-range missile launches – restrict Pyongyang’s ability to further develop its nuclear and long-range missile capabilities, provided that the moratorium remains in place.

3. A more active role played by the DPRK at various international platforms in 2018 should be supported and encouraged. In 2018, the DPRK also substantially stepped up its engagement at some international platforms on the issue of nonproliferation and disarmament. Speaking at the Conference on Disarmament in May 2018, the DPRK Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Han Tae Song, announced his country’s willingness to “join international disarmament efforts for a total ban on nuclear tests.” At the First Committee of the UN General Assembly in October-November 2018, the DPRK delegation, for the first time in many years, actively participated in drafting the UN GA Resolution on the CTBT. In their contacts

with Australian representatives, who led the work on the Resolution in 2018, North Korean diplomats expressed their willingness to vote in support of the document, on the condition that their proposals are taken into account. Before that, the DPRK delegation voted against that annual resolution on 11 occasions, and did not participate in the vote on eight other occasions.

4. Hanoi was a summit of lost opportunities. Unfortunately, the second summit between President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un in February 2019 did not yield any new agreements that many had hoped for. According to various reports, the DPRK was ready to agree to a dismantlement of the entire Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center, which includes an estimated 300 to 400 buildings. All the key facilities of the North Korean plutonium program are believed to be at Yongbyon.

If the DPRK were to completely and permanently dismantle all its plutonium program facilities at Yongbyon, particularly the 5 MWe Magnox reactor and the radiochemical laboratory, it would have no immediate means of producing weapons-grade plutonium. Such a step would also essentially freeze the North Korean thermonuclear program because the Magnox reactor is believed to be the only DPRK facility that currently produces tritium – and tritium has a fairly short half-life of 12.3 years.

Additionally, the Yongbyon Center hosts a uranium enrichment facility, a research reactor, a pilot light-water nuclear power reactor and several other installations which the DPRK indicated readiness to dismantle, using verification measures.

But the United States said that any deal should also include dismantling several facilities outside the Yongbyon Center (known as the “Yongbyon plus alpha” approach) – something the DPRK was not ready to accept.

5. Where are we now? The DPRK continues to show interest in reaching a deal in which Washington and Pyongyang would play the central role. A rapid denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula clearly isn't a realistic possibility. In the short and medium term, the DPRK is very unlikely to abandon the nuclear capability which it has spent more than five decades building, and which the regime regards as a guarantee of its own survival.

The level of mistrust between the key actors, Pyongyang and Washington, is too great to expect the problems that have been piling up in the region for many years to be resolved in one fell swoop. Also, DPRK representatives emphasize their concern over the sustainability of any deal adopted with the United States in light of Washington's recent pullout from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and from the INF Treaty with Russia.

Nevertheless, last year's events have demonstrated that progress towards denuclearization is possible – albeit at a slower pace than some might have hoped. The central principle of negotiations the parties must adopt is the principle of phased and reciprocal approach. Importantly, as of mid-May 2019, North Korea continues to stress that the proposals made at Hanoi remain on the table and can still serve as a basis for another attempt at reaching an agreement on a new phase of the dialogue on the Korean peninsula.

6. Key challenges to progress. The most unwelcome development since the Hanoi summit has been the suspension of all channels for dialogue between the DPRK and the USA, including the freezing of contacts via the so-called New York channel, which refers to the DPRK Mission to the United Nations in New York.

Also, feeling the “pressure” (such as the recent attack on the DPRK Embassy in Madrid), Pyongyang seems to have decided to limit the participation of its representatives in informal contacts for a while – in other words, in the events and workshops held as part of Track 1.5.

Meanwhile, speaking on April 12, 2019 at the 1st Session of the 14th DPRK Supreme People’s Assembly, Chairman Kim Jong Un gave diplomacy until the end of 2019 to return on track. The most urgent task is therefore to resume regular dialogue involving Pyongyang and Washington, so that the parties could make another attempt at utilizing the potential for negotiations created by the US and DPRK heads of state.

7. Priority format for dialogue. Experience in recent years suggests that for any agreement to be sustainable and survive in the long term, it should be concluded in a multilateral format, ideally involving the UN institutions and UN Security Council resolutions. Such an approach is no guarantee of eternal life for any deal, but it clearly makes an agreement more sustainable and less prone to reversals. These considerations are especially valid because the DPRK-US dialogue has made next to no progress following the Hanoi Summit.

Speaking of the format of the dialogue, the experience of the Iranian nuclear talks, which eventually proved a success, could be utilized in the Korean situation. A multinational approach that includes the countries of the region and combines bilateral and multilateral tracks, as was the case with the Iran negotiations, looks the most promising and sustainable. Despite the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the JCPOA, I do believe the so-called ‘Iran deal’ is an exceptional example of the art of diplomacy.

Let us recall that the Panmunjom Declaration also emphasizes the role of the international community’s support and cooperation in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Dialogue on the Korean Peninsula could be based on the P3+3 format, the P3 being the three largest nuclear powers and UNSC permanent members (the USA, Russia, and China), plus three regional states (the DPRK, ROK, and Japan).

8. Reciprocity is a critical factor. I have already mentioned the need to use a phased and reciprocal approach in pursuing the next steps. Since the fall 2018, there has been a growing dissatisfaction in Pyongyang over the lack of “reciprocal”, compensatory steps by the other parties. Negotiations are a two-way street, and the reciprocal measures that would offer some benefits to North Korea should be stepped up. Otherwise, the whole process risks grinding to a halt, or even relapsing into another escalation any time now.

In this context, the possibility of using exemptions from the UNSC sanctions resolutions in order to implement some specific projects involving the DPRK could be considered. Such projects might include the Northern and Southern railway systems interconnection as the first step. At present, that particular project is not active. Restarting the joint

ROK-DPRK operations at the Kaesong Industrial Complex and easing restrictions on the use of North Korean labor force abroad could be the next steps on the list.

9. **No impossible conditions.** As part of the talks in such a format on the Korean Peninsula, we could borrow such principles from the Iran negotiations as mutual respect and a recognition of state sovereignty and security interests of all the parties involved.

Another important consideration is that the DPRK's partners at the talks should not put forward impossible conditions. They should not demand things that no sovereign state would ever accept, barring a military defeat.

10. **Peaceful use of nuclear energy and the outer space.** At a certain stage, the parties involved should also be prepared to reiterate North Korea's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy under IAEA safeguards, as well as its right to peaceful space exploration under reasonable transparency measures. It is worth noting that after a long pause, the DPRK is once again talking at the highest level of the need for using nuclear energy to meet the economy's energy needs. Statements to that effect were made by Chairman Kim Jong Un in his New Year Address and his April 2019 speech to the First Plenary Session of the 14th DPRK Supreme People's Assembly.