

## **Applying diplomacy for the common good**

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The much expected second summit between President Donald Trump of the US and Chairman Kim Jung Un of the DPRK has just ended with no deal. Despite the fact that both advance teams had reached Hanoi for days-long pre-summit negotiation without reaching an agreement, Washington and Pyongyang still expected to deliver a deal at the summit level.

However, on the surface it seems that both parties have had significant misunderstandings before and during their talks, which made it impossible to hammer out a deal with proper mutual compromise.

Accord to President Trump in his solo post-summit press conference, Chairman Kim demanded that the US lift “all” economic sanctions in exchange for the DPRK’s verified closure of its Yongbyon nuclear complex, without addressing any further denuclearizing details including declaration, inspection and dismantling all DPRK’s nuclear weapons and missiles program, hopefully completely and irreversibly.

Nevertheless, the DRPK Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho said at a late press conference of his own that Pyongyang only asked for “partial” lifting of sanctions, contradicting what Trump said. DPRK has indicated that in principle it agrees with denuclearization for complete lifting of sanctions. But at present the DPRK only asked for partial lifting of sanctions, and offered to close its Yongbyon nuclear site.

If both sides had expressed their positions unambiguously, they should not have such vastly different understandings, and their differences could be narrowed. The US side was opposed to entire lifting of sanctions for non-complete implementation of DPRK’s denuclearization. This is quite understandable. Actually the US current stance of possible partial lifting of sanctions for denuclearizing a significant part of the DPRK

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nuclear program has already been much more flexible than its previous position at the earlier summit in Singapore.

Though it is still hard to decipher why the two teams could not communicate and understand each other properly, one should keep in mind that they are willing to use diplomacy to settle their difference. In response to a journalist's question, Kim Jung Un said he would not have come all the way to Hanoi without a genuine intention to denuclearize.

It is possible that both sides have attempted high-pressure diplomacy. In this initial tangible high-stake give-and-take game, Pyongyang wanted to retain as much as nuclear flexibility by restricting the US freedom in verification scope, and meantime to maximize its potential gain through attempting a total lifting of sanctions, though signaling also a possible partial lifting as well. The US side, after offering a liaison office as its carrot, resolutely denied a "non-equal" deal. Given their similar character and temperament, their best intent of opting for diplomacy could end with applying pressure. As both feel "no rush" at this time, their talk quickly collapsed.

If the above conceived scenario makes any sense, the lesson is clear. Each side has not applied sustained diplomacy. Instead, they could well end up with using diplomacy as a one-shot pressure. In light of this, their failure to strike out a deal this time is not surprising.

Given the vast distrust between the two countries, any pursuant of a quick solution through denuclearization is unrealistic. The reason is pretty simple: the DPRK doesn't feel secure and is keen to preserve certain nuclear capability in its early stage of "denuclearization", even if Pyongyang would do it eventually. The US, for its part, has to address the DPRK nuclear and missile arsenal in its entirety despite its own softening of position from a "time-bound total denuclearization" to a "no rush" incremental process.

Understanding the DPRK's feel of geostrategic insecurity would help make explicable the collapse of this talk. Given the demise of the Soviet Union, the DPRK has lost one key ally. The other, China, still has a legally-binding alliance agreement with the DPRK on paper. However, Pyongyang has doubts that China would ever have honor its commitment. At a time China is branding itself as a "responsible power", Beijing might accord its regional and global responsibility to stem nuclear proliferation a higher priority

over its bilateral commitment to come to the DPRK's defense, if the two objectives conflict with each other.

In addition, Pyongyang would not fail to see that the US still has a hegemonic foreign policy. Without any hard evidence or UN Security Council endorsement, the Bush administration launched an illegal preemptive attack on Iraq, and described Pyongyang along with Teheran and Baghdad as a member of "an axis of evil". President Obama, while receiving his Nobel Peace award, partly for his leadership of "global zero", exercised his "strategic patience" to be distant with the DPRK. In addition, President Trump has ordered the building of miniaturized nuclear warheads, so as to deter those leaders of "rogue states" more effectively.

Remembering President Trump's "fury and fire" in 2017, his sudden shift of stance toward the DPRK could well be his display of "art of deal". Once the DPRK would imprudently follow the US demand of a CVID approach to comprehensively, verifiably and irreversibly denuclearizing itself while the US would do nothing during this process, Pyongyang could well commit political and strategic suicide without any parallel economic benefits. No sensible DPRK leader would ever embrace such a one-sided highly risky formula.

Seven months after the first summit in Singapore in June last year, the White House has become more pragmatic, as it now seems to understand that virtually it is impossible to achieve a "US-wins-all, the DPRK-loses-all" denuclearization game. Lately, President Trump has sent a number of messages to show that based on his wonderful personal relations with Chairman Kim, he would not expect the second round of summit to conclude a total and immediate denuclearization. Instead, he would enlighten his DPRK counterpart with the success of Vietnam, the host country, that Pyongyang holds a tremendous opportunity of economic prosperity, if it is prepared to surrender the core of its nuclear and missile arsenals, while the US would offer some enticing olives including setting up an American liaison office in Pyongyang.

While the US has softened its position to some extent, the rest of the world would expect the DPRK to reciprocate in return. Pyongyang may not only agree to extend its existing virtual nuclear and missile testing moratorium, but also offer a certain version of roadmap toward eliminating its fissile material and missile arsenal, though in a limited and incremental manner.

A reasonable conclusion from Trump's walkout from this summit is that high-pressure diplomacy has led to an impasse on relative cost-benefits on the table. This may indicate either their lack of skill in using diplomacy, or lack of intent to make deal so soon. From the DPRK side, indeed it is in no rush to yield.

Militarily, after six rounds of nuclear weapons tests and tens of missile flight tests, Pyongyang's nuclear deterrent should not be underestimated. With nuclear armaments, Pyongyang trusts that it is more secure rather than without. And, with its acquired data from previous tests, the DPRK may be confident in building up its nuclear tipped missiles without immediate further tests, and hence without annoying its neighbors. Economically, it may be hungry but not dying. With its testing moratorium, Pyongyang has already much improved its relationship with Beijing, Seoul and Moscow. It is likely to believe that the beleaguered Trump may be thirstier to get a deal, given his presidential reelection need, at a time of America's challenging relationship with China, Russia, and allies, as well as his many legal battles in the Congress.

The world should not allow the US and the DPRK to squander time this way. Without making even an imperfect deal of denuclearization, Pyongyang's nuclear and missile arsenal could keep expanding, adding its weight in any future talks with the US. If the two sides intend to meet again, they should be better prepared than this time, communicating well and accommodating each other's legitimate concerns. They should trust and apply diplomacy for common goods, rather than use it merely as a platform. Based on improved diplomacy, the US and the DPRK shall present to the world that they are able to achieve both denuclearization and the opening of a new peace era with official ending of the Korean War.