

Trump's Legacy of Korean Peninsula Policy and Biden's Continuation

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Abstract

Following the recent launch of several short-range missiles test from 2020-2021 by North Korea, observers are worrying about whether Pyongyang will go back to war or play the brinkmanship game, to increase its bargaining chips. But recent reports suggest the regime of Kim Jong-un may have dozens of nuclear warheads in its arsenal. Looking into the nature, however, it can be identified as a typical balance-of-power case.

This paper argues that, although there have not been any substantial agreements on denuclearization, the current condition, or stall perhaps, can be taken as the result of interactions among the US and the two Koreas. This paper concludes that given the lack of progress after three summits, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula still has a long way to go. What can be assured is tentative de-escalation of the conflict on the Peninsula. The resolution of North Korea's nuclear weapons seems to have returned to the US old policy. The United States has not regarded the North Korea nuclear issue as its top priority during the US-China strategic competition. A summit between Biden and Kim Jong-un will not be held in the short term before North Korea has expressed its attitude towards the US-South Korea joint statement and close cooperation.

Keywords: *North Korea Nuclear Issue, Trump-Kim Summit, Denuclearization, Korean Peninsula*

美國川普政府朝鮮半島政策遺緒

與拜登政府的延續

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摘 要

在朝鮮從 2020 到 2021 年發射數枚短程導彈後，觀察家們擔心朝鮮是否會重新挑起戰端或重回戰爭邊緣策略，以獲得更多的籌碼。最近報導發現，金正恩政權的軍火庫中可能已經擁有數十枚核彈頭，然而從本質上看，北韓升高籌碼的對峙，被視為是一個典型的權力平衡遊戲。本文認為，儘管在無核化問題上尚未達成實質性協議，但朝鮮半島情勢或許停滯不前，可以看作是美韓兩國長期互動模式的結果。有鑑於川普與金正恩三次高峰會的結果不盡理想，朝鮮半島要實現無核化還有很長的路要走，但至少朝鮮半島衝突能夠暫時緩和。朝鮮核問題在美中戰略競爭中，並非首要解決的問題，美國政府的更替，讓北韓核武器問題又重回到美國原有政策脈絡。在北韓對近期美韓聯合聲明和合作明確表態之前，美國新總統拜登短期內不會和金正恩舉行高峰會。

關鍵詞：北韓核問題、川金會、無核化、朝鮮半島

I. Introduction

US President Joe Biden and President Moon Jae-in of South Korea met in the White House in May 2021 and produced a comprehensive and substantive joint statement emphasizing cooperation on many security issues, such as climate change, global health, sustainable development, and the Myanmar democracy situation. The central issue remains to defend against the threat posed by North Korea.¹

The text of the joint statement suggests the United States to renew its commitment to “the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” to affirm the 2018 accords Kim Jong-un signed with Mr. Moon and with former President Donald Trump, and to endorse the establishment of “permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.”

When the negotiation on the prospect of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula was locked into a stalemate between the United States and North Korea in July 2019, former President Trump on a visit into South Korea, paid a surprise visit to Panmunjom where he met Kim Jong-un, North Korea's supreme leader.² The meeting ended as expected with no substantial resolutions. Significant effects on the domestic fronts of the two countries were noticeable, though. Earlier, President Trump and Kim had met in a second round North Korea-US summit in Hanoi, where they departed with an unhappy ending, leaving the agenda on a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula in limbo. While Washington insisted on the promise made by Pyongyang to carry on with de-nuclearization, Pyongyang reiterated the precondition needed to be lifting of the sanctions, issued with an unyielding attitude backed by occasionally testing missiles and laying bare its nuclear assets.³

¹ Nicholas Eberstadt, “Biden and Moon Are Getting North Korea Wrong,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2021,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/opinion/north-korea-biden-moon-jae-in.html>.

² Peter Baker and Michael Crowley, “Trump Steps into North Korea and Agrees with Kim Jong-un to Resume Talks,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/asia/trump-north-korea-dmz.html>.

³ “North Korea Tests New Weapon,” *New York Times*, April 17, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/.../north-korea-missile-weapons-test.html>.

During the G20 Osaka Summit, the purpose of President Xi Jinping's high-profile visit to North Korea, which extended an exceptionally warm welcome, spoke volumes. Strategically, these were for mutual support and better bargaining positions in the negotiation process vis-à-vis the US.⁴ President Trump's instant response was also clear-cut. Immediately after the Osaka Summit, Trump paid a visit to South Korea, which prepared the top meeting with Kim Jong-un at Panmunjom along the 38th parallel. A triangular mode of engagement between Washington, Pyongyang and Seoul was established, which may de-escalate the eruption of a crisis.

Brinkmanship or going back on one's words has already been taken as Pyongyang's old tricks on the issue of nuclear weapons.⁵ North Korea is known to the world as often resorting to radical measures, including escalating the crisis with a view to gaining more practical interests in hand.⁶ These measures act to catch the world's attention on the issues of Pyongyang's survival and give the impression that the regional security is chaotic.⁷

For years, successive US administrations have been puzzled by Pyongyang's aberrant behavior and are often caught by the policy dilemma between military means and peace settlements. Take for instance the eight-year tenure of George W. Bush, who highlighted anti-terrorism as a means to national security. With this, President Bush saw it important to sustain the Six Party Talks among the main actors in the neighborhood of Northeast Asia. To the extent that there was a joint statement issued on February 13,

⁴ "US-North Korea: Trump and Kim Agree to Restart Talks in Historic Meeting," *BBC News*, June 30, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48814975>.

⁵ Thomas C. Schelling formalized deterrence and the elect of nuclear weapons in terms of game theory, a field of economics which attempts to model strategic interactions between states in terms of mathematical models. His two books, *The Strategy of Conflict* and *Arms and Influence*, are still heavily cited in political science work today for the insights they provide on conflict and cooperation. Game theory heavily relies on the notion of rationality and credibility. See Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p.116.

⁶ Ming Shih Shen, "The Korean Peninsula Bombardment and North Korea Power Succession," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 68, December 2010, pp.16-19.

⁷ Ming Shih Shen, "The Situation and Development of North Korea' Brinkmanship by Nuclear Test," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 19, November 2006, p.17.

2007,⁸ there was a hope that Pyongyang was to close its nuclear reactors and go through the monitoring mechanism of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Despite the public announcement and warm expectation, things have become even more complicated and any possible solution was eventually found to no avail, for Pyongyang changed the tone, asking to have a bilateral approach to the US before giving up its entire nuke plans.⁹

The stalemate went on during the Obama administration. Given President Obama was keen to promote a strategic rebalancing policy in Asia, where military cooperation was underlined, the issues of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula were again forcefully and starkly placed on the table.¹⁰ Pyongyang, however, was not willing to back down. Contextual factors at that stage indicated that with tensions between Seoul and Pyongyang on the rise, the Chinese influence subsequently amplified. Pyongyang knew the delicate equation of power too well. It launched the harshest criticisms on the South Korea-US alliance and rounds of joint military exercises that had been held.¹¹

Under this circumstance, the sanctions that the Obama administration set to North Korea proved ineffective. They failed in preventing North Korea from developing nuclear weapons at the end of the day. When a dozen of nuclear warhead is proven in the hands of North Korea, the prospect for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula is increasingly remote in the eyes of international society.¹² The situation on the Peninsula was filled with uncertainties. On the one hand, President Trump was known to have

⁸ Jim Yardley, "North Korea to Close Reactor in Exchange for Aid," *New York Times*, February 13, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/13/world/asia/13cnd-korea.html>.

⁹ Ming Shih Shen, "The Implication and Influence of Hill's Trip to North Korea," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 27, July 2007, pp.30-33.

¹⁰ Ming Lee, "Obama's Peninsula Policy (2009-2012)," *Perspective Foundation*, Vol. 14, No. 2, April 2014, pp.1-52.

¹¹ De Hai Liou, "The Peninsula New Situation after the Obama Administration Started: North Korea Perspective," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 48, April 2009, pp.14-17.

¹² David Brunnstrom, "North Korea May Have Made More Nuclear Bombs, But Threat Reduced: Study," *Reuters*, February 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-nuclear-study/north-korea-may-have-made-more-nuclear-bombs-but-threat-reduced-study-idUSKCN1Q10EL>.

a military plan as a final resort to root out the potential threats from North Korea's nuclear stockpiles. On the other hand, Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea, after reviving the Sun shine Policy, was keen to have direct talks with his counterpart in the North with a view to deescalating tensions across the Korean Peninsula. To President Moon, the North-South coalition team as one unit to compete in the 2018 Winter Olympics, was quite suggestive.

In retrospect, it has become obvious that Pyongyang was trying to settle the disputes via a bilateral route with the US. It is Washington, the driving force, to decide whether to impose further sanctions against North Korea or just lift them. However, although the agenda for a peaceful settlement of the nuclear dispute was brought forward in the wake of the Panmunjom meeting, if core interests are not guaranteed, how North Korea carries out de-nuclearization remains the key to eventual settlement of nuclear disputes in the Peninsula. Uncertainties linger between Pyongyang's habitual practice of brinkmanship and its intention to trigger overt conflicts.

U.S. President Joe Biden described his North Korea policy in his speech to a joint session of Congress marking his first hundred days in office, as a combination of "diplomacy, as well as stern deterrence." He tried to adopt the classic middle ground policy option of a "calibrated, practical approach"—framed between former Presidents Barack Obama's "strategic patience" and Donald Trump's "grand bargain."¹³In fact, Biden's policy on the Korean Peninsula is like Trump's handling of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Based on US interests, Biden must continue such a legacy.

¹³ Scott A. Snyder, "Biden's Policy Review Leaves North Korea Challenge in Limbo," Council of Foreign Affairs, May 19, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/bidens-policy-review-leaves-north-korea-challenge-limbo>.

II. Trump's Legacy: Three Summit Talks between US and DPNK

A. The Singapore Summit, 2018

It is commonly agreed that, with a series of setbacks and intentional escalation by North Korea, the year 2016 witnessed the Seoul-Pyongyang relations falling to their lowest since the end of the Korean War. Within months of each other, North Korea carried out five rounds of nuke tests. Kim Jong-un's menacing remarks that North Korea could fire missiles into Guam dramatically alerted the US, which also reacted with military plans to address the threats from North Korea.¹⁴ To prepare for the unexpected, the US sent four Carrier Battle Groups (CBG) into Northeast Asia with special task forces mobilized in California, readied for power projection into the Korean Peninsula. Military options included uprooting Pyongyang's nuclear assets by surgical strikes and launching decapitation operations aimed at Kim Jong-un.¹⁵ In parallel, President Moon Jae-in, who had just come into office, began the New Northern Policy, as a substitute for the previous confrontational line that had been taken by former President Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye.¹⁶

North Korea softened its hardline and goodwill across the two Koreas re-emerged perhaps due to Washington's intransigence and Seoul's new policy. The two sides of the Peninsula joined hands in the Winter Olympics held in Pyeongchang in January 2018, when Kim Yo-jong, Kim Jong-un's younger sister, took part in the opening ceremony—a symbol of

¹⁴ Alex Ward, "Exclusive: Trump Promised Kim Jong Un, He'd Sign an Agreement to End the Korean War," *VOX*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/8/29/17795452/trump-north-korea-war-summit-singapore-promise>.

¹⁵ "America Has Military Options for North Korea," *National Interest*, January 4, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-has-military-options-north-korea-theyre-all-bad-23940>.

¹⁶ Rick Noack and Joyce Lee, "The Historic Kim-Moon Meeting as it Unfolded," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/27/the-historic-kim-moon-meeting-as-it-unfolded/>.

icebreaking.¹⁷ Together with the following meeting held between the two leaders from Seoul and Pyongyang at Panmunjom in April 2018, it may be not farfetched for this paper to say that the basic interactive mode of the two Koreas had already been set. However, US participation and as guarantor remain the bedrock of conflict resolutions to the dispute. Ultimately, North Korea is seeking a bilateral talk with the US, which Pyongyang views as the final troubleshooter of the entire issue.

In June 2018, the Trump-Kim Summit held in Singapore caught the eye of international society. It became the focus of the media not only because it was the first round of summits between the US and North Korea but the public expectation was that it more or less soft-pedalled the nuclear disputes, opening a window of opportunity to end the hostility on the Peninsula.¹⁸ Why in Singapore? Singapore was asked to be the host of the historic meeting because it's one of the few countries with diplomatic relations with both the United States and North Korea, a White House official told CNBC.¹⁹

In actuality and with malice towards none, goodwill was indeed exchanged and there was positive coverage widely across the international news media. The meeting ended with a joint statement that was substantiated by four points as follows.²⁰

¹⁷ "Pyeongchang 2018: North and South Korea to March under 'Unification Flag' at Winter Olympics," *ABC*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-18/pyeongchang-north-and-south-korea-agree-to-joint-team/9338032>.

¹⁸ Kate Lyons, Matthew Weaver and Benjamin Haas, "Singapore Summit: What We Learned from the Trump-Kim Meeting," *The Guardian*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/12/singapore-meeting-what-we-know-so-far>.

¹⁹ Yen Nee Lee, "White House Explains Why It Chose Singapore to Host Summit with North Korea," *CNBC*, June 8, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/08/why-trump-and-kim-picked-singapore-for-meeting.html>.

²⁰ White House, "Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit," June 12, 2018, White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/>.

1. Washington and Pyongyang promised to build new relations to suit the hopes of the people of the two countries for peace and prosperity.
2. Washington and Pyongyang would make joint effort to build sustainable and stable peace regimes in the Korean Peninsula.
3. Pyongyang promised to abide by the *Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula* publicized on April 27, 2018,²¹ making effort to ward ultimate status of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.
4. The US and North Korea promised to continue the effort of identifying the remains of prisoners of war (POWs) and return those having been identified.

Looking into the contents, we can infer that the former two points are symbolic with a shared objective at most. In other words, what was forced upon Pyongyang to perform and observe were the promises of returning POW remains. There have been no substantial moves in terms of the progress of de-nuclearization. The shared security concern and public alert in this region still lingers. If there is any relief that can be taken, this would refer to North Korea not eating its words as far as our observation goes. On the other hand, in the words of President Trump, first, Kim Jong-un promised to tear down engine test stands of missiles; second, US sanctions against North Korea would stay awhile; and third, the US would suspend its joint military exercise with South Korea, and the US military, as Trump said, would be looking forward to an eventual withdrawal from South Korea.²²

Although what President Trump publicized to the mass media was not in print in the joint statement, we noticed that Washington did suspend grand military exercises, limiting the scale of military signature to command

²¹ "Korea and DPRK Summit Panmunjom Statement," *Yonhap News Agency*, April 27, 2018, <https://cn.yna.co.kr/view/ACK20180427010100881>.

²² "Trump Orders Pentagon Consider Reducing US Forces in South Korea," *New York Times*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/.../trump-troops-south-korea.html>.

post exercises (CPXs). President Trump insisted that it would not be until a complete nuclear-free North Korea would Washington lift sanctions against North Korea. However, due to its lack of substance, the summit held in Singapore left the prospect for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula with a flimsy foundation. This paper hastens to add that it is a good start to have had a talk between the two top leaders. The challenge for the next phase, as could be anticipated, would be whether Washington remained firm on its position over the issue of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and whether Pyongyang would renege on its promises. These uncertainties turned out to be even more elusive when bilateral exchanges between Washington and Pyongyang became more complicated the talk's moved into the next stage in Hanoi.

B. The Hanoi Summit, 2019

The contents of joint statement publicized after the Singapore Summit in 2018 aroused waves of expectations from international society. Nevertheless, due to Pyongyang's hesitant effort of de-nuclearization that was not fully up to the US expectation as well as no substantial proof that North Korea had slowed its step towards nuke development, the US was still unwilling to lift sanctions against Pyongyang, nor realize of an instant calling off of military exercises. Security concern remained for South Korea after the Singapore Summit. Despite an accumulated goodwill, it was insufficient to reduce the suspicion, let alone settlement of the dispute. Given the burning need to sustain the dialogue and continue the negotiation, the second round of summits between Trump and Kim Jong-un was therefore scheduled.

This time Hanoi was chosen, as it was reported that Kim could avoid flight risks by taking trains via the Chinese mainland into Vietnam, and avoid a need to use a charter plane from Beijing as had been done for the first round of the summits in Singapore.²³ Another reason was Vietnam is one of the few communist states that survived through the end of the Cold War in the early 1990, Vietnam (alongside with China) is a rare case in which rapid economic growth did not lead to the collapse of the one-party political system. Thus, it

²³ Olivia Enos, "The US and North Korea: Lessons from Hanoi," *The Diplomat*, April 01, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/the-us-and-north-korea-lessons-from-hanoi/>.

seemed clear that Kim wanted to replicate the steps made by Vietnam during the 1980s in escaping from political isolation by being “a friend and reliable partner of all countries in the international community,” and achieving unprecedented growth by abandoning the centralized model of economic development.²⁴

Unfortunately, despite Trump's keenness to conclude a substantial result suggestive of a future nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, the outcomes of the second summit in Hanoi proved disappointing. As was made public to observers on the international front. North Korea this time demanded the US to, at least partially, lift the sanctions on 5 items listed on the UN resolutions. According to Pyongyang, these 5 items were only science and technology related to people's livelihood. Preconditioned on this, North Korea claimed that Pyongyang was willing to tear down all the nuclear facilities in Nyongbyon under the joint surveillance of the international experts but could not go further with a completely nuclear-free North Korea.²⁵ It became apparent at this stage of the talk that North Korea offered the nuclear facilities in Nyongbyon as a bargaining chip in exchange for partial sanctions.

Nevertheless, partial lifts of the sanctions cannot produce effects as traumatic as they are supposed to be and, North Korea was calculating in its process of negotiation. Trump undoubtedly understood Kim's tricks well and would not agree for the former grew up as a businessman. Trump was emphatic of his determination that sanctions would not be lifted until the day we see a nuclear-free North Korea. For Trump, the very reason for Pyongyang to accept talks lay in the two-prong pressure—military threat and economic sanctions.²⁶ Economic sanctions take time and call for international cooperation to bring about the desirable effect. Partial lift of the sanctions or

²⁴ Viet Phuong Nguyen, “Trump-Kim 2: Why Hanoi?” *The Diplomat*, February 15, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/trump-kim-2-why-hanoi/>.

²⁵ Jer Shin Sun, “Why Trump and Kim Hanoi Summit Failed?” *BBC*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/world-47422155>.

²⁶ Alex Ward, “At the Vietnam Summit, Trump Has A Chance to Prove Everyone Wrong on North Korea,” *VOX*, Feb 26, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/world/2019/2/26/18239694/trump-north-korea-kim-jong-un-vietnam-summit>.

frequent military re-deployment will offset the overall effect of sanctions and pressure on North Korea.²⁷

One of the reasons for the lack of tangible outcome in the Hanoi Summit lies in the different cognition towards the blueprint of a nuclear-free North Korea between the US and North Korea. Although North Korea promised to make effort toward denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula during the Singapore Summit, there has been so far no course of action and working objectives, all of which were subject to subsequent negotiations held in the future. In this cognitive dissonance, North Korea boasted the effort it had made and the fruits it had reaped, whereas the US complained that North Korea did nothing but surrender those non-functional nuclear facilities in Nyongbyon. While the US was also suspicious that North Korea might rebuild its nuclear facilities at other locations or reactivate its nukes covertly, it would be impossible for the US to consider a lift of sanctions.²⁸ With a demand for partial sanctions having been rejected, Kim Jong-un was also disappointed at the Hanoi Summit, for a partial lift was what Kim badly needed. Kim obviously looked for something that in a timely manner address the increasingly isolated economic situation on his domestic front. In a fog of rage, Kim reshuffled the entire high-ranking representatives in the nuclear talks.²⁹ It was also known that Kim sought supports from Beijing and Moscow without positive responses.³⁰ Ultimately, Pyongyang has to be aware of the cognitive dissonance between the US and North Korea. It also has to take actions rather than paying lip service.³¹

²⁷ Sue Mi Terry, "Assessment of the Trump-Kim Hanoi Summit," CSIS, February 28, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessment-trump-kim-hanoi-summit>.

²⁸ Jer Shin Sun, "Why Trump and Kim Hanoi Summit Failed?" *BBC*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/world-47422155>.

²⁹ Choe Sang-Hun, "The Huge Purged after the Hanoi Summit? Korea Media Reported Kim Executed Many Officers," *New York Times*, May 31, 2019, <https://cn.nytimes.com/asia-pacific/20190531/north-korea-envoy-execution/zh-hant/>.

³⁰ "North Korea's Kim Heads to Russia to Revive old Friendship," *Japanese Times*, April 22, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/22/asia-pacific/north-koreas-kim-heads-russia-revive-old-friendship/#.XSrnKh-Wcw>.

³¹ Simon Denyer, "The US Wants North Korea to Follow, the 'Miracle' of Vietnam's Path, It Might Be Disappointed," *Washington Post*, February 24, 2019,

C. The DMZ Summit, June 2019

Building domestic consensus and winning international confidence become two signposts for the previous two rounds of summit talks. As the issue in point is fundamentally related to the national interests of the United States and North Korea, when the talks evolve into core areas of the bargaining, any significant switches will be encountered with domestic suspicions and there cannot be any quick magic tricks. Worse still was the unhappy ending of the second summit in Hanoi, to the extent that there had not been any deal regarding the time and place for a subsequent meeting. To balance President Xi Jinping's visit to North Korea earlier, Trump sought to have a breakthrough by taking the opportunity from the G20 Osaka Summit, July 2019.³² This could be a welcome move.

To Xi Jinping and as the structure and process proved, Beijing stood as a relatively disadvantaged place in the US-Chinese trade dispute. In other words, to back down from the trade dispute could ease the tension with the US and rescue the economies —only to leave a soft belly ready to be attached by the disgruntled and suspicious opposition inside the Communist Party.³³ Given the relatively weaker bargaining position, it was to Xi's interest that along with partial compromise on the Chinese side, a docile North Korea subject to Beijing in the Washington-Pyongyang talks could deal Xi Jinping a better hand. Likewise, it was also sensible for President Trump to have a direct talk with Xi on the summit, seeking to strike a constructive deal over the issues of US-China trade and the Korean Peninsula so that there could be

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/the-us-wants-north-korea-to-follow-the-miracle-of-vietnams-path-it-might-be-disappointed/2019/02/24/be77f83c-352c-11e9-8375-e3dcf6b68558_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ad9496393681.

³² Grace Liu, "Another North Korean Provocation Ahead of the G20 Summit? Don't Count on It," *The Diplomat*, June 26, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/another-north-korean-provocation-ahead-of-the-g20-summit-dont-count-on-it/>.

³³ Soo W. Kim, "US Economic War on China Weakens Nuclear North Korea, Too," *Rand*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/10/us-economic-war-on-china-weakens-nuclear-north-korea.html>.

some visible credit to boost Trump's re-election campaign.³⁴

The above interpretation coming from public opinion on the international front that Beijing could possibly play a “North Korea card” in exchange for President Trump's goodwill was evidenced in June 2019, when President Xi paid a visit to North Korea, which triggered the attention of many analysts and mass media.³⁵ President Xi made it clear that “Beijing supports the process for political settlement of the issues on the Korean Peninsula, a process that accumulates a basis and constructs conditions for a final resolution”, and that “Beijing is willing to provide affordable assistance to security and development sensible to Pyongyang's own interests”. With these, Beijing came out as a good officer before the eyes of the world. It forced Pyongyang back to the negotiation table with the US,³⁶ yet remained detached from the role of a guarantor—and even the mover and shaker—for the prospect of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.³⁷

As anticipated, in the wake of President Xi's state visit to Pyongyang, the autograph request letters were exchanged between leaders from Washington and Pyongyang and both declared their willingness to have the third round summit, this time at Panmunjom.³⁸ In Panmunjom it was

³⁴ “The Historical Meeting Between US and North Korea Would Not Be a Show Only,” *Central Daily*(Seoul), July 1, 2019, https://chinese.joins.com/big5/article.aspx?art_id=190799.

³⁵ Faras Ghani, “Trump-Kim Summit: Will Two Leaders Meet for Third Round of Talks?” *Aljazeera*, September 6, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/trump-kim-summit-leaders-meet-talks-190905111656760.html>.

³⁶ Justin McCurry and Agencies, “Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un Reboot Alliance with Talks and Mausoleum Visit,” *The Guardian*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/20/xi-jinping-north-korea-kim-jong-un-nuclear-trump-talks-g20>.

³⁷ Liou Shen Jr and Cheng Yu Ju, “Xi Jinping: China Would Provide Help to DPNK for Security Problem Resolved,” *Central Daily*(Seoul), June 21, 2019, https://chinese.joins.com/big5/article.aspx?art_id=190540.

³⁸ Lee Cheng Un, “US: Nuclear Frozen Begin Not the Final End,” *Donga Daily*(Seoul), July 11, 2019, <http://www.donga.com/tw/article/all/20190711/1786536/1/%E7%BE%8E%E5%9C%8B%EF%BC%9A-%E6%A0%B8%E5%87%8D%E7%B5%90%E6%98%AF%E9%96%8B%E5%A7%8B%EF%BC%8C%E8%80%8C%E4%B8%8D%E6%98%AF%E6%9C%80>

an historic photo opportunity for Trump, when he crossed the demarcation line in the demilitarized zone to meet Kim, becoming the first-ever sitting US president to set foot on North Korean territory. He also confirmed his personal commitment to the negotiations, believing that direct talks between leaders can lead to stabilization of the Korean Peninsula. For Kim, meeting in Panmunjom with a US president on North Korea's own territory strengthened his position as the leader of the nuclear state and an equal partner of the United States.³⁹

The meeting was meant to be dramatic. Trump came out from Freedom House in the territory of South Korea towards the 38th parallel, where he waited for Kim, who trotted down from Panmungak, the symbolic building for North Korea in the Joint Security Area (JSA). The two then walked each other towards the southern territory, where Moon Jae-in stood as the host. This was followed by a one-hour closed door meeting, a process that significantly represented the breakthrough of the North Korean-US relations.⁴⁰ As President Trump became the first incumbent president of the United States that entered the territory of North Korea,⁴¹ the Panmunjom Summit was widely taken as having signaled more to the outside world than the Singapore Summit did.⁴²

According to the description made by President Moon Jae-in in the press conference, a consensus was made that Trump and Kim would have a fourth

<https://www.france24.com/en/20190629-trump-proposes-third-meeting-with-north-koreas-kim>.

³⁹ "Kim-Trump Meet in Panmunjom," July 2, 2019, PISM,

https://pism.pl/publications/KimTrump_Meet_in_Panmunjom_.

⁴⁰ Ankit Panda, "US-North Korea Doldrums Return After Third Trump-Kim Summit," *The Diplomat*, July 17, 2019,

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/us-north-korea-doldrums-return-after-third-trump-kim-summit/>.

⁴¹ Steve Holland, Joyce Lee, "Trump Asks What a Third North Korean Summit Would Yield," *Reuters*, September 24, 2019,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-southkorea/trump-asks-what-a-third-north-korean-summit-would-yield-idUSKBN1W82PZ>.

⁴² "Trump proposes third meeting with North Korea's Kim," *France 24*, 29 June, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190629-trump-proposes-third-meeting-with-north-koreas-kim>.

summit with details to be discussed.⁴³ It was a relief to the international society that, rather than being caught by the stalemate in the negotiating process towards the goals of denuclearization, Trump and Kim did manage to sustain what had been achieved from the previous two summits.⁴⁴ The international society also greeted the effort of dialogue that, despite no concrete results so far as a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula is concerned, it helped reduce domestic suspicions inside the US, South Korea and North Korea.

Rumors abounded before the Panmunjom Summit. It was reported that Xi planned to take the occasion of the 2019 G20 Osaka Summit and to have a bilateral talk with Trump, to be followed by a state trip to North Korea. It was also said that Washington intended to spread the news that US arms sales to Taiwan would be factored into a successful G20 Osaka Summit, which was badly needed by the international community. The facts speak for themselves, though. Washington in July 2019, the same month, announced its decision to sell main battle tanks to Taiwan. It was a clear indication that the US was not going to jeopardize Taiwan's national interests in a bid to get an upper hand in the trade war, or to encourage Beijing to play broker to the Panmunjom Summit.⁴⁵ Trump's baseline in the negotiation was simple and clear-cut: lessons learned and experience accumulated have taught the US that it would not believe Pyongyang's claim before North Korea takes effective course of action to fulfil denuclearization. Attached below is the table to show the contrast of the three summits.

⁴³ Glyn Ford, "A Third US-North Korea Summit Is the Last Best Chance for Resolving Nuclear Crisis," *South China Morning Post*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/3010062/third-us-north-korea-summit-last-best-chance-resolving>.

⁴⁴ "The Historical Meeting Between US and North Korea Would Not Be a Show Only," *Central Daily* (Seoul), July 1, 2019, https://chinese.joins.com/big5/article.aspx?art_id=190799.

⁴⁵ Franz-Stefan Gady, "US Administration Accused of Delaying F-16 Fighter Jets Sale to Taiwan," *The Diplomat*, July 31, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/us-administration-accused-of-delaying-f-16-fighter-jets-sale-to-taiwan/>.

**Table 1: Summary of the Trump-Kim Talks
(Compiled by the Researcher)**

Year/ Month	Location	Outcome	Notes
2018/June	Singapore	Four Points as Consensus	No Course of Action Mentioned
2019/February	Hanoi	Unhappy Departure	US Complaints About North Korea's Do-nothing; Pyongyang's Suggested Partial Sanction Rejected
2019/June	Panmunjom	Triangular Meeting Among the US, the South and North Korea	Declarative Notes in the Dialogue Without Substantial Contents

III. Prospects for a Nuclear-free Korean Peninsula after Trump Administration

After observing the processes and summarizing the contents of the three Summits mentioned above, it can be said that the unhappy ending of the Hanoi Summit has to be attributed to discrepancy over the goal between a lift of sanctions and denuclearization. To begin with, it is commonly agreed that no armistice signed to end the military hostility across the Korean Peninsula has long been the root of regional concern. In this context, when North Korea backed down from its bargaining line (even only verbally) but without anticipated utilities in return, it made sense for North Korea, from its point of view, to re-escalate the crisis ladder.⁴⁶

Owing to Trump's reckless suggestion that the US plan a withdrawal of US troops and re-deployments, the defense ministries of the US and South Korea came forward with the decisions that two US-South Korean joint

⁴⁶ Atsuhito Isozaki, "Why Kim Jong Un Has Turned to 'Tributary Diplomacy'," *The Diplomat*, January 23, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/why-kim-jong-un-has-turned-to-tributary-diplomacy/>.

military exercises nicknamed *Key Resolve* and *Foal Eagle* would be replaced by *Dong Maeng*, a smaller scale joint military exercise, and other training projects.⁴⁷ The Pentagon's response was quite suggestive. Although there is room for advancement in sorting out the details and reaching a consensus between the US and North Korea over the issues of denuclearization as well as ending the status of hostility, the effort towards lowering the tension on the Korean Peninsula, generally speaking, remains the underlying trend. However, with recent several rounds of short-range missile tests, uncertainties are still there. The regional states cannot be sure whether North Korea will play the old tricks, banking on the brinkmanship. Or, again attempt to escalate the crisis ladder, seeking more bargaining chips in hand.⁴⁸

Pyongyang had its plan in hand. Had Pyongyang gained the US confidence at the Hanoi Summit, it could have signed an international treaty to end the current status of hostility on the Korean Peninsula, which would have had UN to lift the sanction against North Korea. In other words, if North Korea had concluded an agreement with the US before Pyongyang put into practice its promises on denuclearization, Kim could have easily been ridded of economic sanctions on North Korea from the international community. With this, Kim could have enjoyed multiple returns including a firmer basis for his authority, and a better opportunity for economic recovery. It was obvious that Kim was thirsty for these kinds of results.

However, Pyongyang's plan proved wishful thinking. The US went through rounds of Pyongyang's stalling and insincerity.⁴⁹ The Trump administration was not amenable to North Korea and continued its concrete course of action over the issue of denuclearization, rather than lifting any

⁴⁷ Ji Daryum, "South Korea, US Begin Scaled-down Joint Military Exercises," *NK NEWS*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nknews.org/2019/08/south-korea-u-s-begin-scaled-down-joint-military-exercises/>.

⁴⁸ Ankit Panda & Viping Narang, "Why North Korea Testing Missiles Again," *Foreign Affairs*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2019-05-16/why-north-korea-testing-missiles-again>.

⁴⁹ Ming Shih Shen, "The Strategic Implication of North Korea Continued Military Action," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 51, July 2009, pp.19-24.

sanctions. Any promise by the US side to sign a treaty without taking Pyongyang's behaviour into account would not only prove that the US failed in winning anything back in the game, but also pave the way for a disaster in foreign policy. It is therefore quite natural to see a typical Trump cut short the talks in Hanoi and leave disgruntled when there could not be any substantial agreements, particularly when the US knew Pyongyang's ongoing effort of developing nuclear weapons in secret, and its refusal to hand in nuclear warheads. Without escalating military pressure on the US side then, Trump's dramatic departure from the Hanoi Summit can be read as a constructive move. It actually set a healthy foundation for the next summit round.

An empty-handed North Korea was then left with nothing, except to purposefully escalate the tension across the Korean Peninsula. It tested fire unknown missiles or exhibited bulky weaponry to provoke the US and South Korea. It reproached South Korea, demanding Seoul to say good-bye to US policy, and sought to destabilize the South Korean-US alliance.⁵⁰ This kind of violent response embarrassed South Korea more. On the one hand, if neither the US nor North Korea refused to concede their positions or to sign a treaty before a concrete compromise was in place to carry out denuclearization, the potential threat of the Korean Peninsula would be lingered on. That North Korea reacted with a test firing missile was most disappointing to South Korea. It indicated nothing but the potential risks and Seoul's continual policy failure in de-escalating the conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

Ultimately, there has been a significant degree of unspoken consensus between the US and the two Koreas that they need to work out a de facto peace and prevent military clashes. What discriminates their positions lie in the preconditions to lift the sanctions and courses of action. To President Moon Jae-in, the purpose of South Korea in the Panmunjom Summit was both to have North Korea as a stakeholder and encourage the US to stay vested in a peace agenda. President Moon was clearly of the view that, as long as there were mutual engagements, Kim Jong-un would find no easy

⁵⁰ "North Korea's Dangerous Provocation Tests US and South Korea's Patience," *Central Daily* (Seoul), May 13, 2019, https://chinese.joins.com/big5/article.aspx?art_id=189539&category=002005.

excuse to test fire missiles or secretly develop nukes, which in turn would add credit to Moon Jae-in's policy towards North Korea.

A conclusion from the three summits between Trump and Kim Jong-un is that the biggest difference between the two countries is the "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." Kim Jong-un asked the United States to abandon its nuclear umbrella toward South Korea, as a prerequisite for North Korea's denuclearization, which is difficult for the United States to accept. However, after the Biden administration finally announced its North Korea policy, the denuclearization policy, which was difficult to achieve, became the main axis of the Biden administration's policy towards North Korea.

To Pyongyang, it means that it is willing to dismantle its nuclear program if and only if South Korea also denuclearizes. But South Korea doesn't have any nuclear weapons. What it does have is what's called the US "nuclear umbrella." That basically means that the US promises to defend South Korea from the North — up to and including with the use of US nuclear weapons.⁵¹

For the US, the denuclearization policy means Pyongyang is the only one that must make nuclear concessions. It's a final goal that would see North Korea give up all of its nuclear weapons while South Korea is still under US nuclear protection. US will not agree to withdraw military strength from South Korea.

It is possible that the Biden administration will adopt a policy of welcoming Kim Jong-un's proposition, to bring North Korea back to the negotiations, and then gradually restart negotiations with North Korea after obtaining the understanding of the allies. In fact, such a policy may let North Korea to gain breathing space, continue to insist on possessing nuclear weapons, and even expand its development.

⁵¹ Soo Kim, "Biden's North Korea Plans Come into View," *Interpreter*, May 5, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/biden-s-north-korea-plans-come-into-view>.

IV. Trump's Legacy to Biden's Policy

A. US-ROK Defense Mechanism as a Necessary Condition for Situation and Peace in the Korean Peninsula

Frankly speaking, the past 58 years of South Korean-US joint military exercises and related military activities have witnessed impressive combat readiness of the bilateral alliance as well as a productive effect to deter military aggressions from the North. This explains partially why the US decided to gradually withdraw its force from Seoul and after re-deploying the US contingency array, South Korea followed by reducing its force structure and cutting its force sourcing.⁵² North. This explains partially why the US decided to gradually withdraw its force from Seoul and after re-deploying the US contingency array, South Korea followed by reducing its force structure and cutting its force sourcing.

Suspension of military exercises can be seen as a signal to North Korea. The move is to highlight the intent on the side of the US and South Korea in their pursuit of peace for the Korean Peninsula. With this signal ahead, North Korea can be assured of negotiation space to continue with talks, and not leave the table merely because there has not been a treaty to ink. On the other hand, to further motivate the effort of de-nuclearization, President Trump's public declaration not to have South-Korean-US joint military exercises triggered one major concern voiced by some experts was that the US hegemonic influence might erode. In response to this concern, there is also the argument that judging from relative US capabilities, the US still can fill in the vacuum by re-starting a military exercise at any time whether Pentagon is calling a halt of military activities in this region or not.⁵³

⁵² Michael R. Gordon and Gordon Lubold, "Trump Administration Weighs Troop Cut in South Korea," *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-administration-weighs-troop-cut-in-south-korea-11595005050>.

⁵³ "Peninsula Situation and Development after the Trump-Kim Meeting and the Implication to the US-China Strategic Arrangement," *Asia-Pacific Peace Research Policy Report*, No. 107005, July 2018, p. XII.

Admittedly, the mechanism of defense cooperation between the US and South Korea is still in place. Excluding field exercises, the two actors, as some experts argue, can opt for war games and command-post exercise to assess and practice the contingency plans against any eruption of clashes.⁵⁴ Having noted this, other experts express the concern of the force readiness elevated at the former stage may sound a transition within a snap of finger without realizing that defense mechanism could deteriorated as time goes by. The issue here, then, is not whether the South Korean-US cooperative mechanism can resume the operation at the previous stage. Rather, it is more to do with the opportunity cost that may be too high to recover. In other words, once North Korea continues with its old tricks, i.e., brinkmanship, the US will be forced back to its same response—the coercive approach by staging joint military exercises in the field but with an even more serious security dilemma ahead.⁵⁵ Traces of Pyongyang's tricks are not difficult to find in history. North Korea intended to have a stall in exchange for its breathing space during the Six-Party talks.⁵⁶ When Washington switched its attention onto other regional issues as time went by, it proved that North Korea succeeded in its stalling tactic as a coping measure to the pressing demand of denuclearization.

B. Domestic Uncertainty as a Key Factor in Peninsula Stability

When the news of the abrupt end to the Hanoi Summit spread across the region, North Korea muddled through the reports, whereas people inside North Korea secretly voiced the concern that it shook the confidence in Kim's regime and its sustainability. There was also news coverage in South Korea that political elites inside North Korea smuggled cash in hand to the Chinese mainland, as possibly an act of emergency. This was followed by a

⁵⁴ "US, S. Korea to Replace Spring Exercises with Smaller Drills: Officials," *Reuters*, March 2, 2019,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-southkorea-military/us-skorea-to-replace-spring-exercises-with-smaller-drills-officials-idUSKCN1QI5FO>.

⁵⁵ Yeh Chung Lu, "The Security Dilemma in the Korean Peninsula-In the Aftermath of the 2010 Cheonan Incident," *Perspective Foundation*, Vol.16, No. 1, January 2015, pp.143-184.

⁵⁶ Ming Shih Shen, "Six Party Talks and Northeast Security," in Wong, Ming-hsien, Chunqi Jiang, Wu, Jian-De, eds, *International Relations*, (Taipei: Wunan Press, 2006), pp.475-490.

deficit in foreign reserves as a result of US sanction on coal exports. When Kim was caught by a shortage of financial resources, his relations with the military became fragile and his leadership, faltering. As a matter of fact, discords happened between Kim and military hardliners inside the regime in the process of denuclearization.⁵⁷ Pyongyang shooting short-range missiles and the US intercepting a DPRK-registered cargo vessel would be events that should be factored into the forthcoming agenda of negotiations as well as the contents of agreements. They will contribute not only to the incessant tension in the Korean Peninsula, but also the potential clashes between factions and hardliners inside North Korea.

President Trump made it clear the US will not hasten the negotiation process on the issue of denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula. This gives us a “let-it-be” impression. When Biden took office, one thing was sure: no matter who was US president, little space can be expanded in US foreign policy towards North Korea. The domestic situation inside North Korea on the other hand can be destabilizing, for Kim is badly in need of an early lift of sanctions, without which there will be fewer opportunities to see fruitful outcomes from his five-year (2016-2020) strategic plan for state economic development.⁵⁸ That said, if the domestic situation in North Korea worsens, Kim will blunt his leadership effectiveness inside the regime.

C. Seeking a Potential Linkage to Enhance Strategic Advantages

Initially, President Trump deliberately intended to have a complete settlement of the nuclear concern on the Korean Peninsula by means of US-DPRK negotiation. A nomination and even a win of the Nobel Peace Prize could have contributed to his re-election -- a blueprint aborted by North Korea's tricks at the table. It is therefore not farfetched to anticipate that the

⁵⁷ Lee Jeong-ho, “North Korea’s Kim Felt ‘Very Close’ to The South’s Moon at Summit in Pyongyang,” *South China Morning Post*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/2164700/moon-and-kim-begin-landmark-summit-after-limousine-ride-through>.

⁵⁸ “Korea Should Quit the Discussion about the Nuclear Issues: Should Cut Down the Frozen Deal by US-Korea Cooperation,” *Donga Daily* (Seoul), July 6, 2019, <http://www.donga.com/tw/List/article/all/20190706/1782126/1/>.

US will not back down on Pyongyang's identifiable promise to surrender its nuclear activities and terminate its military coercion. The US will step up its effort of cooperation and coordination to reinforce the US-ROK alliance. Also, in the midst of US suspicion about Beijing and Pyongyang's joint countermeasures against the regional effort of denuclearization, by no means will the US back away from the UN sanctions against North Korea, especially when the latter dithers about the supposed steps towards denuclearization. Furthermore, if Washington's suspicion about Beijing's constructive role in encouraging a naughty Pyongyang becomes writ larger, the Sino-US strategic confrontation will continue, and North Korea will enter into the strategic equation in the grand plan of balancing China.

In the context of Sino-US trade dispute, it is impossible for China to prompt North Korea that there is no need to do anything but to pay lip service on the issue of de-nuclearization or even challenge the US before Washington's very nose.⁵⁹ Beijing's strategic move, if any, is to assist North Korea, behind the close doors, in finances, economy, energy and food out of the concern that North Korea may collapse itself. In other words, if Beijing intends to intervene, it should act as a supporter behind North Korea in the engagement process of the two Koreas. If Beijing seeks to add bargaining chips for Kim in his deal with the US, Washington will certainly broaden the linkage of the issues inclusive of the Sino-US trade dispute, conflict resolution of the Korean Peninsula and all the related issues that strengthen the US bargaining chips on the diplomatic front.

D. UN Sanctions against DPRK Allows US Greater Leeway in Managing Other Challenges

Even with a new US president, a new round of US-DPRK summit is unlikely to take place, since no substantial demands to meet were made on Pyongyang in the Hanoi Summit. Moreover, time is on this side of the US. If on the other hand the UN sanctions continue in place, Kim will have more

⁵⁹ Lee Seong-hyon, "Kim Jong-Un in Beijing: Is North Korea A Bargaining Chip in US-China Trade Talks?" *South Chinese Morning Post*, January 14, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/united-states/article/2181677/kim-jong-un-beijing-north-korea-bargaining>.

and more domestic problems and eventually may find no foreign support but Beijing and Moscow. Unlike in 2003, when North Korea and Iran were understood to have coordinated with each other when both faced international criticisms about their conduct that was equated to proliferation of nuclear weaponry.⁶⁰ Now that security issues related to Iran have re-entered the US agenda, Washington can be described as having too many irons in the fire that it is forced to re-deploy troops into the Middle East.

Under this circumstance, it may not be a stretch to say the long-standing regional concern around the Korean Peninsula has tentatively been shoved to the wayside. To put it more bluntly, as long as Pyongyang does not test fire missiles or explode its nuclear warheads, Washington's prior concern in its strategic calculation at this moment is the Sino-US trade dispute and Iran, thanks to the UN resolution to apply economic sanctions against North Korea. With this mechanism, the US is left with a leeway to cope with the Sino-US trade dispute and the trouble emerging in Iran. The sanctions can also be target-oriented, pressing North Korea one step ahead towards the negotiation table by accepting the preconditions demanded of Pyongyang. Ultimately, the criteria have already been set by Washington: Final, Fully Verified Denuclearization (FFVD) or Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Dismantlement (CVID). What the US seeks is to uproot weapons of mass destruction, not to freeze them into a static seal as Pyongyang claims.⁶¹

V. Biden's Policy Continuation

Fort the reason of Trump held three summit meetings with Kim but achieved no breakthrough other than a pause in nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests that has lasted since 2017. U.S. President Joe Biden has settled on a new approach to pressuring North Korea to give up nuclear

⁶⁰ "What Iran Is Learning from North Korea," *New York Times*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/02/podcasts/the.../north-korea-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.

⁶¹ Lee Cheng Un, "US: Nuclear Frozen Begin Not the Final End," *Donga Daily*(Seoul), July 11, 2019, <http://www.donga.com/tw/article/all/20190711/1786536/1/%E7%BE%8E%E5%9C%8B%E5%9A-%E6%A0%B8%E5%87%8D%E7%B5%90%E6%98%AF%E9%96%8B%E5%A7%8B%E5%8C%E8%80%8C%E4%B8%8D%E6%98%AF%E6%9C%80%E7%B5%82%E7%9B%AE%E6%A8%99>.

weapons and ballistic missiles that will explore diplomacy but not seek a grand bargain with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Seeing from the strategies taken by Kim, DPRK's state objectives seem to have consistently been unification of the Peninsula, rising as a regional power, and holding an independent status away from intervention by Washington and Beijing.⁶² Pyongyang's radical socialist approach to the planned economic system is not working well. To the extent of its economic recession and backward subsistence, North Korea has no option but must rely on China for economic aid, military assistance and energy supplies. While there exists a conventional brotherly affection between Beijing and Pyongyang, that does not mean that Pyongyang is happy to identify itself as a puppet regime subject to China, whose national interest points to a status quo on the Korean Peninsula, i.e., two separated Koreas.⁶³ Pyongyang, ever since President Xi's rise to power, has been increasingly assertive in its policy line. It sticks to patrimonialism in power transfers rather than political reforms. Its missile tests and nuclear development continue to be the source of regional concerns that have also kept President Xi consciously aloof.

Pyongyang's insistence on going nuclear is understandable. To be a regional power and military strength, nuclear capabilities play an important role. After six rounds of nuclear tests, North Korea has gone across necessary thresholds in the process of nuclear development. With less than a hundred nuclear warheads in hand, North Korea is well qualified as a member of the "Nuclear Club". As seen with India and Pakistan, those two countries had been sanctioned for violating the norms in developing nuclear weapons. They also continued the effort, despite the sanctions. When a new situation eventually emerged into the sub-continent, the sanctions were put to bed. This is exactly what North Korea is looking forward to, for developing nuclear warheads, as India and Pakistan showed, seems to be a game of two

⁶² Jei Guk Jeon, "North Korean Leadership: Kim Jong Il's Balancing Act in the Ruling Circle," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, Issue 5, August 2010, pp.761-779.

⁶³ Arthur Ding, "China's Response to North Korea Nuclear Test: Maintain the Korean Peninsula Splited Situation," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 19, November 2006, pp.9-12.

halves. That said, giving up nuclear capabilities or casting aside nuclear warheads will not be a ready option for North Korea.

A contrast to the India and Pakistan cases, here is that Pyongyang does not bear any expectation for economic aid from the international community. Giving up developing nuclear capabilities solely based upon fear of international sanctions will be encountered with questions such as whether the decision to quit is legitimate. On the other hand, Kim is keen to see economic development. However, Kim is hesitant to liberate the economy, for liberation of the market will bring about contradictions against the totalitarian regime. In light of these contradictions, Kim Jong-un and his party cadre will keep at nuclear capabilities. Pyongyang sees to it that its intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are as reassuring as an amulet, capable of reaching the US continent.

If the military option stays, small scale exercise and war gaming is not the problem. It is after a long period of peace time, the re-newed cost of the US-South Korea large scale joint operations will increase. As long as North Korea continues to play the brinkmanship strategy, the United States will conduct drills against the North Korea. North Korea will not take initiative and attack the US until the day when Pyongyang is mature in its military capabilities. When this day really arrives, what concerns the US most is a possibility that North Korea allies with Iran, China and Russia to boycott or counteract the US leadership in managing international affairs.

Here emerge two sets of competing interpretation over the issue of nuclear weaponry. On the one hand, the purpose of US readiness and preventive measures is to counter North Korea's effort of developing nuclear weapons and unifying South Korea. On the other hand, Pyongyang's aggressive move to develop nuclear capabilities is out of the fear that the US may retaliate against North Korea at the end of the day.⁶⁴ Judging from the dilemma featured by fear, one scholar argued that if North Korea can

⁶⁴ Evans J. R. Revere, Mataka Kamiya, "Staying in Sync on North Korea's Nuclear Program," Carnegie: Endowment for International Peace, October 10, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/10/staying-in-sync-on-north-korea-s-nuclear-program-pub-80022>.

be granted by the US with sufficient degree of security and North Korea abides by the promise of non-proliferation, the two may find their ways to eventually settle disputes over the Korean Peninsula.⁶⁵

By no means does the US have the purpose to swallow up North Korea militarily. What the US is busy at, instead, is to prevent military clashes, to ensure survival and security of South Korea, and to maintain peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. Washington is also aware that Pyongyang's military activities and brinksmanship have to be understood as expedients.⁶⁶ The ultimate purpose these of these military ventures was to exert pressure on South Korea and spread the mistrust into the South Korean-US alliance.⁶⁷ Viewed in this light, we may expect that President Moon Jae-in, who is known for his cooperative line with North Korea, can facilitate more coordination from North Korea than his predecessors Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye. We may also expect that Kim may not reiterate nationalist jargons and level criticisms at South Korean-US cooperation, as he used to. President Moon is accepted by North Korea because the Moon's administration underscores economic cooperation with its counterpart including logistical supplies and investment funds.

Looking into the near future, if North Korea feels the threat from US coercion again, Pyongyang has South Korea as leverage on US military options. In other words, even Pyongyang's effort of denuclearization, if any, has been criticized for its being slow-paced, as long as the interactive mechanism exists between the two Koreas, the US will find it hardly legitimate to escalate the crisis ladder in this region or resort to military solutions.

⁶⁵ Leon V. Sigal, "The North Korean Nuclear Crisis: Understanding the Failure of the 'Crime-and-Punishment' Strategy," Arms Control Association, May 1995, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-05/features/north-korean-nuclear-crisis-understanding-failure-crime-punishment-strategy>.

⁶⁶ Ming Shih Shen, "The Strategic Implication of North Korea Continued Military Action," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 51, July 2009, pp.19-24.

⁶⁷ Cheng Yi Lin, "North Korea Situation and The Peace of Peninsula," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 47, March 2009, pp.6-9.

The US attitude towards this issue is worth closer observation. First, South Korea in its engagement with North Korea needs security assurance and strategic support. However, President Trump seems hesitant to further invest more resources into the Korean Peninsula, let alone Trump's open remarks earlier on force withdrawal. Second, although economic aid and political integration help realize the South Korean dream of unification of the entire Peninsula, South Korea cannot achieve it without US support. South Korea will find it even harder to deal with a North Korea backed by nuclear weaponry, if the US withdrew its nuclear umbrella or extended deterrence. It is quite apparent that healthy engagement between the two Koreas needs the support of the US.⁶⁸

For North Korea, there are some baselines that can be helpful to a unification of the entire Korean Peninsula: sowing discord between the US and South Korea, maintaining some sort of military capabilities that force the US to have a second thought whenever Washington threatens to act, and keeping its military strength tremendously superior to that of the South Korea. For South Korea, under the circumstance of a fairly stable South Korean-US relations, North Korea will find its strategic goal—to annex South Korea—a castle in the air. Looking into the future, unless North Korea falls into a distressful situation, a promising prospect of denuclearization calls for more dialogues and detailed haggling.

As long as North Korea does not directly threaten the US by missile test and nuclear weapons, the critical issue for Washington is still the US-China trade war and Iran. To increase economic sanctions pressure on North Korea may force this hungry and poor state to accept the premise and return to the negotiating table. However, given the vicissitude of North Korea-US relations and Pyongyang as a totalitarian regime in nature, a voice full of reproach or an outbreak of hostility will still be on the bargaining list.

⁶⁸ Ming Shih Shen, "The Situation and Development of North Korea's Brinkmanship by Nuclear Test," *Journals of Strategic and Security Analyses*, No. 19, November 2006, pp.17-20.

Biden administration will pursue a “calibrated practical approach that is open to and will explore diplomacy with” North Korea and making “practical progress” that increases the security of the United States and its allies. The United States had consulted with South Korea throughout the policy review process and Washington had informed Seoul of its conclusions in advance. The Biden administration has simultaneously signaled a hard line on human rights, denuclearization and sanctions, while making diplomatic overtures that officials say have been rebuffed by Pyongyang, which has long demanded sanctions relief.

VI. Conclusion

Biden's policy change to North Korea cannot bring peace to the Korean Peninsula, unless North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is willing to abandon his revisionist aims. Due to Kim Jong-un's persistent commitment to nuclearization, even limiting North Korea's nuclear development attain to “complete denuclearization” appears not to be a possible job that is only achievable through the inordinately costly course of regime change.

In addition to the joint statement issued by the United States and South Korea after the May 2021 summit, they also emphasized the friendship between the two countries and pledged their alliance relationship to remain unchanged.⁶⁹ With regard to South Korea's most pressing epidemic, the United States promises to supply vaccines. The US authorized the Moderna vaccine to be produced in South Korea. This is the first foreign production base of the Moderna vaccine. It can not only supply South Korea, but also allow South Korea to play a vaccine card against other countries.⁷⁰

On the North Korean issue, in the US-Korea Joint Statement, the United States stated that it will adopt “calibrated and practical” diplomatic way

⁶⁹ White House, “US-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement,” White House, May 21, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/21/u-s-rok-leaders-joint-statement/>.

⁷⁰ Maria Ponnezhath and Sangmi Cha, “Moderna, Novavax to Produce more COVID-19 Vaccines in S. Korea,” *Reuters*, May 22, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-south-korea-sign-production-deal-mrna-vaccines-2021-05-22->.

with North Korea, and that diplomacy and dialogue will be “based on past commitments between the two Koreas and the US and North Korea.” This statement indicates the United States will not take a hardline on the North Korean issue. The United States has also terminated a “Revised Missile Guidelines” that restricts South Korea’s development of missile technology.⁷¹ South Korea is free to develop missiles and space technology, and the United States will launch cooperation projects with South Korea in space cooperation and overseas nuclear power plant technology.

South Korea has promised to increase the supply of automotive chips, making South Korea a close technological ally of the United States, and bolstering the United States’ response to China’s technological war. South Korea actively supports the US climate plan, welcomes US to be the leadership on global climate issues, and promises to be more active in achieving emission reduction targets.

Regarding regional security issues, South Korea emphasized the “fundamental importance” of trilateral cooperation between the United States, South Korea and Japan in response to North Korea, to safeguard mutual security and prosperity, support common values, and consolidate a “rule-based order”. Emphasizing that the importance of US-South Korea relations goes beyond the Korean peninsula, with particular emphasis on the importance of Southeast Asia, and that the ties between the US, South Korea, and Southeast Asia should be strengthened, indicated that the United States will return to Southeast Asia.

The United States and South Korea have reached a consensus on their important interests and positions, and the United States may not take a military intervention policy against North Korea. The resolution of North Korea’s nuclear weapons seems to have returned to the past policy, and the United States has not regarded the North Korea nuclear issue as its top priority during US-China strategic competition. Because of this, the summit

⁷¹ Brian Kim, “US Lifts Missile Restrictions on South Korea, Ending Range and Warhead Limits,” *Defense News*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2021/05/25/us-lifts-missile-restrictions-on-south-korea-ending-range-and-warhead-limits/>.

between Biden and Kim Jong-un will not be held in the short term before North Korea has expressed its attitude towards the US-South Korea joint statement and close cooperation.

The Biden administration needs to find a best way to induce or impose self-restraint on the expansion of North Korea's nuclear capability, otherwise the dimensions of the North Korean nuclear threat will continue to grow.

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