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## As a New Start to Peace on the Korean Peninsula Begins...



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In their first summit in 11 years, North and South Korea announced the “Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula” on April 27, 2018. During a short but historic half-day meeting, the leaders of both countries held hands and crossed the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and were seen walking together in harmony. These scenes would have been unimaginable just a couple of months ago. The summit was possible because both North and South Korea felt that it was both “a new start to peace” and, as Chairman Kim Jong-un noted in the visitor’s diary at the building the summit took place, “[the summit] is the historic starting point of an era of peace.” North and South Korea have ended their long period of division and confrontation and opened the doors to a new era of peace.

The “Panmunjom Declaration” agreed to by both Korean leaders has characteristics unique to the inter-Korean relationship. The declaration breaks precedent with all the past, dormant agreements between the two Koreas and expresses a strong intent for the inter-Korean relationship to take the lead in carving the future of the Korean Peninsula. The declaration is the result of the two Koreas, as the two main parties involved in the “Korean question,” having the understanding that they must no longer simply cater to the interests of the surrounding major powers. The declaration, moreover, expressed the sincerity and earnestness of the two Koreas to ensure that the inter-Korean relationship does not weaken due to the North Korean nuclear issue and that the two Koreas would work together to find a way out of the “black hole” the nuclear issue has created.

This sentiment is clearly apparent in Clause 3, Line 3 of the Panmunjom Declaration. The two Korean leaders stated their renunciation of war on the Korean Peninsula and the start of a new era of peace, while agreeing to the development of the inter-Korean relationship, the lowering of military tensions, and the building of a “peace regime.” The order of these statements in the agreement are important: the health of the inter-Korean relationship is not dependent on the North Korean nuclear issue or the US-North Korean relationship; rather, it is both the starting and central factor. Moreover, the two Koreas agreed that measures concerning the two countries’ military further strengthen the foundation of the inter-Korean relationship and, moving forward, provide the key to implementing the “peace regime” and achieving denuclearization.

Those who imagined or even expected an agreement regarding denuclearization to be achieved during the summit may have been taken aback by the declaration. The inter-Korean summit had a foundation on seeking progress toward denuclearization and preparing for the US-North Korean summit; however, this high-level meeting was not just a simple stepping stone or provisional bridge to achieve either of these goals. South Korea has made clear its leading role in ensuring that the development of inter-Korean relations achieves progress on the creation of a “peace regime” on the Korean Peninsula and for denuclearization to take place. This all means that South Korea’s role “in the driver’s seat” of the inter-Korean relationship has gained even more credence.

The first clause of the Panmunjom Declaration on the total and dynamic improvement and development of the inter-Korean relationship places emphasis on the principle of national

sovereignty and the implementation of agreements between the two Koreas. The two Koreas agreed to use this as a basis to establish diverse channels of inter-Korean communication, increase civilian exchanges and cooperation, and hold reunions for divided families. North Korea also agreed to readjust Pyongyang's existing time difference with Seoul to ensure the smooth progress of inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation. The mention of rail and roadway connections in the declaration, to aid the balanced development of the national economy and joint prosperity, was testament to the attention to detail given to new economic development between the two Koreas in the future. These efforts are part of an array of "top-down" and "bottom-up" methods aimed at ensuring the creation of a firm and sustainable foundation for the development of inter-Korean relations.

The second clause of the declaration concerns the reduction of military tensions and the building of trust. It is a brilliant logical conception. Military measures between the two Koreas is the most assured link between inter-Korean relations and the peace regime, supported in the declaration by inter-Korean relations (Clause 1) and the implementation of a peace regime (Clause 3). Generally, the inter-Korean relationship has long suffered due to military clashes between the two sides. There were limitations in South Korea's past policy of using money (the economy) in an attempt to "buy off" North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Any possibility of military clashes between the two Koreas must disappear to ensure the inter-Korean relationship can develop without issue. Military measures with the aim of following the Armistice Agreement already in place must take precedence to move toward ending the war and concluding a peace treaty. Moreover, dated preconceptions that military talks must be held to support economic exchanges and military matters must be dependent on progress with the nuclear issue have, through this declaration, been audaciously thrown aside. The declaration is a paradigm shift that calls for the holding of inter-Korean military talks to develop the inter-Korean relationship and build a peace regime.

The reduction of military tensions and the building of trust are considered urgent and necessary conditions to both develop the inter-Korean relationship and bring about the denuclearization of North Korea. As such, the declaration states clearly that the two Koreas will hold high-level military talks in May. There is a high likelihood that the two Koreas will discuss the dismantling of loudspeakers on the border and the issue of leaflets. Issues regarding the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) will be discussed in meetings between the two countries' ministers of defense at a later date. Points of agreement made regarding the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the West Sea appear to have been included in line with the past October 4 Declaration, but this issue should not be dealt with lightly. This is because there is a high possibility that the issue will become an agenda item during the process of concluding a peace treaty.

The third clause of the declaration states that neither Korea will use force in "ending the unnatural state of armistice and establishing a robust peace regime" and move toward disarmament. These points are an extension of measures concerning military matters. Disarmament is more than just an aim to diminish and ultimately remove the source of military tensions and the threat of war between the two Koreas. Disarmament is absolutely required for the realization of peaceful unification beyond any sort of peace regime and is also important to sustain the support and cooperation from surrounding countries.

That the two Koreas declared an end to the Korean War this year suggests another historical event in the coming months. Indeed, the April 2018 inter-Korean summit meeting is not the end of the surprises; rather, it is just the beginning. Ending the war is the real start of peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula and in relieving concerns voiced by the North Koreans. It will furthermore help speed up the negotiations for denuclearization. Such a statement was only possible because understanding was sought beforehand from the United States, China and other countries—the United States, China, and North Korea being the three signatories to the Armistice Agreement. The two Koreas also reconfirmed the holding of three-party or four-party talks to discuss the peace treaty agreed to in the October 4 Declaration. It is expected that the issue of building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula will be discussed in-depth during future trilateral and bilateral summits between North and South Korea, China, Japan, and the US.

The two Koreas agreed to the common goal of “realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula” in Clause 3, Line 4. Of particular note is that both parties acknowledged “that the measures being initiated by North Korea are very meaningful and crucial for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and agreed to carry out their respective roles and responsibilities in this regard.” This statement informs the international community that South Korea both understands and will support North Korea’s intent to denuclearize. North Korea reported the Panmunjom Declaration in its full form through the country’s media outlets. North Korea furthermore agreed to invite experts from the United States and South Korea and the media to witness the dismantling of its nuclear sites in May. That the two Koreas agreed to work together to fulfill their own responsibilities and roles and garner support and cooperation from the international community exemplifies South Korea’s leading role in reducing North Korea’s anxieties as the country adopts measures to denuclearize. The next steps in resolving the nuclear issue will occur at the upcoming US-North Korean summit, but South Korea must continue to play an active role.

The 2018 inter-Korean summit will be recorded in history as a significant and meaningful event where issues ranging from peace, prosperity and unification on the Korean Peninsula to denuclearization and the US-North Korean relationship were discussed. The two Koreas should never let go of one another from this point forward. The inter-Korean relationship must continue down this road to its natural end point. The summit meeting surprised the entire world, but it is not the end of the process. The two Koreas have joined hands to participate in a race to the finish line, and there will be more surprises on the road ahead. The more the world is surprised by events on the Korean Peninsula the closer the two Koreas come to peaceful coexistence and common prosperity. In a way, the road uphill starts from here and there is still a long way to go. That being said, in the wake of the “Panmunjom Declaration,” feelings of optimism and trust lay in wait. The road uphill is a happy one for the two Koreas, and even if the two countries run a little out of breath along the way, they should feel joyful to meet future trials hand-in-hand.

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