

## North Korea's New Strategic Policy Line and the Upcoming Summits: Denuclearization and a Security Guarantee

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SINCE THE TURNING POINT OF KIM JONG UN'S 2018 NEW Year's speech, a resolution of the North Korean denuclearization conundrum is proceeding at a breakneck pace, like a rollercoaster of war and peace. Last year's verbal battle between North Korea and the US, which nearly led to the brink of an actual war, has passed. North Korea's attendance at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and the exchange of special envoys between South and North Korea has progressed much faster than expected. A North Korea-China summit and visit from the US special envoy to North Korea to meet with Kim Jong Un soon followed. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, North Korea announced its "new strategic policy line." This announcement came shortly before the inter-Korean summit due to take place in late April, which will be followed by the North Korea-US summit. All eight attempts during the period between the signing of the Geneva Agreed Framework in 1994 and 2017 to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem have met with failure. In order to get off this rollercoaster of war and peace and arrive at the final destination of North Korea's complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization and a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, it is critical to accurately analyze North Korea's changes in its approach and strategies towards the summit. Furthermore, all related parties, including South Korea, the US, and China, should work together to solve the problem.

In order to resolve this historical conundrum successfully, we must first look beyond the simple

dichotomy of optimism and pessimism and examine the opportunities and limitations of North Korea's strategic decision. We must also identify the true objective behind the summit from the complex perspectives of all parties using official documents as a basis. Then we should make efforts to find answers for the denuclearization of and a security guarantee for North Korea to which all parties, including the two Koreas, the US, and China, can agree.

### North Korea's New Strategic Policy Line: Change and Continuity

It is essential to carefully interpret the two official announcements and the new strategic policy line put forth by North Korea in order to accurately understand what kinds of strategic changes North

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Korea is pursuing prior to the South-North Korea and North Korea-US summits. After meeting Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang on March 5<sup>th</sup>, South Korean national security advisor Chung Eui-yong announced the results of his visit to North Korea, including the contents of the six-point agreement. The key to that agreement was the third paragraph, which states that “North Korea says it is willing to denuclearize and has no reason to possess nuclear weapons if the military threat against it is removed and the regime’s security guaranteed.”

Next, during a summit with Xi Jinping on March 26<sup>th</sup>, Kim Jong Un said “It is our consistent stand to be committed to denuclearization on the Peninsula, in accordance with the will of the late President Kim Il Sung and the late General Secretary Kim Jong Il.” He also said “North Korea is determined to transform inter-Korean ties into a relationship of reconciliation and cooperation and hold a summit between the heads of the two sides.” He further stated “The issue of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can be resolved, if South Korea and the United States respond to our efforts with goodwill, and create an atmosphere of peace and stability while taking progressive and synchronous measures for the realization of peace.”

Taken together, the three statements suggest that the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can be resolved if South Korea and the US take progressive and synchronous measures to guarantee the survival of the North Korean regime. A newly introduced concept here is the term “progressive and synchronous measures.”

In an official statement issued by the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs of on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Pyongyang emphasized the “peace treaty first, denuclearization second” principle while criticizing the “denuclearization first, peace treaty second” principle of South Korea and the US as unrealistic, as well as dismissing China’s suggestion of a ‘dual freeze’ and a ‘dual track’ approach of simultaneously discussing denuclearization and peace talks. However,

Kim Jong Un’s use of the term “progressive and synchronous measures” is different from North Korea’s conventional position. Rather, it implies the simultaneous pursuit of denuclearization and peace talks, similar to China’s proposal.

However, even as North Korea displays flexibility in the ‘procedural’ aspects of the negotiations, it is important to know whether they are also intending to pursue strategic changes in the ‘contents’ of the negotiations, namely denuclearization and a security guarantee. The announcement made on March 5<sup>th</sup> by the South Korean envoy to the North clearly states that “North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he is committed to denuclearization.” However, during the North Korea-China summit on March 26<sup>th</sup>, Kim Jong Un said “It is our consistent stand to be committed to denuclearization on the Peninsula, in accordance with the will of the late President Kim Il Sung and the late General Secretary Kim Jong Il.” The key phrase in this statement is “consistent stand.” The will of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il was not the denuclearization of North Korea, but a denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula. This encompasses not only the denuclearization of North Korea, but also a removal of the existence of nuclear capabilities in South Korea and strategic nuclear weapons surrounding the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, if North Korea’s will to denuclearize means denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, it indicates the denuclearization of both South and North Korea, not just the North.

During the joint press conference after the summit with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Trump said that “...there is a bright path available to North Korea when it achieves denuclearization in a complete and verifiable, and irreversible way.” In a meeting with executives of domestic media outlets on April 19<sup>th</sup>, Moon Jae-in again emphasized that “North Korea is expressing a willingness to completely denuclearize.”

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Session of the 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Worker’s Party of Korea on April



20<sup>th</sup>, Kim Jong Un declared a new strategic policy line. According to this new announcement, the following decisions were made: first, North Korea has sequentially and faithfully achieved nuclear weaponization; second, nuclear tests and the intercontinental ballistic missiles tests will be discontinued; third, North Korea will join international efforts to halt nuclear testing altogether; fourth, North Korea will never use nuclear weapons unless there is a nuclear threat or nuclear provocation against the North, and North Korea will never transfer nuclear weapons or nuclear technology; fifth, North Korea will concentrate all of its efforts on building up a strong socialist economy; and sixth, North Korea will intensify solidarity and dialogue with neighboring countries and the international community. Denuclearization as mentioned in the new strategic policy line did not declare complete denuclearization, but instead proposed an incomplete denuclearization where North Korea will continue to possess its existing nuclear weapons for minimal deterrence without conducting further nuclear weapon or intercontinental ballistic missile tests.

The implications for the second core concept, the security guarantee, are more comprehensive than those for denuclearization; thus, it is more difficult and controversial to evaluate the change in meaning. The key question that is raised by the statement, “if the military threat against [North Korea] is removed and the regime’s security guaranteed,” released after the South Korean envoy’s visit to Pyongyang on March 5<sup>th</sup>, is what conditions will prompt North Korea to agree that the military threat against it has been removed and the security of the regime guaranteed. Conditions and measures for the security guarantee as suggested by North Korea in negotiations over the past two decades have stayed the same within the larger framework, despite some minor differences. North Korea has demanded the normalization of North Korea-US relations, the withdrawal of economic sanctions and provision of economic support, and the

establishment of a peace treaty for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016, North Korea declared the five principles of the “regime guarantee” in a government statement: “First, the release of the US nuclear weapons stationed in South Korea; second, the abolition and verification of all nuclear weapons in South Korea; third, the suspension of the deployment of US nuclear weapons; fourth, a commitment not to use nuclear weapons or pose a nuclear threat to North Korea; fifth, the proclamation of the withdrawal of the United States Forces Korea (USFK).” In the recent working meeting preparing for the US-North Korea summit, it is said that North Korea proposed five measures for the regime guarantee, which include the normalization of the US-North Korea relations, the establishment of a peace treaty, the withdrawal of US nuclear strategic assets from South Korea, the suspension of the deployment of nuclear strategic assets in US-South Korea joint military exercises, and a commitment to not to attack with conventional or nuclear weapons. However, the clause relating to nuclear strategic assets can be interpreted as just another way of saying withdrawal of the USFK and dissolution of the South Korea-US alliance.

There are currently both optimistic and pessimistic views of North Korea’s strategic changes ahead of its summit talks. North Korea’s changed position and approach towards denuclearization negotiations made the planned April summit possible. However, a more careful examination is necessary to determine whether there are any notable changes to the actual content of the negotiations.

Therefore, it is necessary to once and for all evaluate North Korea’s strategic changes with regards to denuclearization and a security guarantee from the perspective of complete denuclearization, which is the final end goal for both South Korea and the US at the inter-Korean and the North Korea-US summits. In this process, it is important to keep an eye on the position of the Trump administration, which emphasizes the



past failures to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The US will stand firm in its “denuclearization first, peace treaty second” principle without accepting North Korea’s “progressive and synchronous” measures of denuclearization unless North Korea’s sincerity and commitment are fully confirmed.

### North Korea’s New Strategic Policy Line and Upcoming Summits

It is necessary to accurately understand North Korea’s position on the upcoming summit as well as to carefully analyze its strategic change. In his 2018 New Year’s Speech, Kim Jong Un put forth “Let us launch a revolutionary general offensive to achieve fresh victory on all fronts of building a powerful socialist country!” as this year’s rallying cry. All fronts, in the case of North Korea, encompass the domestic, inter-Korean, and global fronts. The domestic fronts can be further divided into military, economic, cultural, and political/ideological aspects.

To be clear, the 2018 New Year’s Speech did not officially announce North Korea’s intention to give up its *byungjin* (parallel) policy of pursuing nuclear security and economic development. Instead, it marked 2017 as the year of completion of North Korea’s nuclear forces and turned its attention to economic development, the other main pillar of North Korea’s parallel policy, as the focus for 2018. However, North Korea faced great difficulties in 2017 due to stronger economic sanctions imposed by the international community and military pressure from the US; therefore, in 2018, North Korea intends to work on reducing obstacles in its path toward becoming a powerful socialist country, including economic sanctions and military pressure, on the domestic, inter-Korean, and global fronts.

Because pursuing “a revolutionary general offensive” on the domestic front is currently difficult due to economic sanctions and military pressure imposed from the international front, it appears that

North Korea has decided to utilize the inter-Korean front in order to overcome the current challenges. Even though a new administration took office in 2017, the South Korean government has not made any much-needed changes to its North Korea policy, thereby leading to no significant change in inter-Korean relations. However, due to the urgent situation the Korean Peninsula is now facing, North Korea insisted that the two Koreas should “work together to alleviate military tensions and create a peaceful environment,” and the South Korean government must “respond to [North Korea’s] sincere efforts to mitigate tensions rather than aggravate the situation by engaging in the United States’ reckless North Korean nuclear war.”

On the other hand, on the international front, North Korea briefly stated that “We will act as a ‘responsible nuclear power’ and only use [nuclear weapons] for minimum deterrence.” The North also said “We will firmly respond to any act destroying the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula.” However, after the 2018 New Year’s Speech, North Korea held a North Korea- China summit and is now preparing for a summit with the US on the international front in order to change the current situation, which has become a stumbling block to the establishment of a powerful socialist country.

North Korea now faces a self-imposed quandary in that its nuclear development has crippled its economy. In order to overcome the biggest obstacle to building a powerful socialist country under the parallel policy of nuclear and economic development, it must first denuclearize. In order to resolve this paradox, North Korea has expressed its willingness to simultaneously pursue incomplete denuclearization and peace talks by displaying flexibility and easing its previously hard stance on “peace treaty first, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula second” during the North Korea-China summit and new strategic policy line. Furthermore, North Korea is also trying to obtain certain achievements and rewards via



its progressive and synchronous negotiations. At the outset, it may look like negotiation for the complete denuclearization of North Korea and peace talks will be able to get off the ground. However, the Trump administration will not endure any costs of denuclearization unless North Korea fully demonstrates its sincere intentions to completely denuclearize in the early stages of the negotiations process. Thus, the South Korean government will face the heavy task of coordinating the conflicting positions of North Korea and the US from the beginning of the negotiations,

### **North Korea's Complete Denuclearization and a Security Guarantee**

The core agenda of the inter-Korean and the North Korea-US summits is North Korea's denuclearization and a security guarantee. In order for the summits to be successful, it is necessary to first clarify to what extent the conditions for denuclearization and a security guarantee as understood by South Korea, North Korea and the US coincide and where they differ, and then agree on an agenda. South Korea's role will be essential during this process. South Korea should be able to translate the different interpretations of denuclearization and a security guarantee between North Korea and the US, and it must act as a navigator towards a new consensus.

At the summit, the starting point of the denuclearization discussion will be a nuclear freeze, followed by a verification process including reports and inspections. The important thing is that all parties should agree that the final goal is the complete denuclearization of North Korea. The outcome of the denuclearization discussion, the first item on the agenda at both summits, ultimately depends on whether North Korea and the US can agree on the same conditions for denuclearization. Today's technical and detailed discussion on freezing, reporting, inspecting, and dismantling of North

Korea's nuclear programs must have a broader and more complex scope than those held during the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework or the 2005 Beijing Joint Statement because North Korea's nuclear capability has advanced exponentially. It will be difficult for North Korea to accept the US requirement for special inspections of the various facilities unless they make the strategic decision to pursue complete denuclearization. The US will apply extremely detailed and strict standards to North Korea, and the negotiation process will run into serious difficulties if Pyongyang demands that South Korea and the US take measures in tandem with their strict standards.

Even if North Korea and other related parties have agreed in principle on the complete denuclearization of North Korea, they need to solve the much more difficult task of guaranteeing the security of a completely denuclearized North Korean regime throughout the actual implementation process. In response, North Korea will most likely demand a reduction of the military threat and a security guarantee, and this requires consensus amongst related parties. Since the Geneva Agreed Framework in 1994, the denuclearization of North Korea and the economic, diplomatic and military aspects of a security guarantee, the so-called "Devil's Quadrangle," have remained a conundrum that has not been solved easily for the past quarter century. Although the normalization of North Korea-US relations, which works as a security guarantee in terms of diplomacy, might be realized, international coordination is required to set a standard for how and when to lift economic sanctions and provide economic aid to the North during its denuclearization process. But the most important aspect of the security guarantee will be that of the military. If North Korea does not show a significant willingness to bend on its past requirements, such as the withdrawal of the USFK, the dismantling of the ROK-US military alliance, and control of nuclear strategic materials around the Korean Peninsula, it will be difficult for the related parties, including the two



Koreas, the US, and China, to reach a consensus about the conditions for a security guarantee.

From the standpoint of North Korea, the exchange of complete denuclearization for a security guarantee might seem unfair. Even if the two Koreas declare the termination of the Korean War and related parties including South and North Korea conclude a peace treaty in return for North Korea's complete denuclearization, it will not be easy for the North to completely trust that this declaration and peace treaty will hold any significant effect or value in the reality of international politics where the transnational judicial order does not function like domestic law.

In order to provide an authentic and sincere guarantee of the regime's survival to North Korea, which already perceives the historical reality of international politics only too well, it is essential to guarantee that a denuclearized North Korea will retain non-nuclear defense capabilities. A complex, ironclad plan that provides greater assurance for North Korea's security than the security provided by nuclear weapons must be prepared. To achieve this goal, the two Koreas must pave the way for a declaration of the termination of Korean War and create an arms control plan. In addition, peace talks amongst relevant stakeholders, including the two Koreas, the US, and China, need to be held in coordination with multilateral or Asia-Pacific peace systems, such as the Six-party talks.

### **A Complex Solution to the North Korean Nuclear Problem**

At the inter-Korean and the North Korea-US summits, the related parties must understand that the simultaneous pursuit of a complex solution involving sanctions, deterrence, engagement, and internally driven change within North Korea is necessary in order to successfully resolve the problem of North Korean denuclearization and provide a security guarantee. The nuclear negotiations that have taken

place over the past quarter century historically prove that the North Korean nuclear issue cannot be solved via a simple approach of imposing economic sanctions and responding militarily, nor by providing economic support while improving relations. However, until the North ultimately passes the final gate to reach complete denuclearization, the four tools - sanctions, deterrence, engagement, and internally driven change within North Korea - are indispensable, and these four pillars will be needed to support the structure of the complete denuclearization of North Korea.

Sanctions and deterrence have made an important contribution to bringing North Korea to the table. However, in order for talks to progress to the next level, there must be an effort to guarantee the survival of the North Korean regime and careful thought regarding the "Devil's Quadrangle." Until a certain level of trust has been built and exchanges made regular, denuclearization efforts always have the potential to regress to the pre-negotiation stage. However, this alone is not enough to completely denuclearize North Korea.

What we ultimately need to peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear conundrum in addition to sanctions, deterrence, and engagement is for North Korea to evolve into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. As North Korea's planned economy begins to reap the benefits of marketization and its closed society and culture adopt the efficiency of informatization, the next inevitable step is the evolution of politics to be able to successfully implement a 'non-nuclear security and economic dual policy.' Such changes cannot be enforced externally; they will only arise through North Korea's internally driven efforts. During this process, the stakeholders surrounding the Korean Peninsula must work to evolve simultaneously as well. ■



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