

## Seven Takeaways from the April 27 Inter-Korean Summit: Issues and Assessments

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The two key phrases that characterize the April 27 inter-Korean summit are “the lost 11 years” mentioned several times by Kim Jong-un during his opening remarks at the summit and the statement “complete denuclearization” or a “nuclear-free Korean Peninsula,” incorporated into the Panmunjom Declaration. The former reflects how North Korea has aimed to use summitry as a vehicle to revive the sunshine policy of South Korea, dating back to the era of the “June 15 and October 4 Declarations” signed in 2000 and 2007, respectively. The latter declaration is abstract and general in its expression, far short of the concrete, unambiguous, and firm commitment required to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear weapons and programs.

The absence of specifics on the nuclear issue in these declarations means that the inter-Korean summit has passed the nuclear buck on to the U.S.-DPRK summit. In particular, by introducing measures for promoting bilateral relations that are contingent on satisfactorily addressing the nuclear issue, the Panmunjom Declaration makes settling the nuclear issue a precondition for improving inter-Korean relations. However, the danger of this arrangement is that Washington could become the focus of criticism if Donald Trump fails to reach a nuclear settlement with Kim Jong-un. The United States could be blamed both for obstructing inter-Korean cooperation as well as a failure of the nuclear talks.

Here are the seven key takeaways from the April 27 summit and their implications for the Trump-Kim summit:

**1. Sanctions-lifting:** Kim Jong-un created optimistic conditions for peace, prosperity, and unification in South Korea during the course of the inter-Korean summit. Taking advantage of this euphoric momentum, North Korea will intensify a campaign to loosen sanctions and relieve other pressures (i.e., military exercises). The Panmunjom Declaration is strikingly similar in terms of themes and inter-Korean contacts to the October 4, 2007 declaration, a symbol of the sunshine policy. In fact, there is so much overlap in the construction and contents of the document that it can be branded as “the October 4 Declaration—Version Two.”

**2. Byungjin’s relevance:** Having completed the mission of becoming a nuclear weapons power, Kim Jong-un will now focus on economic development—the other pillar of the byungjin (dual-track) policy. For this purpose, he will vigorously utilize a newly forged trust and partnership with the South Korean government. However, the spirit and substance of inter-Korean dialogue could run contrary to international norms, thereby undermining international efforts to pressure North Korea.

**3. Troops on the table:** Agreeing on nonaggression, confidence building, and disarmament measures in the conventional military will weaken South Korea's security unless the upcoming U.S.-DPRK summit brings about a complete elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons. However, Kim Jong-un's motivation is twofold: to divert resources and manpower from the military to the economy; and to undercut South Korea's superior weapon systems by pushing for mutual reductions in troop capabilities. North Korea is likely to propose a drastic reduction of military personnel, possibly demanding a similar reduction in troops for the United States Forces Korea (USFK).

**4. Peace regime:** A declaration ending the Korean War may provide fertile ground for Kim Jong-un's psychological campaign, causing adverse effects detrimental to South Korea's safety. Pyongyang will attempt to lower Seoul's guard and create a false sense of security. To Washington, the North Koreans will argue that by declaring a formal end to the war, the armistice agreement is no longer relevant, and this in turn would cause the U.S. public to view the withdrawal of USFK from the peninsula as logical.

**5. Putting Washington in the crosshairs:** By avoiding a detailed discussion on nuclear matters with South Korea, North Korea has retained its long-standing position that only the United States is the direct stakeholder in any nuclear discussion. Placing Seoul in the position of mediator rather than main player has led to the unintended consequence of passing the nuclear buck to Washington. If the Trump-Kim summit bears no fruit in the nuclear matter, Seoul can insulate itself from any blame, but Washington will be burdened with the failure of nuclear talks and could be criticized for blocking the improvement of inter-Korean relations.

**6. Disparate definitions of denuclearization:** The Panmunjom Declaration fails to clarify the looming conceptual differences in denuclearization. It should be noted that Pyongyang has exploitatively adopted the term "denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" as a disingenuous phrase aimed at hiding its nuclear development and achieving its long-standing goals of weakening the ROK-U.S. alliance and forcing the USFK off the Korean peninsula.<sup>1</sup> No clear-cut commitment on abandoning all nuclear weapons can be found in either Mr. Kim's public statements or the North Korean government's official documents. At the recent Workers' Party Congress in April, Kim Jong-un caught the world off guard by freezing long-range missile and nuclear tests and proposing to dismantle the Punggye-ri nuclear test site.

At the same time, Kim solemnly affirmed credible completion of nuclear weaponization by carrying out a series of nuclear weapons development projects. These ranged from carrying out a subcritical test, underground test, miniaturization of warheads, and the test of a hydrogen bomb to the production of delivery vehicles. Denuclearization should be defined as the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear weapons and programs. When President Moon Jae-in meets with President Donald Trump on May 22 to debrief the results of the inter-Korean summit, he should present Kim Jong-un's actual wordings, not statements laced with South Korean "best-face" interpretations of the nuclear issues. Furthermore, in order to avoid conceptual confusion, both Presidents Moon and Trump are advised to change their terminology by publicly agreeing on using a more explicit term such as "nuclear dismantlement" instead of "denuclearization."

**7. Different timelines for implementation:** To Kim Jong-un, denuclearization depends on how Seoul and Washington behave. At the summit with Xi Jinping in March, Kim reportedly said that “The issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can be resolved, if South Korea and the United States respond to our efforts with goodwill, create an atmosphere of peace and stability while taking progressive and synchronous measures for the realization of peace.” At the summit with Donald Trump, Kim Jong-un will propose no more than an elaboration on this basic standpoint, while it is likely that the U.S. president will be seeking more definitive deliverables on an accelerated timeline. While South Korea has been at the center of Olympics diplomacy, from here on out, the Trump-Kim summit could push the North Koreans closer to the Chinese and Russians, and the Japanese closer to the United States. Meanwhile, Seoul may be decoupled from all parties.

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