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Expert Opinions on the Inter-Korean Summit*

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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies conducted a survey of experts from South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia regarding the outcomes of the inter-Korean summit held on April 27, 2018. Participants were asked to assess the summit in terms of its impact on inter-Korean relations, the North Korean nuclear issue, and the upcoming U.S.-DPRK summit.

Question 1

What is your overall assessment of the inter-Korean summit? In particular, what is your assessment about the handling of the North Korean nuclear issue?

Choi Kang: The optics were good, and the opening of various channels for communication/engagement is very encouraging. But there is still a long way to go. In some ways, the Panmunjom Declaration is a compilation of agreements made between the two Koreas since 1972. Or rather it is an upgraded version of the June 15 and October 4 Declarations. The core issue or theme was inter-Korean cooperation. Many agreements on exchange and cooperation between the Koreas are there. Even dates of events are clearly stated in the declaration.

On denuclearization they used the phrase “complete denuclearization” and “nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.” The sentence stating that each side “agreed to carry out their respective roles and responsibilities” needs to be clearer. On inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, the declaration is quite detailed, as both Koreas agreed to resume exchange and cooperation

immediately. There are questions about how to work within the current UNSC sanctions framework. On the establishment of a peace regime, the Panmunjom Declaration appears quite ambitious. The document states that both Koreas will declare the end of the Korean War and conclude a peace treaty by the end of this year. The agreement on dialogue channels at various levels can be regarded as a concrete achievement. To sum it up, the declaration is only glass half-full, and there is still a long road ahead.

Kim Sung-han: Overall, it was good for South Korea to engage North Korea in order to reduce tension and pave the way for peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula. The fact that the two leaders agreed on "complete denuclearization" is good, but the North Korean side appears to be sticking to its long held position of denuclearization of the two Koreas by emphasizing each side's respective responsibilities and roles. A 2016 statement by the DPRK government spokesman pointed out that nuclear weapons possessed by USFK should be declared and verified, and the USFK should withdraw. The nuclear-related sentences of the April 27 Declaration are abstract, general, and confusing, which means North Korea's real intention will be unveiled during and/or after the U.S.-North Korea summit meeting.

Kuni Miyake: I hope this will lead to a great success. But the end results are still unclear, and I am not even "cautiously optimistic" yet. The summit unfortunately gave no substantial progress on North Korea's denuclearization issue.

Gary Samore: The inter-Korean summit was magnificently stage-managed and produced, like a high quality Hollywood movie, full of symbolic images and pageantry. [In general,] the language in the Panmunjom Declaration on the North Korean issue is ordinary and unspecific. Nothing special.

Georgy Toloraya: There was nothing decisively new as compared to previous inter-Korean documents: maybe disappointing, but at the same time the two Koreas stress

continuity. Addressing the “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” is a major achievement for both Koreas: the South agreed that this issue is bigger than the North Korean potential [for denuclearization]. The North declared denuclearization as a final goal, although under many (questionable) conditions. After Kim Jong Un declared that North Korea will forego its nuclear and ICBM tests and close its test site, it would be enough to welcome this development and express hope that the issue will be adequately discussed at the DPRK-U.S. summit. Ideally, this should be the start of a long and difficult negotiation for limiting and then reducing the strategic potential of North Korea and the denuclearization of Northeast Asia.

Alexander Vorontsov: The overall assessment is fully positive. The list of important achievements is long.

a) Both leaders reconfirmed important obligations achieved before. Some critics argue that it’s a simple reiteration of previous agreements. But from my point of view, a reconfirmation after a decade of unfriendly relations and in absolutely new international conditions is very essential. Moreover, the two sides overcame the long dispute over which documents are more important and should be fulfilled first (the North pushed for the two summit declarations, and the South pushed for the 1991-1992 documents). Now, both sides recognize all previous documents.

b) North Korea, for the first time, officially used the term “NLL”. The South agreed to use the term “blood relations of the people,” understanding that it’s not minjokkkiri.

c) Article 3.4, to my mind, reflects a rational compromise towards the common goal of complete denuclearization and a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. Understanding that the denuclearization issue would become the key subject of the Trump-Kim meeting [...] both sides reasonably decided to not elaborate on the issue in detail.

Yamaguchi Noboru: This is an extremely positive step in the sense that it will stop further deterioration (while it may not assure something good). As to the future of “Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Denuclearization of the DPRK,” it will take a fairly long time

and tremendous effort to achieve this goal. It is good to learn that all options are on the table, including various dialogues, while pressure and sanctions may have to play a substantial role from time to time.

Zhang Tuosheng: It was a successful summit. Both sides made contributions. Just as most experts forecasted, the summit mainly focused on the improvement of bilateral relations. Both sides hope they can and should play a bigger role for peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. There are just a few words about the denuclearization of the peninsula in the Panmunjom Declaration and no concrete measures to realize the goal. But it is understandable to a certain extent because this is mainly an issue between the U.S. and the DPRK. One problem is that the declaration does not show any clear linkage between the many measures they will take to improve bilateral relations politically, militarily, and economically with denuclearization. The former has a timetable, but the latter has no timetable.

Question 2

What is your overall outlook on the security situation in the Korean Peninsula? On the future of inter-Korean cooperation? On other issues (e.g. separated families, humanitarian issues, etc.)?

Choi Kang: The security situation is expected to be (or at least appear to be) more stable, as many exchanges are expected for the foreseeable future. Tension reduction and confidence-building measures are likely to be discussed, agreed, and implemented. At the same time, exchange and cooperation will unfold between the two Koreas. But due to UNSC sanctions, activities may take place only on humanitarian issues. Economic cooperation will remain a challenge. And there is always the danger of an unexpected downward spiral on the security front.

Kim Sung-han: The overall outlook is good, although things appear more optimistic on the humanitarian front. Issues related to inter-Korean relations and peace-building on the Korean peninsula cannot be implemented until the North Korean nuclear problem is resolved. All of these issues are a “conditional peace.” The Moon government might be tempted to push forward such issues as "peace waters" near the NLL and the establishment of a joint liaison office in Kaesong, but it would require very close consultation with the Trump administration, which will not be easy. The timing of the End of War Declaration and/or Peace Treaty also requires close coordination between Seoul and Washington since it will be impacting the ROK-U.S. alliance and status of USFK.

Kuni Miyake: Tensions might have been alleviated [at the summit], but I don't know how long it will last. Inter-Korean cooperation may go ahead regardless and probably to the maximum extent possible. But eventually progress might stall if North Korea's denuclearization issue does not bear fruit.

Gary Samore: For the time being, Kim Jung Un seems committed to continuing his peace offensive, which is good for reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula and reducing the risk of war. It will be interesting to see if Pyongyang carries out the commitments in the inter-Korean sections of the Panmunjom Declaration – especially if stalemate over the nuclear issue slows sanctions relief and economic cooperation.

Georgy Toloraya: The current situation is optimistic, but the failure of the diplomatic process between the U.S. and North Korea could quickly bring back tension. The ROK should do its utmost not to let this happen and quickly improve inter-Korean relations on all fronts. However, there are certain lacunas: how can a peace treaty be signed between two states that do not recognize the legitimacy of each other? Where would a U.S.-DPRK treaty fit? Hopefully it will be addressed at the Trump-Kim summit (with possible backing of Moon Jae-in). However, only a peace regime guaranteed by all parties (i.e. Six Parties) can

be enduring. The prospect of setting a Northeast Asia security system should not be forgotten.

Humanitarian exchanges are very important for national reconciliation but without economic cooperation the relations won't be durable. The idea to reconnect the railroads is a single positive practical step so far.

Alexander Vorontsov: For sure, the overall outlook on the security situation in the Korean Peninsula is very positive. The future of inter-Korean cooperation will definitely receive a new energetic driver and momentum. New horizons will open for the solution of matters related to separated families and humanitarian issues (outside sanctions restrictions on North Korea will remain).

Yamaguchi Noboru: As North Korea's conventional forces are not as strong as they used to be in comparison to the U.S.-ROK combined forces, North Korea's aggressive options are more limited than before. Along with changes in the DPRK's attitude, in which they are seemingly willing to move towards peace, and the fact that they are far less likely to be successful in an armed conflict on the peninsula, positive steps for future peaceful unification are more likely to take place if relevant parties, such as the U.S., China and Japan, cooperate on such movements. In the meantime, we need to be careful to avoid situations where separated families and humanitarian issues (or abductee issues for Japan) are exploited as leverage or hostages by the North.

Zhang Tuosheng: The security situation in the Korean Peninsula has been further softened by the summit. The risk of military conflicts and war has greatly decreased. The summit will open the door to inter-Korean cooperation, especially for cooperation on separated families and humanitarian issues. In the near future, if the U.S.-DPRK summit also makes progress and both sides agree to hold substantial talks on denuclearization and a peace regime on the peninsula, it will promote, or at least not hinder, inter-Korean cooperation. However, if the U.S.-DPRK summit meets serious difficulties or even fails, inter-Korean

cooperation will face serious challenges. At that time, if the ROK insists on cooperation, especially military and economic efforts, ROK-U.S. relations could be in trouble. If the U.S.-DPRK summit succeeds, I think the U.S. will also demand that the ROK coordinate its policy with the U.S., preventing it from giving too many concessions to the DPRK. So there is still uncertainty for the future of inter-Korean cooperation.

Question 3

What impact (if any) do you think the inter-Korean summit will have on the bilateral U.S.-DPRK Summit in May/June?

Choi Kang: The inter-Korean summit will likely set the stage for the U.S.-DPRK summit on three fronts: denuclearization, peace regime, and sanctions. First, the U.S. is largely responsible for working out the details of denuclearization (i.e. verification, dismantlement and timeframe). There is also the missile and other WMD issues. On peace, the U.S. should develop its position on a peace treaty and normalization of relations with North Korea. All of these must be linked to the denuclearization process. As for the incentives, the U.S. needs to think of the kind of compensation and conditions it will offer North Korea.

Kim Sung-han: The inter-Korean summit confirmed that North Korea's position has not changed on denuclearization, and this will make the U.S. prepare more "tightly" for the summit. In light of the domestic political climate in the U.S., President Trump will have to decide whether he will push hard for CVID or accept North Korea's commitment to give up its ICBMs and to freeze its nuclear programs, which is far from CVID.

Kuni Miyake: There is a great deal [of impact on the U.S.-North Korea summit], but the inter-Korean summit by no means guarantees success in the U.S.-North Korea summit.

Gary Samore: The inter-Korean summit will help pave the way for the Trump-Kim summit in May/June, especially Kim Jung Un's private assurances to President Moon that North Korea is prepared to give up its nuclear weapons if the U.S. formally ends the Korean War and pledges not to attack North Korea. Even if Kim Jung Un's promises are false, they will encourage President Trump that a great breakthrough on denuclearization is at hand.

Georgy Toloraya: President Moon should forcefully deliver the message for peace and cooperation to the U.S. side and insist that excessive demands that could derail the summit would be unacceptable to the ROK. A joint roadmap should be developed in the aftermath of U.S.-North Korea summit.

Alexander Vorontsov: Without any doubt, the inter-Korean summit results will have a positive influence on the bilateral U.S.-DPRK summit in May/June. Many experts considered the inter-Korean summit as an important preparation stage for the Trump-Kim meeting. The full success of the Moon-Kim summit will strongly contribute to the creation of a more favorable atmosphere for the Trump-Kim meeting.

Yamaguchi Noboru: The inter-Korea summit definitely provides positive prospects for the development of future dialogues, including the U.S.-DPRK summit and others, with a big change in the political atmosphere in the Korean Peninsula. In the meantime, future dialogues will have a long list of agenda items, as the recent North-South agreement does not include details for implementation.

Zhang Tuosheng: The inter-Korean summit paves the way for the bilateral U.S.-DPRK summit and is beneficial to the American preparation for the summit.

Question 4

In your opinion, what are some issues that the South Korean government should be mindful of in the days ahead?

Choi Kang: The declaration puts great emphasis on inter-Korean cooperation. There is the danger that this might conflict with international cooperation. South Korea must tread carefully as inter-Korean cooperation can result in a false sense of security and peace.

Kim Sung-han: The Moon government should be careful not to be trapped into another strategic blunder of accepting North Korea's rhetorical commitment to denuclearization. Do not try to ease or lift sanctions before North Korea moves into the moment of truth for COVID.

Kuni Miyake: Concentrate on Korea's long term strategic objectives, rather than on short term and short-sighted tactical achievements. The former includes the future of U.S.-Japan-Korean Peninsula strategic relations.

Gary Samore: The biggest challenge for Seoul is what to do if North Korea does not agree to eliminate all its nuclear weapons and production facilities to the satisfaction of the U.S. before it receives any economic and political rewards. If the U.S.-DPRK nuclear talks become stalemated, some officials in Washington will argue for abandoning the nuclear talks and returning to maximum pressure and “bloody nose.” In order to keep the diplomatic process alive, Seoul will need to persuade Washington to shift to a denuclearization approach of incremental steps and reciprocal actions.

Georgy Toloraya: [The ROK should focus on] economic cooperation not prohibited by UNSC sanctions. Seoul should swiftly denounce unilateral sanctions imposed by Park Geun Hye's regime. For example, it should push the Russia-DPRK-ROK trilateral projects, with a special focus on renewing the Rajin-Khasan railroad project. A new start for the six-party

process aimed at comprehensive solutions to the security issues, including the nuclear one, should be promoted.

Alexander Vorontsov: Starting from the beginning of this year, inter-Korean relations achieved a high positive dynamic and the summit raised it to a new level and pace. On one hand, such momentum should be decisively supported and continued. On the other hand, Seoul and Pyongyang should avoid the euphoria and carefully elaborate the next steps of rapprochement.

Yamaguchi Noboru: While the ROK government has provided a basis for positive development for the future, implementation remains crucial. Regarding cooperation and coordination with other relevant parties, such as the U.S., China and Japan, the ROK government should keep watch and see if and to what extent [the agreements] are implemented as promised.

Zhang Tuosheng:

- a. Insisting on the goal of CVID in the peninsula.
- b. The establishment of a peace regime must go along with denuclearization.
- c. Attaching importance to China's role in denuclearization, the peace regime, and inter-Korean cooperation.
- d. Making all effort to maintain talks and improve ties with the DPRK while preparing to deal with all kinds of difficulties and obstacles, especially a possible new deadlock between the U.S. and the DPRK.
- e. Carefully handle the problems of domestic politics.
- f. Supporting the Six-Party Talks to play an important and indispensable role after the efforts of bilateral, trilateral, and four-party talks.

Expert Biographies

Choi Kang is Vice President for Research and a principal fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. Previously, he was the dean of Planning and Assessment at the Korean National Diplomatic Academy and Senior Director for Policy Planning and Coordination on the National Security Council Secretariat.

Kim Sung-han is Dean and Professor of International Relations at the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS) / Division of International Studies (DIS) and director of Ilmin International Relations Institute, Korea University. He served as a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2012-2013.

Kuni Miyake is President of the Foreign Policy Institute, a private think tank in Tokyo. Previously, he was Executive Assistant to Mrs. Abe Akie in the Office of the Prime Minister of Japan. Prof. Miyake served in Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1978 to 2005.

Gary Samore is Executive Director for Research at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School. He served for four years as President Obama's White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Georgy Toloraya is Director of the Asian Strategy Center at the Institute of Economy at the Russian Academy of Science and Chair of project analysis at "Russkiy Mir" Presidential foundation. He is a former Deputy Director-General of the First Asian Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry. He served two postings in Pyongyang (1978-1980 and 1984-1993) and as Deputy Chief of Mission at Russian Embassy in Seoul (1993-1998), and was Consul-General in Australia (2003-2007).

Alexander Vorontsov is the head of the Department for Korean and Mongolian Studies and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russia Academy of Sciences and the MGIMO-University Associate Professor. He is a member of the Russia-DPRK Intergovernmental Commission dealing with trade-economic and scientific-technical cooperation. Previously, he served as the second secretary at the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Pyongyang.

Yamaguchi Noboru is a retired Lieutenant General in the Japan Ground Self Defense Force and a professor at the International University of Japan. He served as Senior Defense Attaché at the Japanese Embassy in the United States (1999-2001), Vice President of the National Institute for Defense Studies (2005-2006), and Commanding General of the GSDF Research and Development Command (2006-2008).

Zhang Tuosheng is Senior Fellow and Chairman of the Academic Committee and Director of the Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies. Previously, he was an instructor at the People's Liberation Army Military College, Research Fellow at the PLA National Defense University Institute for Strategic Studies, and Deputy Defense Attaché at the Chinese Embassy in the United Kingdom.

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