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North Korea's "One Agreement per U.S. Administration" Approach and the U.S.-North Korea Joint Statement

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"Historic" Summit Meeting

On June 12, 2018, the first ever U.S.-North Korea summit meeting was held after some twists and turns, and a Joint Statement was signed in Singapore. For President Trump of the United States, it represented "a deal of complete denuclearization vs. security guarantees." For North Korea, it represented another agreement made as a nuclear power in line with its "one agreement per U.S. administration" approach. Will the Joint Statement lead to the denuclearization of North Korea? Or will it follow the same fate as the U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework (1994) and the September 19 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks (2005)? In general, there is a mixture of skepticism about a repeat of the past and of hope that this time it will be different. I personally have many doubts. In particular, no concrete details were provided regarding complete denuclearization and security guarantees to the regime, and the roadmap including deadlines for the agreement's execution remains unclear. The Joint Statement has many problems, even compared with the Agreed Framework and the statements related to the Six-Party Talks. The Joint Statement does not mention complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of nuclear weapons. Details concerning verification, one of the greatest points at issue, are unclear. Furthermore, it is not clear about the handling of other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). According to media reports, the United States has already begun to

review a concrete denuclearization process in order to address such issues.¹

At the press conference following the signing of the Joint Statement, President Trump suggested that the achievement of North Korea's complete denuclearization hinges upon working-level negotiations between the United States and North Korea. This would mean that if the negotiations become deadlocked, military tensions could rise once again. Or even if military tensions remain, so long as the Kim Jong Un regime survives, North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and missiles and other offensive capabilities will continue, albeit with some differences in pace. Accordingly, it should be kept in mind that, at this point in time, the Joint Statement and the remarks made by the two sides not included in the Joint Statement are subject to change going forward.

On this cautionary note, this column contends that North Korea has not abandoned its position as a nuclear power and presents my views on the objectives of North Korea's "one agreement per U.S. administration" approach. Lastly, it notes the points that should be taken into account regarding future U.S.-North Korea negotiations and concludes with the implications for the security of Japan.

North Korea Has Not Yet Abandoned Its Nuclear and Missile Development Program

In his New Year's Address on January 1, 2018,

Chairman Kim Jong Un once again declared that North Korea accomplished the great historic cause of perfecting the national nuclear forces. In other words, North Korea boosted its position as a nuclear power. On April 20, prior to the first ever U.S.-North Korea summit meeting, the Third Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) was held. The meeting confirmed victory of the *Byungjin* policy and a new strategic policy line. At this Plenary Meeting, Chairman Kim stated, "No nuclear test and intermediate-range and inter-continental ballistic rocket test-fire are necessary for the DPRK now, given that the work for mounting nuclear warheads on ballistic rockets was finished as the whole processes of developing nuclear weapons were carried out in a scientific way and in regular sequence, and the development of delivery and strike means was also made scientifically." He added "(T)he mission of the northern nuclear test ground has thus come to an end." Chairman Kim stated, "(T)he historic tasks under the strategic line of simultaneously developing the two fronts set forth at the March 2013 Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Party were successfully carried out." In addition, Chairman Kim declared, "(A)t the present stage in which the DPRK was successfully put on the position of the world-level politico-ideological and military power, it is the strategic line of the WPK to concentrate all efforts of the whole party and country on the socialist economic construction."²

A note of caution here is that while Chairman Kim stated that tests and test launches were no longer necessary, he did not state that North Korea would abandon existing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. It appears that North Korea has not only failed to abandon them but is also gaining further confidence in its position as a nuclear power. Although North Korea vowed to abandon nuclear development in the Joint Statement of September 19 of the 2005 Six-Party Talks,

North Korea's current capabilities have reached too high a level to downgrade them to the level at that time. No matter how positive an impression is created by the third and fourth inter-Korean summit meetings, the recent U.S.-North Korea summit meeting, the three North Korea-China summit meetings already held, and the diplomatic performance surrounding them, a concrete process for disarmament including denuclearization is yet to be made clear. We should thus be mindful that the source of North Korea's military threat still persists.

Moreover, if North Korea were to truly abandon not only its capabilities but also its intended possession of nuclear weapons, then it ought to amend the preamble of its existing Constitution which enshrines North Korea as a nuclear power and abolish the Act on Further Strengthening North Korea's Status as a Self-Defense Nuclear Power (2013), a de facto peacetime nuclear doctrine.

North Korea's "One Agreement per U.S. Administration" Approach and Stall Tactic

The approach taken in the recent U.S.-North Korea summit meeting, including the Joint Statement, follows four past examples. For the most part, they went through the process of: North Korea causes a crisis ⇒ U.S.-North Korea negotiations ⇒ agreement.

Table: North Korea's "One Agreement per U.S. Administration" Approach (prepared by the author)

U.S. administration	Agreement	North Korean regime
Bill Clinton (Democrat)	Agreed Framework	Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il
George W. Bush (Republican)	September 19 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks	Kim Jong Il

Barack Obama (Democrat)	Leap Day Agreement	Kim Jong Un
Donald Trump (Republican)	Joint Statement in Singapore	Kim Jong Un

The Agreed Framework, which was established in 1994 as a result of avoiding the first nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, set forth that the United States would organize an international consortium, provide two light-water reactors to North Korea by 2003, and in the meantime supply heavy oil as an alternative energy. It also provided for many other concrete items, such as the process from the freeze to the dismantlement of graphite-moderated reactors and related facilities, monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), reduction of barriers to trade and investment including restrictions on telecommunications services and financial transactions, opening of a liaison office in the respective capitals following resolution of technical issues, upgrade of future U.S.-North Korea relations to the Ambassadorial level, negative security assurance (NSA), and promotion of North-South dialogue. Although the Agreed Framework was established in October 1994, North Korea had agreed to direct dialogue with the United States in June of that year. Kim Il Sung was North Korea's supreme leader at the time but died in July of that year, making Kim Jong Il the de facto supreme leader at the time of the Agreed Framework's establishment. The above international consortium was launched in 1995 as the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), and as is well known, Japan is one of its founding members.

In 2002, the second Korean Peninsula crisis occurred with the discovery of North Korea's uranium enrichment program. In response to this crisis, the Six-Party Talks was launched in 2003. In the September 19 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks agreed upon in the fourth round, North Korea committed to

abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards. Furthermore, the United States affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons. Incidental to this, the Republic of Korea (ROK) reaffirmed its commitment not to receive or deploy nuclear weapons in accordance with the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, while affirming that there exist no nuclear weapons within its territory. The Joint Statement "respected" North Korea's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. With regard to the Japan-North Korea relationship, the Joint Statement committed to taking "steps to normalize their relations in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration, on the basis of the settlement of unfortunate past and the outstanding issues of concern."

The U.S.-North Korea Leap Day Agreement (February 29) of 2012 was reached in between the death of Kim Jong Il (December 17, 2011) and the formal inauguration of Kim Jong Un as the supreme leader (April 15, 2012). In this agreement, the United States committed to providing 240,000 metric tons of nutritional assistance to North Korea and making subsequent efforts to materialize additional food assistance, as well as giving priority to discussing issues concerning the lifting of sanctions and the provision of light-water reactors if the Six-Party Talks is resumed. The United States and North Korea reaffirmed their intention to implement the September 19 Joint Statement. North Korea committed that, "upon request by the U.S. and with a view to maintaining positive atmosphere for the DPRK-U.S. high-level talks," during the period that fruitful talks are being held, it would temporarily suspend nuclear tests, long-range missile launches, and uranium enrichment activity at

Nyongbyon and accept their monitoring by IAEA. This agreement ended in failure, however, due to North Korea's announcement on March 16, 2012, prior to Kim Jong Un's formal inauguration as supreme leader of North Korea, that it would launch a missile disguised as a "satellite" and launched the missile on April 13, 2012.

As indicated above, since 1994, North Korea has sought to reach an agreement following individual negotiations with each U.S. administration, while advancing nuclear and missile development in its shadow. As such, it is clear that North Korea's "one agreement per U.S. administration" approach is intended for advancing nuclear and missile development while avoiding military attacks from each of the U.S. administrations. In other words, it is a stall tactic before accelerating the next phase of development. The administration changes every four or eight years in the United States. For North Korea, it made sense to pretend it was complying with the agreement until the next change of administration. And in 2017, North Korea at last completed "the state nuclear force." Meanwhile, the Trump administration imposes intense military pressure on North Korea as well as rigorous financial and economic sanctions. Conveniently for North Korea, the new ROK administration has adopted a reconciliation policy. Judging from North Korea's actions to date, it would not be surprising if Chairman Kim had decided to seize this opportunity and act as though it had shifted to a conciliatory posture and attempt to reach an agreement with the Trump administration.³

Existing and Future Guarantees of Regime Security

The next question is, what is meant by security guarantees to the regime? The concrete details will likely become clear going forward. Since the Joint Statement reached in Singapore refers to "security guarantees" in the plural form, similar to the beginning

of this column, they are thought to constitute multiple measures. Incidentally, in the Agreed Framework of 1994, the United States agreed to "provide formal assurances to the DPRK, against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the U.S." In the September 19 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks, it states, "The United States affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula and has no intention to attack or invade the DPRK with nuclear or conventional weapons." The statement further states, "The ROK reaffirmed its commitment not to receive or deploy nuclear weapons in accordance with the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, while affirming that there exist no nuclear weapons within its territory." As such, the United States has already committed to some "security guarantees" to North Korea, both in the Agreed Framework and at the Six-Party Talks. A point of caution here is that these security guarantees were provided to North Korea as a non-nuclear power. North Korea is essentially a nuclear power, and the guarantees of regime security demanded by North Korea are likely guarantees of regime security between nuclear powers on equal terms. It is inferred that amid the rise in military tensions between the United States and North Korea in 2017, North Korea was most fearful of a U.S. "decapitation operation" and flights by stealth bombers of the U.S. Forces towards North Korea on multiple occasions. From the perspective of North Korea, the safety of the supreme leader should be guaranteed first and foremost.

North Korea's consistent strategic goals have included "ending the United States' hostile policy towards North Korea." However, it is not necessarily clear on what basis North Korea would determine that the policy has ended. Based on the situation in each instance, North Korea has suggested, for example, suspension of U.S.-ROK joint exercises, stipulation of guarantees of regime security, lifting of North Korea's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, and

transition of the ceasefire agreement into a peace agreement.⁴ In the latest Joint Statement, the words “security guarantees” are mentioned, and the United States agreed to limited suspension of U.S.-ROK joint exercises. In this regard, the United States has indicated that it would adopt a posture that follows the wishes of North Korea.

Conclusion: Implications for Japan’s Security

The achievement of North Korea’s denuclearization will likely depend on future U.S.-North Korea consultations and negotiations. It is expected that the consultations, negotiations, and the execution of the agreement will not be easy. In particular, the greatest point at issue in the consultations and negotiations is the scope and deadline of denuclearization. Considerations must also be paid to other WMDs and the relationship with the inter-Korean Panmunjom Declaration. Of course, there may be instances in which the two countries appear to be making smooth progress on the surface. Judging from North Korea’s past actions, however, it is difficult to dispel the concern that North Korea will secretly retain its existing capabilities and advance nuclear and missile development.

Both Japan and the United States will not lift sanctions unless North Korea takes concrete and meaningful steps to denuclearization. This policy should be adhered to. Meanwhile, inter-Korean working-level consultations are taking place in parallel with the U.S.-North Korea working-level negotiations. Japan, the United States, and the ROK need to work closely to ensure that economic assistance is not actually provided to North Korea in the absence of concrete progress towards denuclearization.

As a result of the agreement, the possibility of military clashes between the United States and North Korea has decreased, and they will likely continue their diplomatic efforts to keep the situation under control for the time being. It has been reported that the United

States and the ROK will immediately resume the suspended joint exercises if North Korea indicates it will not execute the agreement. In other words, the conciliatory mood on the Korean Peninsula and its periphery could rapidly cool depending on the circumstances, and new military tensions may rise.

Finally, Japan must continue to prepare for unforeseen situations and seek to strengthen its defense capabilities without being deceived by the current conciliatory mood.

¹ See, for example, “Hikakuka Kotei Bei 47 Komoku Sotei Misairu nado Fukumu [Denuclearization Process: U.S. Anticipates 47 Items Including Missile],” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, June 18, 2018, p. 2.

² “Third Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea: Guidance from Chairman Kim Jong Un,” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 21, 2018, pp. 1-3. (“3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK Held in Presence of Kim Jong Un,” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 21, 2018. http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=S F01_02_01&newsID=2018-04-21-0019)

³ Hiroyasu Akutsu, “Shuno Kaidan de Wahei Seiritsu demo Kitachosen no ‘Yokushiryoku’ wa Onzon sareru to iu Genjitsu [North Korea’s ‘Deterrence Power’ Will Be Retained in Reality, Even If Summit Meeting Establishes Peace],” *Gendai Bijinesu* [Modern Business], June 7, 2018.

⁴ Hiroyasu Akutsu, “The Security Strategy of North Korea’s Kim Jong Un Regime: A Japanese Perspective,” *Report of the NIDS International Symposium on Security Affairs 2016*, pp. 93-107, especially pp. 95-96.

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