

## The ROK-U.S. Summit and the South-North-U.S. Trilateral Panmunjom Meeting: Outcome and Tasks Ahead

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The ROK-U.S. summit between President Moon and President Trump was successfully held on June 29-30 in Seoul, marking their eighth meeting and President Trump's second visit to Korea. At the meeting, the ROK and U.S. widely discussed security environments including the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and ways of cooperation on main alliance issues. The historic meeting of President Trump and Chairman Kim in Panmunjom, which was facilitated by the ROK-U.S. summit, and three leaders' dramatic encounter attracted interests from all over the world. As such, the ROK-U.S. summit and the trilateral Panmunjom meeting achieved the expected results as they occurred amid estranged inter-Korean relations and a deadlock in denuclearization negotiations following the Hanoi Summit.

The first joint visit to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and Joint Security Area (JSA) by the ROK and U.S. leaders as well as the trilateral Panmunjom meeting has helped the Korean peace process forward. In the past, U.S. Presidents' DMZ visits were largely aimed at conveying a strong deterrence message to the North. In contrast, President Trump's recent visit to the DMZ in accompany with President Moon communicated hopeful messages to the world that the DMZ is not a symbol of competition, division, and hostilities, but rather one of reconciliation, integration, and peace. It is noteworthy that President Trump became the first serving American president to cross the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and set foot in North Korea, holding Chairman Kim by the hand. It is a symbolic act which history will hopefully view as beginning of

dismantlement of the decades-old division of the Korean Peninsula, the last remnant of the Cold War in the world.

The U.S.-North Korea Panmunjom summitry, the first of its kind in 66 years since the armistice, injected fresh momentum into the stalled denuclearization talks, along with its symbolic significance. It all happened rather quickly in a day, from President Trump's impromptu Tweeter invitation and Chairman Kim's acceptance. Enough transpired at the meeting as it merits a "summit." It showed presence of at least personal trust relationship between President Trump and Chairman Kim and their willingness to talk. This personal relationship between the two leaders is now a driving force for maintaining dialogue momentum between the U.S. and North Korea.

President Trump and Chairman Kim arrived at a substantial agreement to restart working-level talks on denuclearization within two to three weeks. This agreement deserves attention as it represents North Korea's behavioral change, which was lukewarm and critical about the resumption of talks after no deal in Hanoi summit. The U.S., likewise, showed greater flexibility, mentioning a simultaneous and parallel approach to denuclearization. Overall, the private meeting between President Trump and Chairman Kim did enhance their mutual understanding regarding denuclearization negotiations. They would have exchanged opinions and perceptions on the breakdown of the Hanoi summit, and checked on each other's goals and approaches to denuclearization negotiations. Such efforts for mutual understanding will be conducive to finding a common ground for future talks, by reducing misunderstandings and mistrust between the U.S. and North Korea.

Meanwhile, at the ROK-U.S. summit, the two sides reconfirmed their strong alliance, and laid the groundwork for the alliance to develop into a comprehensive strategic alliance. The two leaders concurred that the steadfast ROK-U.S. alliance serves as a linchpin of regional peace, stability and prosperity. In regional and global issues, they agreed to continue to work closely as strong allies confirming shared interests in expansion of bilateral trade and investments, harmonious cooperation between Korea's New Southern Policy and the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy, and close coordination for stability in the Middle East. Also, the summit dispelled worries raised both at home and abroad that the ROK-U.S. alliance had appeared to be weakening as President Trump contrary to initial concerns did not openly demand Korea to join in the anti-Huawei campaign or greater burden-sharing

Therefore, the ROK-U.S. summit and the trilateral Panmunjom meeting, not mere meetings, merit attention. What was most encouraging about the summit talks was that President Trump and Chairman Kim agreed to the prompt resumption of the denuclearization talks. Nevertheless, we shouldn't overlook some pending issues when it comes to reactivating the U.S.-North Korea denuclearization talks and continuous development of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

First, the U.S. and North Korea should learn from failures of previous negotiations and utilize the upcoming working-level talks to produce practical, substantive results. President Trump and Chairman Kim will carry forward a third U.S.-North Korea summit based on the results of working-level negotiations. However, the U.S. and North Korea still remain divergent over the definition of denuclearization, equivalence of denuclearization measures and sanctions relief, value and scope of dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear facilities, and denuclearization roadmap. U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun reportedly told reporters aboard a plane flight back to Washington from Seoul that U.S. was looking for a complete freeze of North Korea's WMD programs and presented U.S. requirements, i.e. definition of final phase of the denuclearization and discussion of denuclearization roadmap. Also, Biegun was quoted as saying "U.S. has no interest to lift the sanctions against North Korea until North Korea completely denuclearizes." He reportedly said that the U.S. could give other concessions, such as humanitarian relief, increased social exchanges, and establishment of liaison office with North Korea in Pyongyang. To what extent North Korea will take a flexible stance is yet to be known. Therefore, more concentrated efforts to narrow their differences are required in order to produce substantive implementation plan for denuclearization.

South Korea needs to contemplate its role in the U.S.-North denuclearization process and actively pursue its own national interests. In the upcoming working-level U.S.-North talks, security assurance for the North Korean regime is likely to be a main agenda. North Korea security assurance is a matter that requires a comprehensive and long-term approach encompassing areas of politics, foreign relations, economy, and military, and is directly linked to establishment of peace regime on the Peninsula, future of the ROK-U.S. alliance, and regional security order in Northeast Asia. Therefore, even under the bilateral negotiation structure between the U.S. and North Korea, South Korea has to play its role as an active, creative facilitator so as not to be excluded from the negotiation process. And the international community is highly required to support the role of South Korea.

Lastly, South Korea has to find interface between its New Southern Policy and the U.S.' Indo-Pacific Strategy and cooperative areas for mutual development. At the ROK-U.S. summit,

the two leaders agreed to carry forward harmonious cooperation between their policies under the regional cooperation principle of openness, inclusiveness, and transparency. One area underlined in the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, recently released by the U.S. Department of Defense, is strengthening of international cooperation for regional countries' maritime capacity-building. Hence, South Korea will be able to contribute to maintaining a stable maritime order by cooperating in maritime capacity-building efforts with ASEAN countries, which are key partners of its New Southern Policy.

The ROK-U.S. summit and the trilateral Panmunjom meeting are meant to be historic milestones on the road toward the complete denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. The landmark event for a new epoch of the Peninsula has concluded. Hereon, while calmly preparing for post-Panmunjom talks, we must bear in mind what history says that "direction is so much more important than speed."