

Keynote Addresses

The New Developments on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia

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The Institute for National Security and Strategy to which I belong is a national policy research institution undertaking analysis of the situation and policy proposals to the ROK government relating to national security. I am honored today to have been given the opportunity to give voice to my thoughts on the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

In this past year, there have been numerous changes on the Korean Peninsula. The leaders of the United States and the DPRK, who had been threatening each other with pressing the nuclear buttons on their desks up until the beginning of 2018, just six months later held their first summit, and promised to establish a new relationship.

The mutually estranged DPRK and China—after Jang Song Thaek, the uncle of Kim Jong Un and known as pro-China, was purged—have held three summit meetings in the space of just one year. The ROK and the DPRK also, having held only two summits in the approximately 60 years since the division of the peninsula, held no less than three in the space of one year.

Other than those, summits have been held many times among the nations neighboring the Korean Peninsula, including Japan–China–ROK, US–ROK, and Japan–US summits. While it is unusual that numerous summits have been held in this way in one year, what is more profoundly interesting is that the greater part of these summits have raised the Korean Peninsula problem as an issue. Therefore today I would like to talk about several points on the theme of the new developments on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

First, in order to understand how great the changes were which the Korean Peninsula experienced in 2018, it is necessary to look back a little further in time. Since Chairman Kim Jong Un came to the fore at the end of 2011, the DPRK has carried out more than 80 test firings of ballistic missiles. In 2016 alone, two nuclear tests were conducted, and test firings of various types of missiles were carried out no less than 26 times. In 2017 18 ballistic missile tests took place, but among them were two intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). In the Kim Jong Un era alone the DPRK has undertaken four nuclear tests, but after the sixth nuclear test in September 2017 the DPRK announced that it was a hydrogen bomb test. On 29 November 2017 they test fired an ICBM, the Hwasong-15, capable of attacking the United States mainland directly. Prior to that in August 2017, the DPRK's strategic military command threatened to make an enveloping attack on the US territory of Guam.

Just one year ago on the morning of Saturday 13 January 2018, an emergency warning message email was mistakenly sent out in Hawaii, saying that a DPRK missile was flying toward it, and its residents were greatly disconcerted. This event turned out to be an accident, but it showed how deeply the people of the United States are taking the threat of the DPRK's missiles. At the same time, Japan

is also apprehensive about the DPRK's missiles. Since the US Trump administration was launched, the US government and private sector have felt greatly threatened by the DPRK's nuclear weapons, to the extent that for the first time the DPRK issue was the subject of a public hearing held by the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

President Trump criticized the DPRK's Chairman Kim Jong Un using vehement language, and in April 2017 announced maximum pressure and engagement policies to induce denuclearization, with economic sanctions on the DPRK, diplomatic isolation, as well as military pressure. Moreover, on 20 November 2017 the United States re-designated the DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism. And yet further, the "bloody nose" strategy was reported in the media, implying military tactics against the DPRK. In this fashion, up to 2017 there was no sign of a resolution of the DPRK nuclear issue, and the situation on the Korean Peninsula was seen to have deteriorated to its worst level.

The ROK Moon Jae-in administration launched in May 2017 made a start in taking on the major diplomatic and security issues for resolving the DPRK nuclear problem. The ROK government took its objective as the peaceful resolution of the DPRK nuclear problem and the construction of a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and made efforts to lead the DPRK onto the path to denuclearization, mobilizing all methods, including sanctions and dialogue.

Change began with the DPRK's New Year address and the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. On 1 January 2018, via the New Year address, the DPRK's Chairman Kim Jong Un stated the intention to improve North–South relations and to participate in the Pyeongchang Olympics, and with the ROK promptly responding to that, the situation on the Korean Peninsula began to change rapidly.

The Pyeongchang Olympics became the catalyst for changing the North–South relationship which had fallen into tension and confrontation for many years into one of dialogue and cooperation. ROK and DPRK athletes undertook joint training at the Masikryong Ski Resort in the DPRK, entered the opening ceremony together, and the women's ice hockey team participated in games as a combined team. High-level delegations were dispatched twice so that the DPRK would be able to participate in the opening and closing ceremonies. One high-level delegation member was Kim Yo Jong, Director of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Workers' Party of Korea and younger sister of Chairman Kim Jong Un, and with a personal letter from Chairman Kim Jong Un to President Moon Jae-in, she conveyed the intention to invite him to visit the DPRK.

In reciprocity for the dispatch of the DPRK high-level delegations, on 5 March the ROK government sent a delegation of special envoys

which included Chung Eui-yong, Director of the National Security Office, and Suh Hoon, Director of the National Intelligence Service. The delegation of special envoys met Chairman Kim Jong Un and agreed on holding a North–South summit at the end of April. Chairman Kim Jong Un made clear to the delegation of special envoys that he hoped for dialogue with the United States in order to discuss the denuclearization issue and the normalization of US–DPRK relations, and that he wanted to meet President Trump at the earliest possible time. Moreover, he also made clear that while the dialogue is taking place with the United States, nuclear tests, and test firings of ballistic missiles and the like would not be undertaken.

The reason the DPRK has chosen a strategic change cannot be known exactly from the outside. However, last year the DPRK attempted a major change in strategic direction internally. Through that it is possible to deduce the reason the DPRK has chosen change. On 20 April 2018, via the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the 7th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, the DPRK changed the nation's strategic direction from the line of simultaneous economic construction and a nuclear force to one of concentrating all efforts on socialist economic construction. Stated simply, they have changed the nation's strategic direction from simultaneously promoting nuclear weapons and the economy to concentrating on the economy. In comparison with Chairman Kim Jong Un himself emphasizing that the line of simultaneous economic construction and a nuclear force was a strategic direction to be promoted permanently and not a temporary measure at the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea held in 2016, it means that in just two years major change has arisen.

Of course, if the current denuclearization negotiations fail, there will be the possibility of the DPRK returning to a hard line once again. However, with the 2018 denuclearization situation being based upon the choice of Chairman Kim Jong Un, I think that it is difficult for Chairman Kim Jong Un himself to wreck his own choice. In particular, as he has decided to concentrate all efforts on economic construction, he also has the onus of having to show economic results sufficiently to the people.

Several months ago I had the opportunity of meeting a DPRK senior official, and we exchanged opinions on the situation on the Korean Peninsula. I spoke of there being public opinion in the ROK. I informed the official that as there is public opinion in the ROK, not even the president can make decisions of his own volition. With that the DPRK senior official asked why I thought there was no public opinion in their country. I was shocked by those words. I had always been under the impression that because the DPRK was a dictatorship there was no public opinion. I was mistaken in my thinking, however. In retrospect, the ROK experienced a period of military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s, but at that time too there was public opinion in the ROK. Going back still further, public opinion existed even in the Korean Dynasties period. There ought to be public opinion in the DPRK as well. Whoever the dictator, the regime wouldn't last long without accepting public opinion. I think it is the same with Kim Jong Un also in the DPRK.

So what is the public opinion in the DPRK now? That may be said simply to be the raising of the economic level. Chairman Kim Jong Un knows that well. For that reason, during his first public speech on 15 April 2012 he promised that the people of the DPRK would not

have to tighten their belts a second time. To that extent Chairman Kim Jong Un knows that the economy is important. I interpret that, to that end, he changed the line from simultaneous nuclear and economic advancement to one concentrating on the economy.

President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong Un have carried out three summits. The various agreements made at the summits can be divided into three major categories. The first is invigorating North–South exchange and cooperation. The second is ceasing North–South hostile actions, easing military tension, and eliminating the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula. The third is achieving complete denuclearization.

At the first summit which took place on 27 April, the Panmunjom Declaration was announced. Via that declaration, the two Koreas promised to cooperate toward the improvement of North–South relations, the easing of military tensions, and the establishment of a peace structure for the Korean Peninsula, amongst other things. Panmunjom, where the summit was held—at the place where the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed—is an area symbolizing the division of the Korean Peninsula. Within the Panmunjom Declaration a statement was inserted for realizing a Korean Peninsula without nuclear weapons through complete denuclearization. To that end the Panmunjom Declaration became the first document that a supreme leader of the DPRK has signed directly which incorporates an intention of denuclearization.

Via the declaration a mood of reconciliation between the two Koreas was created, but the DPRK denounced the US–ROK joint air force exercises held from 11 May as a military provocation toward the Panmunjom Declaration, and refused dialogue with the ROK. The North–South dialogue was suspended, but in order for Chairman Kim Jong Un to find a breakthrough in US–DPRK relations, which had not progressed much at all, he requested a meeting with President Moon Jae-in and the dialogue suddenly resumed.

In the process of the US–DPRK negotiations, the DPRK criticized the US demand for the unilateral abandonment of its nuclear programs, and stated its position that it could reconsider the US–DPRK summit. In response, President Trump announced the cancellation of the US–DPRK summit, two days later on 26 May President Moon and Chairman Kim Jong Un held another summit at Panmunjom, and agreed on such matters as cooperation for the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and for the success of the US–DPRK summit, and the prompt implementation of the content of the Panmunjom Declaration.

In this fashion, such matters as the DPRK relying on the ROK for the improvement of US–DPRK relations and the raising of the nuclear issue as a major subject for discussion in the negotiations with the ROK are things which have never been seen before. Around the time of the US–DPRK summit, the DPRK held three China–DPRK summits. Through those the DPRK restored China–DPRK relations, distanced from the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime, and I think they were trying to achieve security in the negotiations with the United States. China, meanwhile, reconfirmed its own influence relating to the Korean Peninsula problem via the China–DPRK summits.

On 12 June the first-ever US–DPRK summit was held in Singapore. At the summit held on the island of Sentosa in Singapore, the DPRK and US leaders made a joint statement which included

content such as: the establishment of new US–DPRK relations; joint efforts to build a peace regime; the DPRK working toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula; and recovering and repatriating the remains of US POWs and war dead from the time of the Korean War. Regarding the content of the agreement between the US and DPRK leaders in Singapore, there was also criticism of it not coming up to expectations. It was also pointed out that there was no concrete content concerning denuclearization in the agreement. Looking back at the security situation on the Korean Peninsula in 2017, however, the US–DPRK summit not only created a springboard for the dissolution of the mutually hostile relations between the two nations, but could be said to have paved the way for markedly reducing the risk of military conflict in the DPRK.

The DPRK and the United States, however, experienced difficulties in implementing the points of the agreement at the Singapore summit. The DPRK, despite its own steps of actual denuclearization, such as the halting of nuclear and missile tests and the dismantling of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site, voiced dissatisfaction that the United States was insisting on prior denuclearization only, refusing commensurate steps and strengthening sanctions against the DPRK. Meanwhile, the United States stuck to its position that additional steps were necessary, including a declaration of nuclear capabilities, and cancelled a visit to the DPRK by Secretary of State Pompeo planned for August.

In order to have talks on the preparations for the upcoming North–South summit in the autumn and on measures for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, on 5 September the ROK government sent special presidential envoys to Pyongyang. On 4 September President Moon Jae-in had spoken with President Trump by phone and explained the meaning of sending special envoys to the DPRK, and President Trump had proposed President Moon for the role of chief negotiator for both the United States and the DPRK. While meeting the delegation of special envoys, Chairman Kim Jong Un declared his intention to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula during President Trump’s first term.

The Pyongyang Joint Declaration was adopted at the third North–South summit held in Pyongyang in September. Included in the declaration were: the holding of groundbreaking ceremonies within the year for connecting railways and roads, the priority normalization of the Kaesong Industrial Zone and tourism at Kumgangsan; the strengthening of cooperation for the fundamental resolution of the problem of the divided families’ issue; and working on a joint hosting of the 2032 Olympics. In addition, it also included concrete measures connected to denuclearization, such as the permanent closure with the attendance of the nations concerned of the Dongchang-ri engine testing site and missile launching pads, and the permanent decommissioning of the Nyongbyon [Yongbyon] nuclear facility, in the case of the United States taking a commensurate step. Moreover, it was specified that Chairman Kim Jong Un would visit Seoul in the near future.

As an appendix agreement to the Pyongyang Joint Declaration, an agreement on the implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration in the military sphere was also adopted. For the implementation of the agreement and consultation at any time for the prevention of military clashes, it also included the immediate setting-up of a North–South Military Joint Committee. The actual practice of the implementation

agreement in the military sphere, while having a limited form between the two Koreas, has the significance of there being the control of armaments. After the September summit, the content of this military agreement is being moved smoothly to implementation. Through that, the result of the tension from the confrontation of conventional weaponry easing has gradually become visible.

The major transformation in North–South relations in the last 12 months could be said to have been realized due to the intermeshing of the ROK government’s consistent DPRK policy and the changes in the DPRK’s external policy. Even while the ROK government is maintaining sanctions on the DPRK, it has been continually furthering policy to draw out change in the DPRK, by presenting a bright future post-denuclearization. In addition, it hasn’t wavered from its line of using the Pyeongchang Olympics as a turning point for the improvement of North–South relations and for the consolidation of peace on the Korean Peninsula. At the end of 2017 when tensions rose with the DPRK’s Hwasong-15 missile, the ROK government suggested the postponement of the next US–ROK military exercises, and via that induced the DPRK’s participation at the Olympics. Then it realized the North–South summit, leveraging the mood of reconciliation created at the time of the Olympics. Moreover, the ROK government adopted a policy of developing North–South relations and US–DPRK relations together, and achieved a certain degree of success. President Moon, in an interview with US media on 25 September, also presented the idea of the United States, which is unfavorable to the easing of sanctions, being able to take commensurate steps which the DPRK hopes for, in methods such as a declaration of the end of the Korean War, humanitarian assistance, or the establishment of a US liaison office in Pyongyang, and the exchange of economic inspection teams.

Furthermore, the DPRK has also undertaken a decision to proactively improve relations with the ROK and enter into denuclearization talks, and it could be said to be getting involved in the improvement of North–South relations. In particular, via the development of North–South relations, the point taken of attempting to fix US–DPRK relations is worthy of attention. The DPRK for a long period to date has stuck to a position of not discussing the nuclear issue with the ROK. However, changing that position last year, it made clear its intention to denuclearize via the special envoys sent by President Moon Jae-in. Through this, they realized the first US–DPRK summit, amongst other things. Within the Joint Statement at that first US–DPRK summit, the DPRK reaffirmed the Panmunjom Declaration of April 2018, and included the phrase of making efforts for the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This showed very clearly that North–South relations were pulling US–DPRK relations in their train.

That does not mean that the last 12 months was only about North–South relations pulling US–DPRK relations in their train. With North–South relations being linked to US–DPRK relations, when US–DPRK negotiations were deadlocked, North–South relations were dampened also. Toward the ROK having assumed the role of mediator between the United States and the DPRK, the situations where the DPRK and the United States have respectively laid bare their discontent are not few. The DPRK has made the criticism that the ROK is using sanctions, and is halfhearted about North–South relations. In addition, some people in the United States have

emphasized that Seoul has plunged headlong into the improvement of North–South relations, and that there is the possibility of cracks appearing in ROK–US coordination.

In this way, the situation on the Korean Peninsula is in a whirl and changing dramatically, but the reality is that there still remain many problems to resolve. It appears that now real change has at last begun.

Via the New Year address this year also, the DPRK has made clear its position of developing North–South relations, and cooperating on the peace and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula. In proceeding to full denuclearization regarding the nuclear issue, there is the constant position of the party and republic, and Chairman Kim Jong Un has expressed his own steadfast will. That phrase, his own steadfast will, is worthy of attention.

Viewed from the New Year address, this year also it is forecast that by and large North–South relations will not be harmonious. The DPRK, however, is requesting the restarting of the Kaesong Industrial Zone and the reopening of tourism at Kungangsan, which are constrained due to sanctions, and the halting of US–ROK joint military exercises amongst other things, and will probably put pressure on the ROK to develop North–South relations, regardless of US–DPRK relations.

Additionally, in the New Year address, the DPRK proposed four-party negotiations among the ROK, the DPRK, the United States and China to change the armistice framework to a framework for peace. Furthermore, on his birthday on 8 January, Chairman Kim Jong Un visited China, and it was the fourth China–DPRK summit held since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime. Considering such a situation, the Korean Peninsula this year will probably appear more dynamic and complex.

There is an often-asked question about the changes in the situation on the Korean Peninsula in 2018. That has to do with the DPRK’s seriousness. The question is whether the DPRK’s intention of denuclearization is dependable. Looking back at the DPRK’s behavior in previous denuclearization negotiations and their implementation, such a doubt is fully understandable. However, it is not the case that relations between nations are begun without confidence. Conversely, via reciprocal relations, the approach of building up confidence may be more realistic. Therefore, for genuine change in the situation on the Korean Peninsula, it is extremely important that the two Koreas and the surrounding nations produce new agreements, as is the process of implementing them. They have to build mutual trust through actual practice.

Moreover, it is necessary to consider the point that trust and a feeling of mistrust are reciprocal. For the DPRK also, assurances in the post-nuclear decommissioning period are necessary. Having the assurance that decommissioning is much more beneficial than possessing nuclear weapons, then wouldn’t the DPRK relinquish them of its own accord? To date international society has much debated the sanctions aimed at the DPRK’s wrongdoing. However, there has not been a lot of debate as to what commensurate measures to take when the DPRK gets to the point of abandoning its nuclear weapons. I think it is possible to encourage positive change, substantiating commensurate measures aimed at positive change and preventing wrongdoing for the first time.

The DPRK nuclear issue became a focus of international society’s

attention in the 1990s, and subsequently has been a threat from a long time ago, not having been resolved over a span of approximately 30 years. Particularly with the DPRK’s nuclear capability rising, the DPRK nuclear issue has become a core security concern in Northeast Asia, and not just on the Korean Peninsula. In Northeast Asia, however, the DPRK nuclear issue is not the sole security problem. For example, the clashing of the United States and China has the appearance of a hegemonic war on all sides, and its repercussions have the potential to spread globally. Of course, it differs from the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, but the US–China antagonism doesn’t have clear boundaries. The clashing and cooperation cross over. However, war and confrontation between great powers has a domestically-oriented appearance which is greatly alarming. In particular, in the case of domestically-oriented policies colliding in the countries of Northeast Asia, where bones of contention that have an influence on public sentiment—such as historical and territorial issues—have been smoldering, the negative repercussions will be extremely large. Consequently, the ROK government, has been seeking cooperation on a variety of issues with Northeast Asia obviously, as well as with many more countries.

The ROK’s Northeast Asian policy can be classified roughly into three. I would like to conclude my address, speaking concisely on those three policies. The first is the New Northern Policy, the second the New Southern Policy, and the third is a Northeast Asian peace cooperation platform.

The New Northern Policy is a policy of linking together the transportation, logistics and energy infrastructure of the ROK and the countries of Eurasia. It attempts to connect the ROK, which had become in effect an island nation due to the division of Korea, to the continent. This concept has been a matter of concern for a long time for the ROK in the post-Cold War period, and is directly linked to the resolution of the DPRK issue as well.

The New Southern Policy is one of strengthening cooperation with ASEAN and India. The ROK began showing interest toward ASEAN and South Asia after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. If the subsequent cooperation with ASEAN is taken as having been promoted from the perspective of the ROK’s economic advantage, this New Southern Policy differs in that it attempts to create common benefit.

If the objectives of the above two policies are taken to be focused on prosperity, then the objective of the third Northeast Asian peace cooperation platform is a concept focusing on peace, attempting to make dialogue and cooperation in Northeast Asia regular and systematized. That is, it is a concept for creating virtuous-circle relations for peace and prosperity, and achieving joint prosperity naturally for the two Koreas, as well as neighboring countries. The twenty-first century world is becoming more close-knit. Regardless of whether hoped for or not, a state of mutual influence is increasing. Therefore, the ROK will expand further the space for cooperation, and make efforts for diversification. In the non-conventional security issues, if experience in various kinds of cooperation can be built up, then it would have a positive effect also for the resolution of conventional security issues like the nuclear issue.

This year, I don’t know what direction the changes in the situation on the Korean Peninsula will take, but at this point in time it appears

to be heading in the desired direction, including the staging of a US–DPRK summit. However, by doing nothing good results cannot be expected. In peacefully resolving the DPRK nuclear issue via the changes in the situation now, the ROK will probably not be able to

stand still in order to open up an era of peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. I hope with all my heart for the understanding and cooperation of all in Japan.

[Translated by ERINA]