

BACKGROUND

No. 3381 | FEBRUARY 1, 2019

Seoul Must Not Reduce Its Security Before Pyongyang Reduces Its Threat

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Abstract

U.S.–North Korean denuclearization negotiations have stalled. Seven months after the historic U.S.–North Korea summit, the two sides cannot even agree on common definitions of “denuclearization” and “Korean peninsula.” The two Koreas, however, have moved quickly to improve bilateral relations prior to any progress on denuclearization. South Korea has pledged massive economic benefits without requiring North Korea to commit to unilaterally abandoning its nuclear and missile arsenals as required under 11 United Nations resolutions. South Korean officials have told U.S. counterparts that Seoul wants to separate its engagement with Pyongyang from denuclearization. As a result, the United States is increasingly concerned about President Moon’s policies toward North Korea. While the focus has been on denuclearization, Washington and Seoul must not lose sight of the massive North Korean conventional force that threatens South Korea and U.S. troops stationed there. The Moon administration has also become North Korea’s advocate by advocating for a peace declaration, which would be a meaningless gesture. A peace treaty should only come after progress in reducing North Korea’s nuclear threat, missile threat, and conventional force threat to South Korea and the U.S.

America’s denuclearization negotiations with North Korea have stalled. Seven months after the historic U.S.–North Korea summit, the two sides cannot even agree on common definitions of “denuclearization” and “Korean peninsula.” The two Koreas, however, have moved quickly to improve bilateral relations prior to any progress on denuclearization.

KEY POINTS

- South Korea’s prioritization of improved inter-Korean relations over North Korean denuclearization puts the U.S. ally at odds with the long-standing U.S. emphasis on eliminating Pyongyang’s nuclear threat.
- The April 2018 inter-Korean summit led to pledges of nonaggression and mutual force reduction. But none of the many previous pledges prevented North Korea from provocations, assassination attempts on the South Korean president, terrorist acts, military and cyberattacks, and acts of war.
- Recent self-imposed constraints by the U.S. and South Korea have not been reciprocated by North Korea. Pyongyang has not constrained or cancelled any military exercises.
- While the allies risk degrading their deterrence and defense capabilities, there has been no diminution in the North Korean conventional threat to South Korea and U.S. troops stationed there. Pyongyang continues to augment its nuclear and missile arsenals.
- The onus is on North Korea to take actions to overcome the current diplomatic stalemate.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3381>

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South Korea has pledged massive economic benefits without requiring North Korea to commit to unilaterally abandoning its nuclear and missile arsenals as required under 11 United Nations resolutions. Seoul increasingly sees denuclearization as a U.S.–North Korean issue rather than one that affects all U.N. nations. South Korean officials have told U.S. counterparts that Seoul wants to separate its engagement with Pyongyang from denuclearization.¹

As a result, the United States is increasingly concerned about President Moon Jae-in’s policies toward North Korea. Washington perceives Seoul as getting too far ahead of the U.S. by prioritizing improved north-south relations over denuclearization. The Moon administration has had to be reined in through both public and private messages, according to U.S. officials.²

While the focus has been on denuclearization, Washington and Seoul must not lose sight of the massive North Korean conventional force that threatens South Korea and U.S. troops stationed there.

The Moon administration has also become North Korea’s advocate by advocating for a peace declaration. Such a declaration is a meaningless gesture; a peace treaty should only come after progress in reducing North Korea’s nuclear threat, missile threat, and conventional force threat to the allies.

Divergence on North Korea Policy: A Challenge to the Alliance

President Moon’s prioritization of improving inter-Korean relations over denuclearization puts him at odds with the long-standing U.S. emphasis on eliminating the North Korean nuclear threat. Washington and Seoul have increasingly divergent assessments of the North Korean threat and the policy for responding to Pyongyang’s nuclear, missile, and conventional threats.

Policy differences were so great that it became impossible for them to remain out of the public eye.

A U.S.–South Korea working group was created to encourage bilateral consultations rather than post-fact notifications and announcements. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo described the working group as making “sure that we don’t talk past each other, that we don’t take an action or the South Koreans don’t take an action that the other is unaware of or hasn’t had a chance to comment on or provide their thoughts.”³

Seoul Advocates Economic Benefits for Pyongyang. President Moon resurrected the progressive “sunshine policy,” under which extensive benefits are promised or provided to North Korea in hopes that doing so will eventually induce Pyongyang to moderate its hostile policies. The Moon administration promised a lengthy and ever-growing list of economic benefits to North Korea despite the absence of any progress on denuclearization. All of Seoul’s economic plans would violate U.N. sanctions, U.S. laws, or both.

A partial listing of South Korea’s promised largesse includes the following:

- The Panmunjom Declaration revived South Korea’s nine paragraphs of massive infrastructure project proposals in the 2007 inter-Korean summit statement. The Ministry of Unification estimates that the cost of implementing part of the inter-Korean summit agreements would be \$264 million in 2019. However, after the 2007 inter-Korean summit, the Ministry estimated that the inter-Korean projects would cost \$12.7 billion.⁴ In 2018, the South Korea Rail Network Authority estimated it would require \$38.6 billion to upgrade North Korea’s decrepit railroad system.⁵
- In June 2018, South Korean officials pledged to help North Korea modernize its roads on both the east and west coasts to international standards to enable “balanced development and co-prosperity.”⁶

1. Daniel Sneider, “Behind the Chaos of Washington’s Korea Policy,” *Tokyo Business Today*, August 27, 2018, <https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/235272> (accessed January 24, 2019).

2. Author interviews with U.S. officials.

3. “Pompeo: Inter-Korean Cooperation Should Not Outpace NK Denuclearization,” *The Korea Times*, November 21, 2018, <http://m.koreatimes.co.kr/pages/article.asp?newsIdx=259040> (accessed January 24, 2019).

4. “Government Dismisses Criticism Over Cost of Inter-Korean Summit Implementation,” *Yonhap*, September 12, 2018, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180912010500315> (accessed January 24, 2019).

5. Lee Yong-soo, “Modernizing N.Korea’s Railways Would Cost W43 Trillion,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, October 1, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/10/01/2018100101323.html?Dep0=twitter (accessed January 24, 2019).

6. Lee Sung-eun, “South to Work on North’s Roads,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, June 20, 2018, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3049971> (accessed January 24, 2019).

- In his August 15, 2018, Liberation Day speech, President Moon advocated the future resumption of the Kaesong and Kumgangsan joint economic ventures with North Korea as well as reconnecting inter-Korean rail lines, natural resource development projects, and special unification economic zones. A Ministry of Unification spokesperson commented that the “Kaesong Industrial Complex should resume as soon as possible.”⁷
- The Moon administration earmarked \$992 million for cooperation projects with North Korea in 2019, a 14.3 percent increase over last year’s budget. The majority of the fund (\$450 million) would be spent on improving North Korea’s road and rail infrastructure, with an additional \$400 million on forestry cooperation to provide fertilizer to the north. Money devoted to a planned North Korean human rights foundation would be reduced.⁸
- South Korea’s Minister of Oceans and Fisheries Kim Young-choon said Seoul would seek to create a joint fishing zone near the western sea border and modernize North Korean ports.⁹
- In December, South Korea held a National Security Council meeting to discuss creating an international air route linking the two Koreas.¹⁰
- *Moon Seeks Sanctions Exemptions.* The Moon administration has repeatedly requested reduction of international sanctions on North Korea, or that South Korea be exempted from levying sanctions. In July 2018, the Moon administration sought exemptions from U.N. sanctions in order to pursue economic projects with North Korea.¹¹ In December, South Korea asked the U.S. for wider exemptions to U.N. sanctions in order to expand joint economic and business projects with North Korea.

National Security Office Chief Chung Eui-yong claimed that more exemptions were needed to build trust between the Koreas, and between Pyongyang and Washington, prior to the next Trump–Kim summit.¹² Chung declared that North Korea’s denuclearization process has already passed the point of no return and has “begun to enter an irreversible phase.”¹³

U.S. Cautions South Korea on Sanctions Enforcement. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha admitted to the National Assembly that she had had a tense phone call with Secretary of State Pompeo because Seoul had not consulted Washington prior to the October 2018 summit agreement. U.S. officials explained that “South Korea’s explanations for opening a liaison office in North Korea were not satisfactory.” Kang indicated that Washington was also caught unaware when South Korean businessmen involved in the Kaesong economic venture were invited to the opening ceremony of the office.¹⁴

7. “S. Korea, U.S. Have Different Views on Resuming Kaesong Complex,” *The Dong-a Ilbo*, August 2, 2018, <http://english.donga.com/List/3/01/26/1410468/1> (accessed January 24, 2019).

8. Lee Sung-eun, “South Raises Spending on North,” *Korea Joongang Daily*, August 29, 2018, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3052473> (accessed January 24, 2019).

9. Kim Eun-jung, “Seoul Proposes Joint Fishing Zone, N. Korean Port Modernization,” *Yonhap*, September 27, 2018, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2018/09/27/0200000000AEN20180927009900320.html> (accessed January 24, 2019).

10. “S. Korea Holds NSC Meeting to Discuss Creating International Air Route Between Koreas,” *The Korea Herald*, December 13, 2018, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181213000858> (accessed January 29, 2019).

11. Kim Bo-eun, “Exceptions to Sanctions Needed for Better Inter-Korean Ties, Says South Korean FM,” *The Korea Times*, July 23, 2018, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/356_252699.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

12. Kim Yoo-chul, “Seoul Seeks Wider Sanctions Exemptions for North Korea,” *The Korea Times*, December 21, 2018, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/12/356_260784.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

13. “Top Security Adviser Says N. Korean Denuclearization Process Is Irreversible,” *Yonhap*, December 21, 2018, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181221000635> (accessed January 24, 2019).

14. Shin Hyonhee, “Growing Split in Seoul over North Korea Threatens Korea Detente, Nuclear Talks,” *Reuters*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-southkorea-unification-dis/growing-split-in-seoul-over-north-korea-threatens-korea-detente-nuclear-talks-idUSKBN1032VV> (accessed January 24, 2019), and Kim Jin-myung, “Pompeo ‘Protested Against Seoul’s Agreements with N.Korea,’” *The Chosun Ilbo*, October 11, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/10/11/2018101101213.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

Other indications of U.S. concern with Moon's policies include:

- The U.S. State Department admonished South Korea: "We expect all member states to fully implement UN sanctions, including sector goods banned under UN Security Council resolutions." Another State Department official stated that "progress on inter-Korean relations must happen in lockstep with progress on denuclearization."¹⁵
- After the September 2018 inter-Korean summit, the U.S. Treasury Department felt it necessary to directly contact seven state-owned and commercial South Korean banks to warn them that engaging in financial cooperation with North Korea "does not align with US policies," and reminded them to comply with U.N. and U.S. financial sanctions.¹⁶ The Treasury Department warned that it was "deeply concerned" about South Korea's planned financial cooperation with North Korea.¹⁷
- The U.S. asked South Korea for a list and timelines of planned cross-border projects and requested that Seoul guarantee that it would not violate U.N. sanctions. The U.S. warned Seoul that it could withdraw support for inter-Korean projects if any sanctions violations were discovered.¹⁸
- President Donald Trump warned the Moon administration to maintain sanctions after For-

eign Minister Kang suggested Seoul may lift its sanctions imposed after Pyongyang sank a South Korean naval vessel in 2010, killing 46 sailors.¹⁹

- Special Envoy Stephen Biegun requested a meeting with South Korean presidential Chief of Staff Im Jong-seok, one of the strongest Moon administration advocates for reducing sanctions on North Korea. Biegun reportedly stressed that Seoul's eagerness to offer benefits to Pyongyang risked causing strains with Washington.²⁰

Seoul Rebuffed on Sanctions Exemptions. A member of the U.N. Committee on North Korean Sanctions emphasized that the exemption issued for an inter-Korean railroad survey was limited to the survey mission only. The diplomat commented that the delivery of any goods to North Korea or modernizing and reconnecting the railway is still subject to sanctions.²¹

President Moon directly advocated with foreign governments to ease U.N. sanctions on North Korea, but was rebuffed by the leaders of the U.K., France, and member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, all of whom responded that sanctions should be maintained until significant denuclearization took place.²²

The Moon administration also asked international financial institutions (IFIs) to provide assistance to induce North Korean economic reform. President Moon said, "I think international funds supporting North Korea's infrastructure will need to be created. Other international agencies including the World

15. Shin, "Growing Split in Seoul over North Korea Threatens Korea Detente, Nuclear Talks."

16. Ibid.

17. Joyce Lee, "U.S. Treasury Calls Reveal 'Deep Concern' over South Korea Banks' North Korea Plans: Document," Reuters, October 22, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-us-northkorea-southkorea-banks/u-s-treasury-calls-reveal-deep-concern-over-south-korea-banks-north-korea-plans-document-idUSKCN1MW19O> (accessed January 24, 2019), and "US Treasury Asks S. Korean Banks to Follow UN Sanctions Just After Pyongyang Summit," *Hankyoreh*, October 13, 2018, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/865675.html (accessed January 29, 2019).

18. Cho Yi-jun, "U.S. Demanded List of Cross-Border Projects," *The Chosun Ilbo*, October 19, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/10/19/2018101901303.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

19. "U.S. Warns of Secondary Sanctions," *The Dong-a Ilbo*, October 15, 2018, <http://english.donga.com/Home/3/all/26/1501717/1> (accessed January 24, 2019).

20. Kim Yoo-chul, "US Calls on Seoul to Slow North Korea Policy," *The Korea Times*, October 30, 2018, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/10/356_257856.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

21. "Additional Sanction Waivers Necessary if Korea to Earnestly Push for Railway Project: Report," *The Korea Herald*, November 28, 2018, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181128000113> (accessed January 24, 2019).

22. Byun Duk-kun, "Moon Says France, UN Can Speed Up NK's Denuclearization by Easing Sanctions," *The Korea Herald*, October 16, 2018, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181016000075> (accessed January 24, 2019), and Jeong Woo-sang, "ASEAN-South Korea Meet Vows to Keep N. Korea Sanctions in Place," *The Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/11/16/2018111601573.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the Asian Development Bank should aid North Korea.”²³

South Korean finance minister Kim Dong-yeon in May announced that Seoul was seeking shortcuts to allow North Korea to receive funding and support from IFIs, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.²⁴

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund responded that North Korea could join once it complied with their rules, including the need for transparency on economic data, but it was premature to discuss providing assistance to the regime.²⁵

Inter-Korean Security Agreements

The April 2018 inter-Korean summit led to bilateral pledges of nonaggression and mutual force reduction. President Moon and North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un committed their countries to “completely cease all hostile acts against each other.” The two leaders “pledged that ‘there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula and thus a new era of peace has begun.’”²⁶

However, Pyongyang violated similar pledges in the 1972, 1992, 2000, and 2007 inter-Korean joint statements. In 1972, the Koreans agreed to “implement appropriate measures to stop military provocation which may lead to unintended armed conflicts.”²⁷ In 1992, they vowed that they would “not use force against each other” and would “not undertake armed aggression against each other.”²⁸ And in 2007, Seoul and Pyongyang agreed to “adhere strictly to their obligation to nonaggression.”²⁹

None of those pledges prevented North Korea from conducting provocations, assassination attempts on

the South Korean president, terrorist acts, military and cyberattacks, and acts of war.

Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA).

In September 2018, the two Koreas signed an agreement to ease military tension and build confidence. Provisions include:

- Cease all live-fire, field training, and maritime maneuver exercises in the air, land, and sea within designated boundaries;
- Preclude live-fire artillery drills or field training exercises within 5 kilometers (km) of the military demarcation line;
- Prohibit live-fire and maneuver exercises within designated areas;
- Impose no-fly zones for rotary and fixed-wing aircraft within designated areas; and
- Remove designated guard posts and turn the Joint Security Area and maritime areas near the Northern Limit Line into peace zones.

The CMA is laudable for taking steps to lengthen the fuse of war by reducing the danger of inadvertent tactical military clashes along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) escalating to larger strategic conflicts. Follow-on steps to increase transparency of opposing military forces could reduce the potential for faulty or ambiguous intelligence indicators leading to preemptive attacks.

23. Dagyum Ji, “North Korea Wants to Join IMF and World Bank, Pursue Economic Reform: Moon,” NKNews.Org, September 26, 2018, <https://www.nknews.org/2018/09/north-korea-wants-to-join-imf-and-world-bank-pursue-economic-reform-moon/> (accessed January 24, 2019).

24. Elizabeth Zwirz, “Trump Could Meet with Kim Jong Un by Year’s End, South Korean President Tells Fox News,” Fox News, September 25, 2018, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/09/25/trump-could-meet-with-kim-jong-un-by-years-end-south-korean-president-tells-fox-news.html> (accessed January 24, 2019).

25. “S. Korea’s Finance Minister Asks IMF to Help with N. Korea’s Reform Efforts,” Yonhap, October 13, 2018, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181013002700315> (accessed January 24, 2019), and “N. Korea Is Welcome to Join World Bank when Ready: VP,” Yonhap, October 17, 2018, <https://www.msn.com/ko-kr/money/topstories/yonhap-interview-n-korea-is-welcome-to-join-world-bank-when-ready-vp/ar-BBOUvhh> (accessed January 24, 2019).

26. Chung-in Moon, “A Real Path to Peace on the Korean Peninsula,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-04-30/real-path-peace-korean-peninsula> (accessed July 28, 2018).

27. July 4th North-South Joint Statement, July 4, 1992, http://www2.law.columbia.edu/course_005_L9436_001/North%20Korea%20materials/74js-en.htm (accessed January 24, 2019).

28. U.S. Department of State Archive, “Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchanges and Cooperation Between the South and the North,” February 19, 1992, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/ac/rls/or/2004/31012.htm> (accessed January 24, 2019).

29. Bruce Klingner, “Nice Try, North Korea and South Korea, But Your Pledges Are Airy, Empty Confections,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-klingner-north-korea-declaration-is-mostly-empty-promises-20180501-story.html> (accessed January 24, 2019).

However, static defensive positions, such as fixed concrete bunkers and minefields, are not threatening, nor are they the source of past military clashes on the peninsula. The French Maginot Line was not the catalyst for German invasions. Nor did North Korea develop nuclear weapons because South Korean soldiers carried small arms in the Joint Security Area or sat in immovable defensive concrete guard post bunkers.

The greatest danger of armed conflict is from North Korea's forces—their forward, offensively oriented disposition and the regime's history of making threats and initiating hostilities. It is North Korea, not South Korea or the U.S., which has attacked the other side frequently since 1950. Only North Korea invaded, conducted decapitation and assassination strikes, torpedoed a ship in the other's territorial waters, bombarded an island with artillery, serially breached military demarcation lines, and threatened to turn the other's capital into a sea of fire.

Tensions Reduced, But Not the Threat. The confidence-building measures implemented to date can reduce the potential for accidental tactical military clashes, but they have not reduced the North Korean tactical or strategic conventional military threat to South Korea, nor do they represent progress in denuclearization. Forward-deployed North Korean military forces have not moved nor have they been reduced.

If South Korea believes that lowering its defenses makes itself safer because the threat of accidental war is reduced, what are Seoul's next steps? Remove counter-battery radars against North Korean artillery? Reduce THAAD and all South Korean missile defenses? End South Korea's development of M-SAM and L-SAM missile defense programs and SM-3/6 procurement?

Reducing Deterrence *Before* Reducing the Threat

After the U.S.–North Korean summit in Singapore in 2018, President Trump unilaterally decided

to end allied “war games” (North Korea's derogatory term for joint U.S.–South Korean military exercises, previously rejected by Washington and Seoul) on the Korean peninsula. That decision has been the gift that keeps on giving...for North Korea.

Since President Trump's decision, the allies have cancelled numerous military exercises, including Freedom Guardian, Ulchi, Taeguk, two Korea Marine Exercise Program (KMEP) exercises, an artillery exercise in the West Sea, land and sea drills in the East Sea, Vigilant Ace, and Foal Eagle.³⁰

The inter-Korean comprehensive military agreement also constrains allied military forces' ability to maintain deterrence and defense capabilities:

- Live-fire artillery exercises on Baeknyeong and Yeonpyeong Islands in the West Sea were cancelled due to the inter-Korean agreement.³¹
- South Korean K-9 artillery on Yeonpyeong Island must now move to the peninsula to train. Yet, North Korean 4th Corps artillery, which attacked Yeonpyeong Island in 2010 killing four South Koreans, are not affected by the inter-Korean military agreement.
- A major land and sea artillery exercise near Songjicho Beach in the East Sea was cancelled because of new restrictions on inter-Korean military exercises. Previous exercises included howitzers, multiple-rocket launchers (MRLs), a guide-missile patrol boat, and high-speed boats.³²
- South Korea closed the only long-range artillery practice range in Gangwon province due to the inter-Korean military agreement. The range had been used to practice with the Chungmoo MRL and K-9 self-propelled artillery howitzer, including live-fire exercises in April and November every year.³³

30. In 2017, the Freedom Guardian exercise involved 17,000 U.S. troops. The Vigilant Ace exercise involved 230 U.S. fighter and support aircraft.

31. Yang Seung-sik, “Army Shuts Down Artillery Practice Range,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, November 28, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/11/28/2018112801250.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

32. Park Yong-han, “Land-and-Sea Drill Is Canceled,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, October 24, 2018, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3054640> (accessed January 24, 2019).

33. Yang, “Army Shuts Down Artillery Practice Range.”

- The U.S. and South Korea can no longer conduct close air support of allied ground force exercises in front line areas because of new restrictions in the inter-Korean military agreement.³⁴
- At the request of the South Korean government, the U.S. will stop flying strategic bombers over the Korean peninsula, and ground force regimental drills will be held outside South Korea.³⁵

The allied self-imposed constraints have not been reciprocated by North Korea. Pyongyang has not constrained or cancelled any military exercises, including its annual large-scale Winter Training Cycle. By agreeing to one-sided constraints, has Seoul admitted that *it* is the threat to peace on the peninsula rather than North Korea?

North Korea also uses the inter-Korean agreements to try to impede additional allied defensive measures beyond the scope of the accords:

- When battalion-level KMEP exercises resumed, North Korea condemned them as “counter to the inter-Korean military agreement that calls for eliminating dangers of war throughout the Korean Peninsula and terminating cross-border hostility.”³⁶
- North Korea criticized Seoul’s combining First and Third ROK Armies into a new Ground Operations Command, as well as a tactical drill by the 36th Infantry Division of the South Korean army.³⁷

- Pyongyang criticized South Korea’s planned increased defense budget, calling it an “outright violation of North–South declarations and military agreements and also a grave challenging move that runs counter to the improvement in inter-Korean relations.”³⁸
- During his 2019 New Year’s Day speech, Kim Jong-un declared “that the joint military exercises with foreign forces, which constitute the source of aggravating the situation on the Korean peninsula, should no longer be permitted and the introduction of war equipment including strategic assets from outside should completely be suspended.”³⁹

Canceling Exercises Has Consequences. Militaries must train in order to maintain proficiency. They also must train on the terrain and echelon at which they would be required to fight. Substituting battalion-level exercises for combined arms exercises does not provide the same level of training. Doing so directly affects interoperability across services and between South Korean and U.S. militaries.

Heritage Foundation analyst Lieutenant General Thomas Spoehr (Ret.), U.S. Army, assessed that

there is a direct impact on interoperability when exercises are cancelled. Suspending these large joint exercises for an extended period of time, particularly for more than six months, could erode the readiness of U.S. and South Korean forces to successfully work together to defend South Korea. If [the ban includes] lower-level exercises, the negative impact on readiness will be more immediate and severe.⁴⁰

34. Jun Hyun-suk, “S. Korea, U.S. Can No Longer Conduct Frontline Air Raid Drills,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, October 19, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/10/19/2018101901545.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

35. Yoo Kang-moon, “US Indo-Pacific Command Says No Strategic Bombers Will Be Dispatched to Korean Peninsula,” *Hankyoreh*, November 28, 2018, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/872189.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

36. Jun Hyun-suk and Roh Suk-jo, “N. Korea Demands Suspension of S.Korea-U.S. Marine Drill,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, November 13, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/11/13/2018111301401.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

37. “N. Korean Website Says S. Korea’s Military Drill Intolerable,” *Yonhap*, September 12, 2018, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180912009700315> (accessed January 24, 2019).

38. “N. Korean Propaganda Outlets Blast S. Korea over Increased Defense Budget,” *Yonhap*, December 14, 2018, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181214001100325> (accessed January 24, 2019).

39. “New Year Address of Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un for 2019,” *Rodong Shinmun*, January 1, 2019, http://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2019-01-01-0003 (accessed January 24, 2019).

40. Thomas W. Spoehr, “Suspending Military Exercises in South Korea Carries Risks,” *Heritage Foundation Commentary*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/suspending-military-exercises-south-korea-carries-risks>.

There should be a limit to how long the U.S. cancels exercises without tangible progress on denuclearization. Given the turn-over of U.S. military personnel in Korea, a year is probably the limit on how long cancellations should continue without such progress. Otherwise a majority of U.S. military personnel in Korea will have no experience in large-scale combat operations with South Korea.

While the allies risk degrading their deterrence and defense capabilities, there has been no diminution in the North Korean conventional threat to South Korea and U.S. troops stationed there. Pyongyang continues to augment its nuclear and missile arsenal. The regime has expanded and upgraded its production facilities for fissile material, nuclear warheads, re-entry vehicles, missiles, and mobile missile launchers as well as its mobile missile deployment sites.

Although not a breach of the terse and flawed Singapore Summit statement, North Korea's ongoing nuclear and missile activity violates 11 U.N. resolutions. These resolutions require North Korea to abandon its nuclear, missile, and biological and chemical warfare programs—and to do so in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner.

Seoul Unilaterally Goes Beyond CMA. South Korea is removing anti-tank defensive barriers⁴¹ and will begin removing 8.4 km of barbed wire fence in Gyeonggi province and potentially 57 percent of a 300-km iron-fence sea and river boundary.⁴² Seoul will spend \$312 million to remove 284 km of coastal and river defensive barbed wire fencing.⁴³

South Korea's Ministry of National Defense will reach out to Pyongyang to discuss expanding the DMZ no-fly zone imposed by the inter-Korean military agreement to include the Han River estuary and Northern Limit Line maritime boundary in both the East and West Seas.⁴⁴

The Dangers of Prematurely Signing a Peace Declaration

In the past, Pyongyang claimed that the greatest impediment to resolving the nuclear issue was U.S.–South Korean joint military exercises, which the regime argued reflected allied hostile intent. Pyongyang pocketed President Trump's concession to cancel the exercises and made no movement toward denuclearization.

The regime now argues that a peace declaration ending the Korean War is required to reduce tensions and improve relations. In July 2018, the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that “the issue of announcing the declaration of the end of the war⁴⁵ at an early date is the first process of defusing tension and establishing a lasting peace regime on the Korean Peninsula [and] constitutes a first factor in creating trust between [North Korea] and the U.S.”⁴⁶

Pyongyang warned in August that bilateral talks were “again at stake and may fall apart” due to the U.S. reluctance to move forward on the peace issue.⁴⁷ Kim Jong-un declared in his 2019 New Year's Day policy speech that further progress on denuclearization is contingent on “replacing the current

41. “Anti-Tank Barriers on the Way to Seoul Being Destroyed,” East Asia Research, September 7, 2018, <https://eastasiaresearch.org/2018/09/07/anti-tank-barriers-on-the-way-to-seoul-being-destroyed/> (accessed January 24, 2019).
42. Tara O, “Seoul Vulnerable: The Abandonment of the DMZ and the Destruction of South Korea's Military Capability,” East Asia Research, August 18, 2018, <https://eastasiaresearch.org/2018/08/18/seoul-vulnerable-the-abandonment-of-the-dmz-and-the-destruction-of-south-koreas-military-capability/> (accessed January 24, 2019), and Benjamin Haas, “Fewer Barbs Across Korean Border as South Scales Back Fence,” *The Guardian*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/17/fewer-barbs-across-korean-border-as-south-scales-back-fence> (accessed January 24, 2019).
43. “The Blue House Will Eliminate 284 km of Coastal and Riverine Barbed-Wire Fences, 8,299 Military Facilities” (in Korean), *The Dong-a Ilbo*, November 20, 2018, [https://news-donga-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/news.donga.com/amp/all/20181120/92945790/1?usqp=mq331AQECAFYAQ%3D%3D&_js_v=0.1#aoh=15428064275328&_ct=1542806444530&referrer=https://www.google.com&_tf=From%20%251\\$s&share=http://news.donga.com/3/all/20181120/92945790/1](https://news-donga-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/news.donga.com/amp/all/20181120/92945790/1?usqp=mq331AQECAFYAQ%3D%3D&_js_v=0.1#aoh=15428064275328&_ct=1542806444530&referrer=https://www.google.com&_tf=From%20%251$s&share=http://news.donga.com/3/all/20181120/92945790/1) (accessed January 24, 2019).
44. Jun Hyun-suk, “Defense Ministry to Expand No-Fly Zone to NLL,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 2018, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/11/16/2018111601555.html (accessed January 24, 2019).
45. Also referred to as a peace declaration. It would be a symbolic political document that, unlike a formal peace treaty, has no legal impact on the armistice ending the Korean War or the United Nations Command.
46. Korea Ryugilo Editorial Bureau, “FM Spokesman on DPRK–U.S. High-level Talks,” September 15, 2018, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?lang=eng&ftype=document&no=12300> (accessed January 24, 2019).
47. David Tweed, Isabel Reynolds, and Jihye Lee, “Rift Grows Between U.S. Allies over North Korea's Nuclear Threat,” Bloomberg, August 28, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-28/rift-grows-between-u-s-allies-over-north-korea-s-nuclear-threat> (accessed January 24, 2019).

ceasefire on the Korean peninsula with a peace mechanism.”⁴⁸

More troubling, however, is South Korea’s enthusiastic advocacy of Pyongyang’s strategy. Moon adopted Pyongyang’s interpretation of joint summit statements by putting the onus on the U.S. for further steps: “It all comes down to whether the U.S. is ready to provide corresponding measures in a swift way. The U.S. promised to end hostile relations with North Korea to provide security guarantees and work toward new U.S. North Korea relations—these actions need to be taken in parallel.”⁴⁹

President Moon has expressed his eagerness “to sign a declaration ending the Korean War as soon as possible to give a sign that hostile relations between North Korea and the U.S. are ending.”⁵⁰ Moon declared that “the United States and the international community must end hostile relations and also...provide security guarantees to the North Korean regime [including] a declaration to end the Korean War.”⁵¹

Rather than pressing North Korea to comply with U.N. resolutions, South Korean officials continually call for allied concessions, including ending joint U.S.–South Korean military exercises and deployment of U.S. strategic assets to the Korean peninsula. South Korea also wants the U.S. to issue a declaration that it will stop “threatening” North Korea with nuclear and conventional weapons, and that it will reduce sanctions.⁵²

South Korean officials downplay concerns over the ramifications of declaring an end to the Korean War by highlighting that the document would only be symbolic, without any real effect or consequences. But its advocates have yet to identify any tangible benefits to signing a peace declaration, neither a specific quid pro quo that the regime will provide, nor the expected change in North Korean policy or behavior resulting from the regime feeling “less threatened.”

The U.S. has already repeatedly provided non-hostility declarations and promises not to attack North Korea, either with conventional or nuclear weapons. These documents had no impact on North Korea’s continued production of nuclear weapons. Why would this new piece of paper be expected to have greater impact than those previous pledges?

A rushed declaration of the end of the Korean War would have serious negative consequences for the decades-old South Korean–U.S. alliance defense security. Even a limited declaration can create a domino-effect advocacy for prematurely signing a peace treaty, ending joint military drills, disbanding United Nations Command, abrogating the mutual defense treaty, and creating societal and legislative momentum in both South Korea and the U.S. for reduction or removal of U.S. forces before reducing the North Korean threat that necessitated American involvement.

Beyond security ramifications, a peace declaration could also lead to advocacy of reduced U.N. and U.S. sanctions and provision of economic largesse to North Korea before significant steps toward regime denuclearization.

A peace declaration would be a historic but meaningless feel-good gesture that has no tangible benefits and does nothing to improve the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. It would not reduce the North Korean military threat to the allies or alleviate distrust and suspicion. It would only provide an amorphous hope that it would improve relations and lead Pyongyang to undertake positive but undefined actions.

The Path Ahead—Conventional Arms Reductions

Presidential claims of success with North Korea could lead to premature advocacy by Seoul or Washington to

48. “New Year Address of Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un for 2019,” *Rodong Shinmun*.

49. Kim Bo-eun, “Korean War May Be Declared Over This Year,” *The Korea Times*, September 26, 2018, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/09/356_256034.html (accessed January 24, 2019).

50. *Ibid.*

51. Uri Friedman, “The ‘Compliment Trump’ Doctrine,” *The Atlantic*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/north-south-korea-moon/571321/> (accessed January 24, 2019).

52. Hwang Joon-bum, “Moon Administration Seeks to End Korean War at UN General Assembly in September,” *Hankyoreh*, August 31, 2018, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/860132.html (accessed January 24, 2019); Jung Hyo-sik, “Early Plan Prioritized Peace Over Nukes,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 31, 2018, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3052581> (accessed January 24, 2019); and Uri Friedman, “Inside the Dispute Derailing Nuclear Talks With North Korea,” *The Atlantic*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/north-korea-war-declaration/568603/> (accessed January 24, 2019).

reduce U.S. military forces in South Korea as well as a reduction in South Korean military budget and force levels. Conversely, a continued stalemate in denuclearization talks might lead the Moon administration to offer up changes to the allied military posture to induce progress. Either course would be a serious mistake.

Any conventional force reductions should be part of a carefully crafted agreement with North Korea that clearly delineates all parties' responsibilities. These forces should be capped and then weaned away from the forward area using measures similar to those in the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)⁵³ and the accompanying 1999 Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures.⁵⁴

The CFE Treaty capped the number of North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Warsaw Pact tanks, artillery, armored combat vehicles, combat aircraft, and attack helicopters in the European zone of application.⁵⁵ The accord created limits on these treaty-limited items in sub-zones. The treaty also included extensive provisions for destruction of excess treaty-limited items, notifications, information exchanges, and intrusive inspections of declared and non-declared facilities.

The CFE Treaty sought to reduce the potential for large-scale attack, or misperceptions of impending invasion, by weaning large military forces away from the delineating line between the two alliances.

What Washington and Seoul Should Do

The U.S. and South Korea, along with other U.N. member nations, must coordinate their policies to more effectively press North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile programs. Washington should emphasize to Seoul that:

- Efforts to improve inter-Korean relations must not move forward without commensurate steps by North Korea to comply with U.N. resolutions. There should be no economic benefits or sanctions

reductions to North Korea without significant denuclearization steps by the regime.

- U.S. laws pertaining to North Korea's human rights violations, sponsoring acts of terrorism, and criminal activities, such as money laundering, require separate actions by the regime for amelioration.
- A peace treaty formally ending the Korean War should be contingent on eliminating the North Korean nuclear threat not just to the U.S., but to regional allies as well, and reducing the conventional force threat rather than the opening gambit to improve relations with Pyongyang. North Korean conventional forces should be capped and then weaned away from the forward area using measures similar to those in the CFE Treaty and the accompanying Vienna Document.
- The onus is on North Korea to take actions to overcome the current diplomatic stalemate. Pyongyang should pledge to immediately end nuclear and missile production, provide a data declaration of its nuclear and missile programs, agree to on-site inspections, and commit to dismantle those facilities and destroy its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

President Moon has advocated policies aimed at conflict avoidance and enhancing inter-Korean relations while delegating denuclearization to the United States. Such policies exacerbate growing strains between Washington and Seoul; they risk creating South Korean perceptions that the U.S., not North Korea, is the impediment to denuclearization; and they could negatively affect ongoing Special Measures Agreement negotiations,⁵⁶ wartime operational control transfer,⁵⁷ and South Korean defense reform

53. Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, <https://www.osce.org/library/14087?download=true> (accessed January 25, 2019). The author was part of the U.S. delegation to the CFE Treaty.

54. U.S. Department of State, "Overview of Vienna Document 2011," <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/cca/c43837.htm> (accessed January 2019).

55. Overall limits for each alliance are 20,000 tanks, 30,000 armored combat vehicles, 20,000 artillery pieces, 6,800 combat aircraft, and 2,000 attack helicopters.

56. The bilateral Special Measures Agreement ("cost sharing" agreement) negotiations determine the compensation Seoul pays for the non-personnel costs of stationing U.S. forces in South Korea.

57. During the Korean War, South Korea transferred operational control of its military to the United Nations Command (UNC). In 1994, the UNC returned peacetime operational command of South Korean forces to Seoul. The U.S. and South Korea are discussing the timing of returning wartime operational command.

measures. The alliance has successfully weathered previous political storms, but current South Korean policies complicate a coordinated allied strategy toward North Korea.

Current concerns of the alliance are driven by the actions of *policymakers*, not the *military* of either country. While the diplomatic differences are being worked out, the men and women of both militaries will continue to stand on the ramparts of freedom. As Edmund Burke wrote: “People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.”

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