

Moon and Kim Stage an Exuberant Summit in Pyongyang

Saturday 20 October 2018, by [SHORROCK Tim](#) (Date first published: 20 September 2018).

Bold proposals on demilitarization break the logjam with Washington.

Over three days of diplomacy and pageantry in Pyongyang this week, the leaders of North and South Korea put on a stunning display of national unity and purpose that sent an unmistakable message that the two Koreas have moved into a new phase of reconciliation and are ready to overcome the barriers that have kept them divided since 1945.

“We have lived together for 5,000 years and been separated for 70 years,” South Korean President Moon Jae-in told some 150,000 people who had gathered in Pyongyang’s May Day Stadium to celebrate the summit in a climactic moment on Wednesday night. “We must live together as one people.”

The summit, the third between Moon and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un, was designed to tell the world—and skeptics in Washington—that North and South are determined to end, once and for all, the danger of war and nuclear conflict on their divided peninsula and resolve years of tension over North Korea’s nuclear-weapons program.

Minutes after returning from Pyongyang on Thursday night, Moon summarized his conversations with the North Korean leader to hundreds of Korean and foreign reporters covering the summit at the Seoul Press Center. “Chairman Kim expressed his wish to finish complete denuclearization at an early date and focus on economic development,” he said.

If the North makes good on its promises, “the US side, as well as our side too, need to take steps that would eradicate our hostile relations with the North,” he added. On Wednesday, following their first day of meetings, the two leaders laid out their goals.

“Today we adopted a military agreement to make a nuclear-free Korean peninsula,” Kim declared. Moon, standing next to him, added: “A Korean Peninsula free of war has begun to take shape. The South and North agreed today to eliminate all risks that could lead to war from all parts of the Korean Peninsula.” It was the first visit to Pyongyang by a South Korean leader since 2007.

The summit was “peacemaking at its finest,” said Christine Ahn, the founder of Women Cross DMZ, an international coalition of women seeking to transform the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War into a permanent peace treaty. “This is history being made; there’s no turning back.”

On the nuclear front, North Korea offered to “permanently dismantle” two key facilities of its ICBM program that is so threatening to the United States, including a missile-engine test facility and a missile launchpad, and to allow outside experts into the country to observe the process. It also said it would permanently shut its nuclear facility at Yongbyon if certain conditions were met.

In addition to these gestures, President Moon said Thursday, Kim said he wants Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo's "North Korea visit and a second summit with President Trump to happen at the earliest convenience in order to speed up the denuclearization process."

Moon Chung-in, a special adviser to President Moon who accompanied him to Pyongyang, said in a press briefing Wednesday that the situation has fundamentally changed.

North and South Korea now "share a common starting point: prevent random conflicts on the Korean Peninsula, which, in turn, could lead to preventing nuclear conflicts," he said. "Through this process, the two Koreas should be able to achieve complete denuclearization on the peninsula."

Highlights of the summit included a detailed agreement to defuse military tensions along the military demarcation line dividing the two countries [1], a decision by Kim to make an unprecedented visit to Seoul later this year, and a joint proposal to host the Olympic Games in 2032. Moon was accompanied on his trip by dozens of corporate executives, sports stars, artists, and leaders of civic organizations.

In Pyongyang, the two leaders issued a sweeping joint declaration they hope will knit their countries together economically and socially. It includes agreements to quickly link their road and rail connections, promote binational cooperation on environmental protections and public health, and open a permanent facility so divided families can visit each other on a regular basis. Most of the agreements completed proposals first made at their initial summit in Panmunjom last April.

Moon and Kim also agreed to reopen the Gaesong Industrial Complex just north of the DMZ, one of the most enduring symbols of previous eras of détente, which was closed in 2016 during a period of severe tension. But the joint projects, which will also include tourism projects and a west-coast special economic zone, can only happen "as conditions rip[en]," Moon and Kim said. This was a reference to the US and UN economic sanctions on the North.

"There's good potential for economic cooperation, but to really obtain these benefits, they have to get out of the sanctions," Daniel Pinkston, a professor at Troy University in Seoul and an expert on North Korean politics, told *The Nation* in an interview outside the press center. Pinkston has been highly skeptical that the North will ever give up its weapons, but said the military agreements hold serious promise.

"The two sides agreed to refrain from any action to infiltrate, attack or occupy each other's area of jurisdiction by any means or method," the agreement states.

Among other steps, according to an analysis by the Associated Press [2], the two Koreas agreed to establish "buffer zones" on land and at sea and a "no-fly zone" in the air over the border to prevent the possibility of accidental confrontations.

"There appears to be real movement in confidence-building measures," said Pinkston. "But can the agreement address issues of weapons of mass destruction? A lot of work remains there." He noted that Yongbyon—a reactor complex where North Korea extracts plutonium from spent fuel and produces highly enriched uranium for weapons—"is only a piece of the nuclear program. Just closing it is not abandoning that program. Are they willing to trade it off in pieces? I'm not convinced."

Moon Chung-in, the presidential adviser, seemed to address that concern in his press briefing during the summit. This was "the first time, ever, for Pyongyang to announce its willingness to permanently give up its plutonium- and highly-enriched uranium-producing facilities, which are the foundation of its nuclear weapons," he said.

The US and UN sanctions, which increased in 2017 as the North tested one nuclear weapon and

over a dozen ICBMs, have prevented the two countries from moving forward on new transportation and economic proposals. They also sparked a dispute between Seoul and Washington last month over the two Koreas' opening of a permanent liaison office in Gaesong.

Seoul and Pyongyang opened it anyway. That was the right move and should not be seen as problematic by the US government, James Clapper, the former director of national intelligence, told *The Nation* while traveling from Washington to Seoul on a Korean Air flight last Sunday. "The two Koreas have every right to move ahead like they are, even if people here [in Washington] don't like it," he said.

The proposals by the North to close the two missile facilities were designed to get movement on the sanctions, which the United States has insisted must remain in place until the North completely and permanently eliminates its nuclear and ballistic-missile programs.

So was the offer on Yongbyon, which Kim, in the joint declaration, said he would permanently dismantle if "the United States takes corresponding measures in accordance with the spirit of the June 12 US-DPRK Joint Statement."

That term—"corresponding measures"—was a reference to promises made by President Trump to Kim in Singapore last June to create a new US-North Korean relationship and "build a lasting and stable peace regime" on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has insisted that Trump follow up on his pledge before it takes further steps on disarmament.

Even though the Koreans left the ball in the US court, the proposals from Moon and Kim were met with immediate approval from President Trump, who tweeted his thanks moments after their joint news conference in Pyongyang. He will meet with Moon on September 25 in New York to discuss the developments and the possibility of a future summit with Kim. In his press conference Thursday, Moon said he would discuss with Trump the idea of declaring an end to the Korean War by the year's end.

But even as the usual gang of Washington hard-liners, missile-technology experts, and skeptics of the Korean peace process were criticizing the Moon-Kim promises as too little, too late, Pompeo, who has been the North's chief interlocutor in this year's negotiations, welcomed the gestures. "On the basis of these important commitments, the United States is prepared to engage immediately in negotiations to transform U.S.-DPRK relations," Pompeo said in a statement issued by the State Department (the DPRK, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is North Korea's formal name).

Pompeo said he had invited his counterpart in the North, Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho, to meet in New York at next week's UN General Assembly, and added that he had invited the North to meet the new US special representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, in Vienna.

"This will mark the beginning of negotiations to transform U.S.-DPRK relations through the process of rapid denuclearization of North Korea, to be completed by January 2021, as committed by Chairman Kim, and to construct a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula," Pompeo said.

The use of the term "transform" was clearly designed to respond to the North Korean concerns that Pompeo and Trump had not fulfilled their pledge in Singapore. "It was not having the peace declaration to offer that led Pompeo to tell Trump to call off the last visit," Leon Sigal, the author of *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*, reminded *The Nation* in an e-mail.

On the summit's final day, Moon and Kim climbed Mount Paektu, the highest mountain on the

Korean Peninsula and a symbol to both Koreas of the mythical founding of their 5,000-year-old nation.

This fulfilled a lifetime dream for President Moon, an avid hiker whose family fled North Korea in the early days of the Korean War in 1950. But to many Koreans, the climb up Mount Paektu—a live volcano where Korean guerrillas fighting Japanese colonialism during the 1930s and '40s often hid out—was also a reminder of their historical struggle for independence from foreign powers.

Tim Shorrock

P.S.

- THE NATION. SEPTEMBER 20, 2018:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/moon-and-kim-stage-an-exuberant-summit-in-pyongyang/>

For more internal links, see the original article.

- Tim Shorrock is a Washington, DC-based journalist and the author of *Spies for Hire: The Secret World of Intelligence Outsourcing*.

Footnotes

[1] http://www.arirang.com/News/News_View.asp?nseq=223806

[2] ESSF (article 46568), [Korean Peninsula: Korea's leaders Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un agree on military, nuclear steps](#).