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Opening the Door to Peaceful Korean Peninsula: Evaluation and Remaining Tasks of the Military Domain in 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang

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2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang has laid the foundation for inter-Korean relations to expand and develop not only into an area of politics, society and culture, and humanitarianism but also in the military domain. The recent opening of the inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong and the subsequent agreement on the establishment of the Joint Military Committee well demonstrate that inter-Korean relations will be advanced at the institutional level. The most profound achievement of the summit is an agreement on alleviating tensions in land, air, and sea and settling permanent peace. Such achievement and the strengthened trust between the two leaders will contribute to facilitating the North Korea-U.S. relations, thereby making the Korean Peninsula peaceful. To faithfully and smoothly implement those agreements in the future, a priority should be set and a close cooperation is required between interested parties.

1. Pyeongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018 and Military Agreement

2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang successfully came to an end. This inter-Korean summit, held for the third time this year in

Pyeongyang, has received attention both at home and abroad, with the news flooded in, of which a headline starts with “the first ever...in history.” The Pyeongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018, came out as a result of this summit (hereinafter referred to as “Pyeongyang Joint Declaration”), is in line with the First 2018 Inter-Korean Summit held in Panmunjeom on April 27. President Moon Jae-in and Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirmed the need for thorough implementation of Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula (hereinafter referred to as “Panmunjeom Declaration”). During the summit talks, a few rounds of meetings and various events such as visiting Mount Paektu took place, thereby strengthening a sense of trust between the two leaders.

The Pyeongyang Joint Declaration was worthy enough to attract international attention given the fact that it laid out new detailed measures for alleviating military tensions and preventing the recurrence of war. President Moon even stated in his reporting to the public on September 20 right after he came back from Pyeongyang that the most significant and fruitful result of this summit in terms of inter-Korean relations is an agreement reached in the military domain. In fact, the South and the North have made efforts to build political and military trust after the Panmunjeom Declaration. The two Koreas simultaneously stopped a mutual slandering and discarded means of propaganda. At the same time, the two have established a system of prevention of accidental military clashes by restoring military communication lines along the East and West Sea. Moreover, both Koreas, through a series of military meetings, have discussed a conclusion of “comprehensive agreement” that will contain measures for easing tensions. The Military Agreement reached in 2018 Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit is a result of mutual efforts of the two Koreas for the implementation of the Panmunjeom Declaration. Such cooperation will also be seen in the implementation process of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration. To that end, President Moon’s resounding remarks “We are embarking on a new era without a war on the Korean Peninsula” have been receiving the international support.

In fact, Article 1 of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration stipulates the basic direction and measures for eliminating the danger of war and ceasing hostile relations. A case in point is the adoption of the “Agreement on the Implementation

of the Historic Panmunjeom Declaration in the Military Domain” as an annex to the Pyongyang Joint Declaration and the activation of the Inter-Korean Joint Military Committee as an organization in charge of implementation. Such agreement is a reminder of the adoption of Annex Agreement on Non-aggression to the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement of 1991 and the establishment of the Joint Military Committee thereof. One cannot help but to get the impression that newly-released measures show familiar patterns that have been repeated over the course of 30 years. However, what sets those agreements apart from the pact is that those past agreements were made in a temporary dialogue mood with not enough trust built between leaders of the two Koreas. Thus, the implementation of past agreements were practically impossible in the face of nuclear crisis triggered by North Korea’s nuclear pursuit. In that regard, 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyongyang is in stark contrast to meetings of the early 1990s in terms of conditions and outcomes of the summit.

2. Military Agreement: Embarking on Journey for the Establishment of Peace Regime

There are 6 articles and 22 paragraphs in the Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjeom Declaration in the Military Domain (hereinafter referred to as “Military Agreement”) signed on September 19 between South Korean Defence Minister Song Young-moo and North Korea’s Minister of the People’s Armed Forces Rho Kwang Cheol under the presence of leaders of the two Koreas. This Military Agreement is indicative of full-blown start for the establishment of a peace regime. The Panmunjeom Declaration lays out basic direction for the cessation of all hostile acts and the establishment of a peace regime. Meanwhile, the Pyongyang Joint Declaration encompasses all the detailed measures that South and North Korea can do under the current condition as follows: cessation of hostile acts against each other in every domain, including land, air, and sea, procedures of military operation, withdrawal of Guard Posts (GP) within the Demilitarized Zone

(DMZ), demilitarization of the Joint Security Area (JSA), inter-Korean joint operation to recover remains within the DMZ, and the shared use of Han River Estuary. In particular, an agreement to cease various military exercises aimed at each other in the land, air, and sea, including along the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) clearly shows that inter-Korean military cooperation is now moving toward a level of arms control beyond simply building trust. If those agreements are implemented, it will lead not only to the prevention of war but also lay the foundation for solid peace on the Korean Peninsula.

There are a few implications of the summit. First, a peace process has begun to unfold in earnest through the Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit. South-North Joint Declaration on June 15, 2000, was an output of the first inter-Korean summit focused on reconciliation and cooperation since the division of the Korean Peninsula. Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace, and Prosperity of October 4, 2007, aimed at a simultaneous pursuit of peaceful resolution of North Korea's nuclear issue and the development of inter-Korean relations, but failed to get implemented thereafter due to the worsening of circumstances. The Panmunjeom Declaration reached on April, 2018—10 years after a conclusion of an agreement of such kind—laid out broad agreement on promoting mutual efforts for the advancement of inter-Korean relations and a path to peace. The Panmunjeom inter-Korean summit on May acted as a catalyst for holding the North Korea-U.S. summit. Over the past six months, President Moon and Chairman Kim exchanged opinions either directly or indirectly and affirmed that carrying around the danger of war is a self-destructive path for both and an obstacle to coexistence and co-prosperity between the North and the South. The Pyeongyang Joint Declaration was born out of a few rounds of talks between the two Koreas and implementation efforts made after the Panmunjeom Declaration. Therefore, it would be fair to say that a peace process on the Korean Peninsula is now on track.

Second, military cooperation for peace is now evolving from a pledge into an action. The two Koreas have put a low level of implementation efforts after the Panmunjeom Declaration, such as ceasing a mutual slandering, and restoring a military channel. However, tensions along the MDL never came to a halt. This time,

the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration and the Military Agreement contain very detailed steps for the scope and methods of cessation of hostile acts, including force, weapons, range, and area, thereby opening up an opportunity for creating a palpable peace. Leaders of both Koreas declared at home and abroad through the Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit that peace is forged not by words but by actions and announced relevant pledges accordingly.

Third, military agreements made in this summit is set out to be implemented within the institutionalized framework, thereby increasing a chance of sustainability and predictability. Throughout the history of inter-Korean relations, the military sector is an area that has frequently undergone abrupt changes and complete roll-back of an agreement. Up until now, military cooperation seemed like a far-fetched goal due to the longstanding confrontation between the South and the North since the Korean War. Therefore, it is essential to establish an implementation mechanism that will sustainably put those military agreements into action leaving practice of the past behind. One way to start is to establish the Joint Military Committee. It will be useful to refer to related agreements came into effect between prime ministers of the South and the North on May 7, 1992, although the operation of such committee needs consultations and coordination between the two Koreas.

Last significance of the Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit is a mutually-reinforcing political and military trust-building. Above all, a close communication between South and North Korean leaders and the will for peace settlement are the defining factors that have contributed the most to such extensive and detailed agreements. The remaining task is to faithfully follow through agreements on military cooperation, thereby increasing political trust. This will, in turn, lead to a secure environment for people of South and North Korea and contribute to world peace.

3. Inter-Korean Military Cooperation Driving Denuclearization

This chapter looks into achievements and characteristics of agreements

reached in the military domain during the Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit. Those are all the more worth noticing since they could give some implications for the establishment of a peace regime and institutionalization of the advancement of inter-Korean relations into the future.

First, the agreements of 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang are indicative of the expansion of security paradigm and diversification of the scope of military cooperation. At a press conference held after a release of the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration, President Moon stated “We are able to break free from shackles of privilege, corruption, and inhumanity, all of which are the byproduct of threat of war and ideology-rooted confrontation.” In fact, humanitarianism can be realized, natural ecosystem can be protected, and culture and arts can flourish only when the danger of war disappears and confrontational relations are eliminated. Steps set forth in the Military Agreement contain a path to human security, civil protection, and survival of the nation, going beyond the existing national security paradigm. The scope of military cooperation is not only a strategic matter but also deeply related to the livelihood of South and North Koreans and the future of the nation as a whole, including disaster rescue operation, support for agriculture, safe fishery, excavation of remains, and guarantee of passage, communication, and customs. Those facts suggest that military security and human security should go harmoniously together in promoting inter-Korean military cooperation in the future with more strengthened communication between the government and the non-governmental sector in the process.

Another characteristic of the Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit is that the South and the North pledged to have more active attitude and responsibility in an area of military cooperation. Both Koreaes, through the Military Agreement, showed that they can and should rightly play a leading role in alleviating tensions and building trust at least in an area of conventional military force. So far the two Koreaes had not been very active in building trust due to conflicting views in the military domain. Moreover, the two had not been able to serve a leading role in building military trust in the face of tensions stemmed from the North’s nuclear pursuit as well as the developing of situation mostly led by North Korea-U.S. relations. However, this

time South and North Korea agreed to be active in cooperation in the area of conventional military force since both saw the pressing and shared need for common and cooperative security and resolving nuclear issue through a dialogue.

In the meantime, another achievement of the summit is that inter-Korean trust expanded into the military area is likely to lead to resuming the North Korea-U.S. dialogue and facilitating denuclearization negotiation. In fact, the Pyeongyang inter-Korean summit has received positive international attention in general with an evaluation that the usefulness of dialogues and trust-building efforts of both Koreas will contribute to the resolution of North Korea's nuclear issues and the overall stability of the region. Above all, U.S. President Trump's reaction to the summit with expressions such as "tremendous progress," "courage (of Chairman Kim)" suggest a possibility of resuming the North Korea-U.S. negotiation. Positive signs are already being reported: Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea and its U.S. counterpart are known to have a meeting in Vienna and New York soon; U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo is reportedly set to have his 4th visit to North Korea after his previously canceled trip. President Moon and Chairman Kim has reached a comprehensive agreement on the development of inter-Korean relations and at the same time made a detailed agreement on methods of denuclearization of the North. In fact, Chairman Kim's will for dismantling nuclear facilities and missile launch site is evaluated as being attractive for the Trump administration in terms of a possibility of producing achievements of its foreign policy and policy on denuclearization. This summit well demonstrates that the advancement of inter-Korean relations with the ROK-U.S. alliance in place is also beneficial to improving North Korea-U.S. relations and facilitating denuclearization. To that end, inter-Korean dialogue and North Korea-U.S. dialogue should proceed in harmony with each other creating a virtuous cycle given that sustainable and stable peace is only possible when relations between hostile forces improve at the same time.

4. Future Tasks: Priority and Follow-up Measures

It is highly laudable that 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyeongyang has

produced extensive, detailed, and action-driven agreements in line with the implementation of the Panmunjeom Declaration. In particular, one agreement in the military domain will be recorded in the history of arms control on the Korean Peninsula: prevention of clashes in every domain, including land, air, and sea and the implementation efforts for various cooperation.

Despite all those achievements, however, it is required to take a note of criticism toward the outcome of the summit and make up for what is lacking. First remaining task is to set a priority in projects on military cooperation. Regarding this matter, a problem of boundary between the two Koreas is emerging to the surface once again. Article 3, Paragraphs 9 to 11 of Annex Agreement on Non-aggression, which took effect on September 17, 1992, stipulate that there is a ground boundary line or the existing MDL between the two Koreas. Although the two sides agreed to respect the existing sea border, there still remains ambiguity. A controversy over sea border could arise in the process of creating a peace zone and setting an area for common fishery in the West Sea. However, the priority is to seek a common interest under peaceful environment. It is with such basic direction that a peace zone and an area for common fishery was discussed and that there was no discussion on boundary during the summit. Therefore, future-oriented thinking is required going beyond an age-old habit of confrontation. So the first task to be tackled is to set a priority with a consideration for viability and conditions for projects that were agreed upon and set forth in the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration and the Military Agreement.

The second remaining task to be reviewed is that the declaration to end the Korean War, specified in the Panmunjeom Declaration, was missing in the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration, which marks the beginning of full implementation of the former. The end-of-the war declaration set for this year, described in the Panmunjeom Declaration, can be reached with the participation of South and North Korea and the U.S. without China taking a step back. President Moon has a will for pursuing the end-of-the war declaration and U.S. President Trump is also positive toward the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration. After all, the tri-lateral end-of-the war declaration could be possible if North Korea takes on denuclearization steps in

earnest as promised.

In the meantime, the Moon Jae-in government released the “Defense Reform 2.0” after the adoption of the Panmunjeom Declaration, which contains a significant increase of defense budget. Offensive defense policy with three pillars system—Kill Chain, Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPPR)—will become a point of contention in inter-Korean negotiation on arms control in the future. A path to peace in the military domain, declared in the Pyeongyang Inter-Korean Summit, requires a review of existing practice of national defense policy, which was rooted on an age-old-view of absolute security. This is a subject worthy of serious and constructive contemplation into the future.

Lastly, various measures for military cooperation, revealed in the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration, require a close consultation and coordination with the United Nations Command (UNC), or the U.S. military authority. To that end, the ROK government should harmoniously operate dual channels, between the South and the North and between the South and the U.S. One way to do it is to consider reviewing how to carry out the excavation of remains and the elimination of mines within the DMZ in a multilateral way among the South, the North, and the U.S. In fact, experiences of cooperation and trust earned through the process will be utilized as an asset for establishing a peace regime and facilitating denuclearization.

As the Pyeongyang Joint Declaration and the Military Agreement specify comprehensive and various measures for easing tensions and settling peace between the two Koreas, it is the author’s hope that the implementation policy will be realistic and multi-dimensional to keep up with those measures. ©KINU 2018

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