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North Korea's Stance on the 'End-of-the-War Declaration' and the Security Dilemma

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President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea (ROK) proposed a 'declaration to ending the war' on the Korean Peninsula and in return, the first deputy director of North Korea's Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Kim Yo-jong showed a positive response and mentioned the possibility of holding a summit. This recent development has given a spotlight to whether the inter-Korea dialogue on the 'end-of-the war declaration' could resume. North Korea, however, launched the hypersonic missile 'Hwasong-8,' three days after Kim Yo-jong released a statement. Although Kim Yo-jong's statement and North Korea's missile launch seem somewhat contradictory, they are in line with North Korea's policy on defense, the US, and South Korea, as announced at the 8th Party Congress held last January. Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong-un made clear the preconditions for the end-of-the-war declaration at the 5th Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK. The security dilemma deeply rooted in the Korean Peninsula is still at play in North Korea's calculations. The risk of war will increasingly loom large on the Korean Peninsula if the South and the North continue on a path of 'the balance of horror' sustained by force. South and North Korea should put their heads together to find a way to embolden 'peaceful means for peace' rather than to 'strengthen security for peace' to promote a more stable and sustainable peace.

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Preconditions for the ‘End-of-the War Declaration’: Double Standard and Bias of the US and the ROK & Withdrawal of the US’s Hostile Policy on North Korea

President Moon Jae-in once again proposed that “three parties of the two Koreas and the US, or four parties of the two Koreas, the US and China come together and declare that the War on the Korean Peninsula is over” at a speech of the UN General Assembly on September 22, 2021.¹⁾ In response, North Korea’s Vice Foreign Minister Lee Tae-sung said in a statement on September 24 that the end-of-the-war declaration carries symbolic meaning in that it is a political declaration that officially puts an end to a prolonged state of the division on the Korean Peninsula. Yet, he

1) South and North Korea already reached an agreement on proceeding with the end-of-the-war declaration within the year at the Panmunjom Declaration in April 2018. Leaders of the two Koreas agreed at the Panmunjom Declaration “During this year that marks the 65th anniversary of the Armistice, South and North Korea agreed to actively pursue trilateral meetings involving the two Koreas and the United States, or quadrilateral meetings involving the two Koreas, the United States, and China with a view to declaring an end to the War, turning the armistice into a peace treaty, and establishing a permanent and solid peace regime.”

went on to say that “the solemn reality facing us shows that adopting the end-of-the war declaration is premature.” He emphasized that “the end-of-the war declaration is nothing but an illusion as long as the US continues to put in place its hostile policy on North Korea, which is the biggest obstacle to ending the war on the Korean Peninsula.”²⁾

Seven hours after the release of Lee’s statement, however, Kim Yo-jong said in her statement that “the end-of-the war declaration is not such a bad idea” and that “it is an intriguing proposal and good thinking.” At the same time, she argued that declaring the end to the Korean war primarily necessitates the guarantee of mutual respect and the withdrawal of prejudiced outlook toward the other party, hostile policy, and unequal double standard. Kim went on to say that “parties could sit on the table to declare the end to the Korean war and discuss South-North Korea relations and other issues on the Chosun Peninsula(Korean Peninsula)” only when those preconditions are met.³⁾ She also stated the next day(on 25th) that once preconditions are met, which were proposed based on her personal view, “the end-of-the war could be declared at an opportune time and various issues on improving relations could be addressed within earlier time through constructive discussions, such as the re-establishment of the inter-Korean liaison office and the South-North Korea summit.”⁴⁾

Some in the media and the political circle in the ROK showed optimistic expectation, albeit prudently, for resuming inter-Korean dialogue and improving inter-Korean relations while highlighting Kim Yo-jong’s take on the end-of-the war declaration, the re-establishment of the inter-Korean liaison office, and the inter-Korean summit meeting. They view that Kim Yo-jong’s preconditions could be met in the process of resuming the dialogue and that her statement sends a signal that North Korea may accommodate South Korea’s proposal for dialogue if the ROK makes a case for the dialogue. They evaluated that North Korea signaled an intention to the Moon

2) *The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, 2021.9.24.

3) *The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, 2021.9.24.

4) *The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, 2021.9.25.

government to create an environment, under which the North can start afresh regardless of which government will take office next year in the ROK. Furthermore, they claimed that restoring relations with the ROK government is a diplomatic card necessary for the dialogue and negotiations with the Biden administration. North Korea, however, went ahead with launching missiles three days after the release of Kim Yo-jong's statement without agreeing to the restoration of the inter-Korean communication channels. In a sense, some optimistic prospects undervalued the meaning of North Korea's preconditions.

Preconditions, proposed through Vice Foreign Minister Lee Tae-sung's statement and two of Kim Yo-jong's statements, reflect North Korea's strategic line and policy toward the US and the ROK revealed at the 8th Party Congress last January. North Korea came to the negotiation table for a security guarantee and economic reconstruction after having declared the completion of nuclear force. However, negotiation failure has made the North brace for a 'prolonged struggle.' North Korea declared a frontal breakthrough via the spirit of self-reliance (*Charkyok Kaengsaeng*) at the Party Congress in January 2021 against the backdrop of the failure of the five-year economic growth plan precipitated by a breakdown of the second DPRK-US summit in 2019, continued sanctions, the spread of coronavirus pandemic, and natural disasters. Pyongyang's proposals include 1) continuing the build-up of nuclear force and opening the space for negotiations under the principle of 'responding to power with power and goodwill with goodwill' until the US withdraws its hostile policy on North Korea, and 2) 'partially improving relations' contingent on the ROK's implementation action of inter-Korean agreements as a well-meaning gesture. Their demands illustrate that North Korea will strengthen its nuclear force based on the spirit of self-reliance if their demands of withdrawal of US's hostile policy and improvement of inter-Korean relations are not met.

Remarks of Kim Yo-jong and Kim Jong-un, Demonstrative of Security Dilemma of South and North Korea & Missile Launches

In his statement, Vice Foreign Minister Lee Tae-sung excoriated the double standard and hostile policy of the US, who, in his view, considered North Korea's military actions to be provocations, the military build-up of the US and its allies to be nuclear deterrence. He argued that if the end-of-the-war declaration occurs with the strengthening of the ROK-US alliance in place, it will only destroy the regional strategic balance and cause an endless arms race between the two Koreas. In her first statement, Kim Yo-jong claimed that "the ROK should discard double-standardized, illogical prejudice, vice, and hostile attitudes that seek to beautify the legitimacy and justification of their actions and make an issue with and denounce our just actions for exercising the right to self-defense." Her second statement also argued that South Korea should not try and "destroy the balance of the military force" on the Korean Peninsula with the US's double standard in place.

At a policy speech at the Supreme People's Assembly on September 29, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong-un made clear the preconditions for the end-of-the-war declaration. He said that whether inter-Korean relations get restored in the future hinges on the attitudes of the ROK.⁵⁾ He claimed that "mutual respect should be guaranteed; prejudiced thinking toward the foreign country, unequal double-standardized attitude, and hostile views and policies should be discarded first before putting an end to the war on the Korean Peninsula." He also expressed his dissatisfaction toward the ROK government saying that "We neither have any reason and goal to provoke the ROK nor intend to harm South Korea. The ROK should do away with the disillusion of having to deter North Korea's provocation, a feeling of

5) Kim Jong-un, "Direction of Struggle for the New Development of Socialist Construction (The Fifth Session of the 14th Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, 2021.9.29.)," *The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, 2021.9.30. Chairman Kim Jong-un announced his take on the Biden administration for the first time in this policy speech. Chairman Kim Jong-un maintained that "the US's military threats and hostile policy stay all the same as before as clearly demonstrated by actions of the past eight months since the beginning of the new US administration" and "how they are manifest and presented has become increasingly slyer."

danger, and victim mentality.” Chairman Kim also said that he will restore a severed inter-Korean communication channel in early October and that inter-Korean relations in the future depend on the ROK’s attitudes.

North Korea has engaged in several bouts of missile provocations since the breakdown of the DRPK-US negotiations. The North has claimed them to be a measure to boost the nation’s self-defense capability and a response to the ROK-US military drill and the adoption of their strategic weapons. Pyongyang has strongly opposed the ROK government’s expression of regret and negative comments on the North’s missile launches. Since February 2019, North Korea halted all inter-Korean dialogue and severed the inter-Korean communication channel in June. Moreover, Pyongyang blew up the inter-Korean liaison office in Gaesong making an issue with some NGOs sending anti-North Korea propaganda leaflets in June last year. Although the inter-Korean communication channel was fully restored 13 months later on July 27, 2021, after the leaders of the two Koreas exchanged letters, North Korea once again severed the channel on August 10 after Kim Yo-jong condemned the ROK-US joint military drill. All in all, Kim Yo-jong’s statement, Kim Jong-un’s speech, and North Korea’s missile launch point to a challenge in resolving the security dilemma facing South and North Korea.

Need to Explore How to ‘Strengthen Peaceful Means for Inter-Korean Peace’

The 2018 spring of peace on the Korean Peninsula was made possible thanks to an exchange between North Korea’s suspension of nuclear testing and a halt of the ROK-US joint military exercise. In other words, working out an exchange framework of ‘security for security’ earned North Korea’s agreement, thereby creating a negotiation phase. After the Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018 were agreed upon, however, a much anticipated second DPRK-US summit broke down, putting the nuclear negotiation at an impasse. South and North Korea, too, were not able to maintain an exchange framework of ‘security for security.’

In North Korea’s view, various measures to enhance self-defense capability and

facilitate the transition of the wartime operational control (OPCON) of the Moon government and the ROK-US joint military drill are a hindrance to implementing summit-level agreements, including inter-Korean military agreements. South and North Korea already laid out the foundation to address the inter-Korean security dilemma through the Agreement on the Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain of September 2018. Unable to overcome conflicts and contradictions between measures to improve self-defense capability on one hand and the improvement of inter-Korean relations and the pursuit of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula on the other hand, South and North Korea ended up facing a much more reinforced 'security dilemma.'

Arming oneself with independent national defense capability is, in a sense, crucial for South Korea to counter North Korea's nuclear armament, the military confrontation on the Korean Peninsula, and neighboring countries' military build-up including Japan and China. As Kim Yo-jong's statements indicate, North Korea claims to have bolstered independent self-defense capabilities. South and North Korea's singular military measures, if perceived as a threat to one another, are highly likely to lead to an arms race as opposed to the implementation of the military agreements against the backdrop of fragile trust toward each other. The risk of war will increasingly loom large on the Korean Peninsula if the South and the North continue on a path of 'the balance of horror' sustained by force. To prevent it from happening requires strategic thinking on how to harmoniously strike a balance between accommodating each other's security demands and improving inter-Korean relations. Restoring trust through mutual dialogue is essential in the process. In other words, South and North Korea should put their heads together to find a way to embolden 'peaceful means for peace' rather than to 'strengthen security for peace' to promote a more stable and sustainable peace.

Policy Task of the Moon Jae-in Government: Stable Management of the Korean Peninsula

The South Korean government's policy on North Korea carries three policy dilemmas. First is a security dilemma facing South and North Korea. The two Koreas should

secure independent military capabilities while considering the moves of their neighboring countries. One party's military build-up, perceived to be a direct threat to another party, however, makes it inevitable that each party responds to the other party's such moves amidst the direct military confrontation between the two Koreas. Second is a dilemma facing the ROK government in the process of seeking a peace regime against the backdrop of the ROK-US alliance and the ROK's policy autonomy. The stronger ROK-US alliance is likely to lead to the weakening of the autonomy in South Korea's policy on North Korea, thereby hampering its negotiation leverage over North Korea. The third is a dilemma between the process of promoting a peace regime and the remaining terms of the office for the current ROK government. North Korea, under Suryong's Monolithic System of Guidance, believes that time is on their side as long as they can weather through the sanctions. The US, on the contrary, views that time is on their side since they have started to see the effects of sanctions. The ROK government with a five-year single presidential term, finds it hard to coherently implement the initial policy regardless of who takes the office. The party, faced with weakening standing as time goes by, is bound to become increasingly unsettling with time and end up conceding more in negotiations.

Chairman Kim said that the inter-Korean communication channel will be restored and the future inter-Korean relations will hinge on the attitudes of the Moon government. With limited remaining terms of the office, the Moon government will find it difficult to induce North Korea into dialogue while considering North Korea's preconditions. In other words, the Moon government is not likely to reserve the inter-Korean relations into the one in the 2018 peace phase by resuming inter-Korean dialogue within the limited remaining terms of office. After all, the least Moon government could do at this moment is to stably manage the situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula and the inter-Korean relations with the consideration for the upcoming presidential campaign.

The Moon government first needs to propose a comprehensive discussion on North Korea's precondition based on an exchange framework of 'security for security' while focusing on the 'strengthening of peaceful means for peace.' The ROK could propose an opening of the South-North Joint Military Commission tasked with a comprehensive

discussion on the inter-Korean arms race, including the ROK-US joint military drill, and the implementation of the military agreements. Although it is hard to predict how North Korea would react, it is necessary to show the will to improve inter-Korean relations via preemptive concessions and a proposal for cooperation as it did in 2018. Second, the ROK government could signal its will to implement inter-Korean agreements by enforcing some part of the inter-Korean agreements that the ROK is capable of proceeding without outside intervention. The ROK could consider showing its will to implement inter-Korean agreements by preemptively putting into action some of the inter-Korean military agreements regardless of North Korea's response, such as turning the DMZ into a peace zone, although it might spark controversy. Although the Moon Jae-in government finds it challenging to reverse the currently stalemated phase into the 2018 phase of spring of peace, it could at least choose to create an opportunity to resume inter-Korean dialogue while stably managing inter-Korean relations. ©KINU 2021

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