



Online Series

2018. 05. 02. | CO 18-12

Evaluation of 2018 Inter-Korean Summit and Future Prospect : Meaning and Implementation Measures of Complete Denuclearization

Hong, Min
(Research Fellow, North Korean Research Division)

To sum up characteristics and achievements of the 2008 Inter-Korean Summit regarding denuclearization, first the Panmunjom Declaration contains a logical structure of the implementation process of complete denuclearization. Second, the two leaders' sincerity and commitment to denuclearization have effectively taken the form of internationally binding agreement through the Declaration, the signing of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and verbal messages of leaders of the two Koreas. Third, the Declaration reaffirmed what was described in the 1992 Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The agreement is completely different from North Korea's usual demands of "making the Korean Peninsula a denuclearized zone." Fourth, a series of North Korea's recent moves were considered to be a significantly important prior action for denuclearization. In fact, the North has effectively started the denuclearization process. Fifth, the Declaration can be seen as both sides' will to resolve denuclearization issues with the international cooperation and under international norms. This paper sets out to lay out the meaning of complete denuclearization and present the following: the level of complete denuclearization perceived by South Korea, North Korea, and the U.S.; differences in denuclearization methods between North Korea and the U.S.; political implications embedded in CVID; and approach that the ROK government should hold in the future.

On April 27, the historic Panmunjom Declaration was adopted at the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit held at the Peace House on the South Korean side of the truce village of Panmunjom. The Declaration, despite its extensive agreements contained, is evaluated as a well-made statement in terms of linkages and harmony between each agreement. It is attributed to close communication and prior coordination between the two Koreas. In particular, expressions such as “complete denuclearization” and “a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula” specified in the Declaration have replaced the typical ambiguity with concrete measures in North Korea’s will for denuclearization.

Declaration of Denuclearization, “Will + Implementation Measures + Cooperation,” with Logical Completeness and Commitment to Action

A major characteristic of the Declaration is that it contains a logical structure of the implementation process of complete denuclearization. By setting the sequence of “affirming the will for denuclearization” → “emphasizing responsibility and role for implementation” → “earning international cooperation,” the implementation steps and measures were specified beyond a simple will for denuclearization. In that regard, the Declaration can be evaluated as having reached a very advanced consensus. Second, both sides reaffirmed the will for complete denuclearization through the Declaration, the signing of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and verbal messages of the two leaders. Their sincerity and commitment to denuclearization have effectively taken the form of internationally binding agreement given that the Declaration was announced live worldwide.

Reaffirmation of the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

Third, the Declaration reaffirmed the “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” and “elimination of the danger of war,” which were already described in the 1992 Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (hereinafter referred to as “the 1992 Joint Declaration”). In the 1992 Joint Declaration, both the South and the North declared to commit to eliminating nuclear

weapons and facilities from the entire peninsula. The agreement reached this time, therefore, can be seen as a reaffirmation of the agreement made between the two Koreas in the 1992 Joint Declaration. The agreement is completely different from North Korea's usual demands of "making the Korean Peninsula a denuclearized zone," which include breaking off the ROK-U.S. alliance and removing the U.S. extended deterrence (nuclear umbrella). This time North Korea did not even request the withdrawal of United States Forces Korea (USFK) from South Korea. This is why the U.S. is counting on the success of the North Korea-U.S. summit.

Implementation for Denuclearization Has Begun

Fourth, a series of North Korea's moves — recent suspension of nuclear tests, long-range missile, and ICBM tests as well as closure of its nuclear test site — were considered to be a significantly important prior action for denuclearization. In fact, it is fair to say that the North has effectively started the denuclearization process. Fifth, a proper adjustment was made in setting agendas for the inter-Korean summit and the North Korea-U.S. summit. The Declaration indicates that the final agreement on denuclearization and the establishment of basic guidelines (time frame, timing, subject, and category) have been left to the North and the U.S. so that detailed implementation methods can be addressed in the North Korea-U.S. summit.

Promise of Denuclearization in Terms of International Standard and Norms

Lastly, the Declaration stipulates that South and North Korea agreed to actively seek the support and cooperation of the international community for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Such description can be seen as both sides' will to resolve denuclearization issues and pursue trilateral cooperation among South Korea, North Korea, and the U.S. under international norms. Examples of those international norms are the inspection and verification system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the U.N. Security Council resolution. That statement can also be interpreted as a plan to declare an end to the war and seek a peace treaty recognized within the support and resolution of the UN.

Two Axes Driving Denuclearization: Inter-Korean Relations and Peace Settlement

The Declaration carries a special message in terms of denuclearization given that the agreements were specified in the order of inter-Korean relations, a peace settlement, and denuclearization. The structure is built in a way that allows the inter-Korean relations and the peace settlement to serve as a main driving force for North Korea's denuclearization. It has affirmed the common sense that denuclearization can gain more momentum when accompanied by an underpinning will and actions to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Prior Coordination and Exchange of Opinions on Complete Denuclearization among South Korea, North Korea, and the United States

The phrase “complete denuclearization” of the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit was agreed upon as a result of close prior coordination and communication between the two Koreas. It means that the South, the North, and the U.S. are closely working out the details of the process that will eventually lead to the assertion of the North's will for denuclearization. The U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo said in an interview with ABC on April 29 that he had talked with Chairman Kim Jong-un about the meaning of a “complete, verifiable and irreversible” mechanism. His comments suggest that a discussion was held between Pyongyang and Washington in addressing the denuclearization methodologies. North Korea and the U.S. appear to have shared their opinions on complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization (CVID) and narrowed their differences to some extent.

How to Implement Denuclearization: North Korea's Synchronous Approach to Denuclearization and the U.S. Compressed Approach to Denuclearization

The key issue at the North Korea-U.S. summit will be a road map to the implementation of denuclearization, which consists of the subject, categories, timing (speed), and sequencing. The U.S. compressed approach to denuclearization highlights the speed whereas North Korea's phased and synchronous approach to denuclearization

focuses on sequencing. Each approach can be synchronously applied with measures including denuclearization, a peace treaty, normalization of relations between North Korea and the U.S., and removal of military threats. This synchronous progression may not guarantee as high speed as the U.S. desired. However, the problem can be resolved if the security of the North Korean regime is guaranteed at the corresponding speed of implementing denuclearization. After all, it is not that the problem remains unresolved because of the difference between the two. In the end, it is all about political decisions setting the pace of denuclearization and the security guarantee.

Politics of CVID: Conditions for Irreversible Denuclearization

There are remaining challenges that must be addressed to completely achieve CVID within a short period in a compressed manner. In addition to limitations of the inspection and verification system, doubts may linger about the sincerity and transparency of a party, who will undergo the nuclear inspection. The CVID is, by nature, both technical and political. Certain issues cannot be resolved only with the technical approach, such as alleviating mistrust and doubts and making the North renounce its nuclear weapons without damaging its national pride. The technical process of CVID should eventually accompany political trust. In other words, the ultimate means of denuclearization is to create political trust and give North Korea the confidence in the security of the regime so that it would see no reasons to use nuclear weapons and war heads even if those arsenals are hidden. Establishing a peace regime, in effect, requires a political bond that makes up for the imperfection and uncertainty of denuclearization. In this regard, the declaration of an end to the war and a peace treaty among the South, the North, the U.S. and possibly China will have significant implications in the implementation of denuclearization. ©KINU 2018

※ The views expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author and are not to be construed as representing those of the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU).