



Deep Freeze and Beyond: Making the Trump-Kim Summit a Success

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Principal Findings

What's new? The on-again, off-again summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is upon us. The parties are in the throes of preparation for the historic 12 June meeting in Singapore. North Korea's nuclear weapons will top the agenda.

Why does it matter? Only months ago rising tensions between Washington and Pyongyang risked leading to actual conflagration on the Korean peninsula. The summit is a dramatic change for the better. But, given mismatched expectations and lack of preparation time, diplomacy could fail, pushing the parties back toward conflict.

What should be done? The U.S. and North Korea should agree on the contours of an "action-for-action" approach: a four-step plan that could put North Korean nuclear weapons and missile testing in the deep freeze – and establish a monitoring and verification system essential to denuclearisation – in return for political, security and economic benefits.

Executive Summary

As the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) eye an unprecedented leader-level summit on 12 June in Singapore, the rest of the world watches with a mix of anticipation and anxiety. But notwithstanding the head-spinning on-again, off-again developments relating to the summit in recent weeks, Washington, Pyongyang and the entire region are in a far better place than six months ago. It was only in November 2017 that North Korea was wrapping up a breathtaking twelve-month missile and nuclear testing spree, and prominent U.S. voices were entertaining the possibility of so-called preventive war, regardless of the unthinkable human and economic costs. Although some complain that the shift from brinkmanship to diplomacy gives them whiplash, whiplash is preferable to war. The question now is whether this moment of possibility can be nurtured into durable progress toward eventual denuclearisation, peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

There is understandable doubt. Pyongyang and Washington both had reason to step back from the brink reached in 2017, but there is potentially a perilous mismatch in their expectations for how negotiations will proceed. The Trump administration has until recently argued forcefully for a “big bang” deal, in which North Korea quickly carries out the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of its nuclear capability, after which Washington would provide economic and security rewards for Pyongyang. In that spirit, Washington would not want to ease up on the pressure and sanctions it believes have helped bring North Korea to the table until it sees major steps from Pyongyang, although there are signs that China may have already begun relaxing its enforcement of the sanctions, adding to the already brewing friction between the U.S. and China.

For its part, North Korea clearly is unprepared to quickly trade away the ultimate guarantor of its security and wants instead an “action-for-action” approach whereby both sides would take steps in a phased process, along the lines of the framework agreed upon in the 2005 Six-Party Talks. Others also will have a say. Beijing is concerned about Pyongyang getting too close to the U.S. But having reasserted its influence, it supports Pyongyang's approach as the one that would cause the least disruption to the prevailing strategic balance. Urgently seeking to diminish the risk of war and explore a rapprochement, Seoul has taken an increasingly assertive role in drawing together Pyongyang and Washington. Tokyo frets about the possibility of a deal that fails to address its strategic interests, including its vulnerability to North Korean ballistic missiles with shorter ranges than the ICBMs that preoccupy the United States, as well as chemical and biological weapons.

The way to address this mismatch and maximise chances of regional buy-in would be for the U.S. to accept the necessity of an “action-for-action” approach and turn its attention to negotiating with Pyongyang the contours thereof. Summit sceptics like U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton have suggested that if North Korea were truly serious about denuclearisation it would agree to the “Libya model”. In the present situation, though, the negative strategic implications for the DPRK are too great, the bilateral trust deficit too deep, and the North Korean nuclear program too big and advanced to mimic the short-order transfer of equipment and other materials

that characterised Libya's denuclearisation in 2003 and 2004. Even if such a thing were physically possible, the verification and access the U.S. would require for assurance that everything of strategic value had been addressed would take years to achieve. Of course, the essence of "action-for-action" is that there must be concessions on both sides, and the U.S. and other stakeholders will have to be prepared to meet North Korea's moves with corresponding security, political and economic measures.

In his 1 June meeting with Kim Jong-un's representative Kim Yong-chol, President Trump appeared to be turning the corner toward accepting such phased denuclearisation. That's a welcome development, although the administration's track record calls the firmness of this new position somewhat into question.

Managing expectations for the summit itself is also critical. It would be magical thinking to expect that a summit announced on the spur of the moment in March, with only three months of working-level preparation, could produce a well-considered and viable arms control agreement in June. It would be far more realistic for the parties to aim for a statement of principles that in general language addresses each party's key strategic requirements, commits them to meeting again and formally locks in place the current moratorium on nuclear and missile testing. There are ample precedents to draw from in crafting such a document. Again, Trump's recent statements suggesting several meetings would be needed reflect a salutary – albeit again possibly fleeting – realism.

Finally, the parties need to fix their sights on the destination they will be seeking to reach after the summit. While the ultimate destination should remain the total and monitored denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, the political and practical impediments to negotiating a roadmap leading all the way there could be prohibitive. An alternative would be to stake out an ambitious midway point to start with, building upon precedents that have achieved at least some success in the past. As recently as 2009, international inspectors had some access to North Korea's nuclear sites. One possibility would be to bring them back, expand their remit and, in stages, aim for a deep freeze that caps Pyongyang's production of nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and key related materials in a verifiable way.

There are many ways to frame such a deep freeze, many other plausible and constructive way stations of comparable ambition, and many reasons to believe that a project of this scope – one that would entail risks and uncomfortable concessions from both sides – will not succeed. But jaded students of history should not dismiss the opportunities of the present diplomatic moment. For all that this moment has been shaped by mistrust, sabre-rattling and larger-than-life personalities, its salient feature may be the presence of leaders in Washington, Pyongyang and Seoul who, for whatever mix of personal, political and policy reasons, show an inclination to address a crisis that threatens international peace and security like few others. There is no shortage of concern about the U.S. and North Korean leaders, and Crisis Group has commented on both at some length. But on this issue at least, one can hope, their unusual and troubling traits might be well suited to the challenge.

Washington/Seoul/Beijing/New York, 11 June 2018

Deep Freeze and Beyond: Making the Trump-Kim Summit a Success

I. Introduction

The much anticipated summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un – scheduled, at the time of writing, for 12 June 2018 in Singapore – would mark a milestone in an extraordinary sequence of diplomatic manoeuvres between parties to the Korean peninsula crisis.¹ There has been a radical shift since late November 2017, when North Korea conducted the last of the twenty missile tests and one nuclear test it carried out over the course of the calendar year.² After the 29 November launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Pyongyang declared its nuclear deterrent complete. The U.S. and DPRK have since engaged in a volte-face that disoriented commentators likened to “diplomatic whiplash”,³ and the ensuing three months have left the press, the U.S. Congress and regional stakeholders – among others – struggling to come to grips with what the unprecedented summit might portend.

The core question is whether this summit between two idiosyncratic leaders, who just months ago were exchanging taunts like “little rocket man”⁴ and “dotard”,⁵ and

¹ For previous Crisis Group reporting on the DPRK, see Asia Reports N°61, *North Korea: A Phased Negotiation Strategy*, 1 August 2003; N°87, *North Korea: Where Next for the Nuclear Talks*, 15 November 2004; N°89, *Korea Backgrounder: How the South Views Its Brothers from Another Planet*, 14 December 2004; N°96, *North Korea: Can the Iron Fist Accept the Invisible Hand?*, 25 April 2005; N°100, *Japan and North Korea: Bones of Contention*, 27 June 2005; N°112, *China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?*, 1 February 2006; N°122, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October 2006; N°168, *North Korea's Nuclear Missile Programs*, 18 June 2009; N°169, *North Korea: Getting Back to Talks*, 18 June 2009; N°179, *Shades of Red: China's Debate over North Korea*, 2 November 2009; N°198, *North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea*, 23 December 2010; N°208, *Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South*, 14 July 2011; N°230, *North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability*, 25 July 2012; N°254, *Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close*, 9 December 2013; N°269, *North Korea: Beyond the Six-Party Talks*, 16 June 2015; and Asia Briefings N°52, *After North Korea's Missile Launch: Are the Nuclear Talks Dead?*, 9 August 2006; N°56, *North Korea's Nuclear Test: The Fallout*, 13 November 2006; N°62, *After the North Korean Nuclear Breakthrough: Compliance or Confrontation*, 30 April 2007; N°71, *North Korea-Russia Relations: A Strained Friendship*, 4 December 2007; N°91, *North Korea's Missile Launch: The Risks of Overreaction*, 31 March 2009; N°101, *North Korea under Tightening Sanctions*, 15 March 2010; N°293, *The Korean Peninsula Crisis (I): In the Line of Fire and Fury*, 23 January 2018; and N°294, *The Korean Peninsula Crisis (II): From Fire and Fury to Freeze for Freeze*, 23 January 2018.

² Data is drawn from the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies database of North Korean missile tests, which records only tests in which the missile tested is capable of delivering at least 500kg a distance of at least 300km. See “Understanding North Korea's missile tests”, Nuclear Threat Initiative, at www.nti.org/analysis/articles/understanding-north-koreas-missile-tests.

³ “Donald Trump and North Korea: What a fine mess”, *The New York Times*, editorial, 9 March 2018.

⁴ “Trump calls Kim Jong Un ‘little rocket man’ on Twitter”, Associated Press, 30 November 2017.

⁵ Austin Ramzy, “Kim Jong-un called Trump a ‘dotard’: What does that even mean?”, *The New York Times*, 22 September 2017.

one-upping each other's threats of nuclear annihilation,⁶ will lead over time to denuclearisation and a peace deal for the peninsula, or whether it will put their countries back on a collision course. That is no small worry, for despite the current diplomatic thaw, there is plenty of scope for disappointment and frustration that could bring the parties to the brink of military confrontation. If the parties cannot arrive at a realistic vision for a summit outcome, or if they walk away from Singapore without an agreed game plan for the next phase of diplomatic engagement, feelings of betrayal could quickly drive the parties back to the dangerous standoff that characterised their relations throughout 2017. A failed effort at diplomacy could also empower hardliners and hawks in both Washington and Pyongyang, who will almost certainly use it as evidence that bellicosity is the only way to deal with an implacable adversary.

Toxic frustration is not the only possible outcome, however. Speaking from Washington's perspective, a senior U.S. diplomat suggested in March that if a complete absence of agreement is on one end of the spectrum of possibilities, and a "bad deal" is on the other, there is plenty of space for a positive result in the middle.⁷ The purpose of this report is to help the parties steer toward what each could stake out as its own version of that middle ground: it puts forward an option for what the leaders could agree upon at the summit and points to where the parties could productively focus their energies in the period that follows. While the "deep freeze" option proposed here would not bring the parties all the way to denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula, it lays out a robust verification mechanism that would take them a measurable distance in that direction. There are endless variations on the option presented, which could be calibrated by the parties in the course of talks.

The report focuses narrowly on issues relating to nuclear and missile capabilities that are at the core of bilateral tensions between the United States and North Korea. It leaves other important issues – such as the disposition of chemical and biological weapons, the relationship between progress on human rights and sanctions relief, and the content and structure of multiparty peace talks – to be addressed in future reports and elsewhere. The report draws upon extensive research and senior- and working level interviews in Washington, Seoul, Beijing and New York.

⁶ Peter Baker and Michael Tackett, "Trump says his 'nuclear button' is 'much bigger' than North Korea's", *The New York Times*, 2 January 2018.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior U.S. diplomat, March 2018.

II. Anatomy of a Pivot: From Sabre Rattling to Planning an Historic Summit

A. Charm Offensive and an Olympic Truce

The shift from provocation to inter-Korean dialogue began in earnest in November and December 2017, in the run-up to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea).⁸ Once preliminary agreement on North Korean participation in the Olympics had been reached, Kim Jong-un made a set-piece public appeal for talks with South Korea during his annual televised 1 January speech.⁹ This overture was swiftly welcomed in Seoul, and several rounds of official dialogue at the Korean War truce village, Panmunjom, rapidly ensued on 9, 15 and 17 January.¹⁰ The talks, which were deliberately focused narrowly on various aspects of North Korea's Olympic participation, went ahead in a positive atmosphere, suggesting Pyongyang's interest in sustained dialogue.¹¹ Pyongyang, Seoul and Washington arrived at a de facto "Olympic truce" prior to the Games, with the United States and South Korea holding off on joint military exercises and North Korea observing a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and missile testing.

With tensions subsiding in the calm created by the de facto truce, North Korea played several cultural diplomacy cards. It sought to convey a positive image to a South Korean public whose enthusiasm for engagement with its northern neighbour had waned considerably since the end of the "sunshine policy" era (1998-2008) amid repeated acts of aggression by North Korea in subsequent years.¹² Kim also dispatched his sister Kim Yo-jong to the opening ceremony of the Games. She not only played

⁸ A civil society organisation, the South and North Korea Sports Exchange Association, met the April 25th Sports Club, the North Korean army sports team, in November. This was followed by a long meeting in a restaurant in Kunming, China on 18 December that included Choe Mun-sun, governor of the Olympic host province of Gangwon and an ally of President Moon Jae-in. Choe was keen to solicit North Korean participation in the Winter Olympics, which ran from 9-25 February. "Choe Munsun, 'Contact with North Korea two weeks ago ... North, 100% certain to attend Pyeongchang'", *Hankyoreh*, 2 January 2018; "단독]남북, 작년 11월 9일 중군명서 '평창 참가' 첫 물밑접촉" ["Exclusive: South and North, first secret contact on 'PyeongChang participation' last November 9 in Kunming, China"], *Donga Ilbo*, 3 January 2018; "5시간 폭탄주가 남북 물고 ... 모란봉 악단 초청하겠다" ["5 hours of bomb shots and South-North discussion [I will] invite the Moranbong Band"], *JoongAng Ilbo*, 5 January 2018.

⁹ "Kim Jong Un's New Year address", *Rodong Sinmun*, 2 January 2018.

¹⁰ "S. Korea offers high-level talks with N.K. next week", *Yonhap*, 2 January 2018; "South Korea bets that talks with North could pay off", *The Washington Post*, 2 January 2018.

¹¹ "In rare inter-Korean talks, North pledges 'invaluable gift'", *Reuters*, 9 January 2018; "남북 고위급회담 취재 온 북한 기자의 말: '분위기가 오늘 특히 좋다'" ["North Korean reporter returning from South-North high-level meeting: 'The atmosphere was especially good today'"], *Huffington Post KR Edition*, 9 January 2018; "South Korea and North Korea to hold working-level talks on Jan. 15", *Reuters*, 13 January 2018.

¹² During this period, a North Korean soldier shot a South Korean tourist dead at the Mt. Kumgang resort in July 2008; DPRK forces sank the ROK corvette *Cheonan* in March 2010; and North Korean artillery shelled the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong-do in November of the same year. There was also an incident in which two ROK soldiers patrolling the inter-Korean border were maimed by a landmine in August 2015. North Korea denies culpability for the explosion, which it says was an accident caused by heavy rain; however, in South Korea it is widely believed to have been deliberate.

expertly to the global media, but also delivered a handwritten letter from her brother to President Moon, inviting him to an inter-Korean summit as soon as practicable.

B. *From a Pyongyang Dinner to a Driveway Press Conference*

President Moon did not immediately accept the summit proposal, suggesting that the parties would first need to create an appropriate atmosphere.¹³ He was likely eager to avoid appearing to move too far, too fast in front of the U.S. delegations led by Vice President Mike Pence at the opening ceremony of the Games and President Trump's daughter, Ivanka, at the closing.¹⁴ But ten days after the Games ended, Moon dispatched a delegation to Pyongyang led by National Security Advisor Chung Eui-yong – a cousin of CIA official Andrew Kim, a central figure in U.S. negotiations with North Korea – and state intelligence agency head Suh Hoon. Kim Jong-un received them on 5 March, again projecting seriousness of purpose by leading the talks personally, alongside his sister Kim Yo-jong and the country's point man on inter-Korean relations, Kim Yong-chol. The North Korean leader also, unusually, hosted a small banquet for the South Koreans.¹⁵

And then the DPRK largely went silent, leaving South Korea to carry Kim's ostensible pro-engagement message to the United States.¹⁶ South Korea's Chung and Suh travelled to the White House on 8 March to brief the administration on the Pyongyang meetings. They shared the news – kept under wraps until then – that Kim had suggested a meeting with Trump. They also conveyed their understanding that Kim would refrain from nuclear and ICBM tests in the interim, that he was “committed to denuclearisation”, and that U.S.-ROK military exercises could continue without jeopardising this opening.¹⁷

By at least one account, the South Korean envoys had in mind to set up a meeting at their own level, which would bring together then-National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo with their North Korean counterparts.¹⁸ Instead, as has been widely reported, Trump appears to have taken the decision to accept Kim's invitation on the spur of the moment and without the support of

¹³ “S. Korea pushes for creating conditions for inter-Korean summit”, Yonhap, 22 February 2018.

¹⁴ “Pence, Moon play down differences over North Korea on eve of Games”, CNN, 8 February 2018; “Moon Jae-in, Ivanka Trump stress need for peace, differ on strategy”, UPI, 23 February 2018.

¹⁵ “경애하는 최고령도자 김정은동지께서 남조선대통령의 특사대표단 성원들을 접견하시었다”, [“Dear Supreme Leader comrade Kim Jong-un meets delegation of Special Envoy of South Chosŏn president”], video, YouTube, 6 March 2018; “Kim Jong Un meets delegation of special envoy of S. Korean president”, KCNA, 6 March 2018.

¹⁶ Analysis of previous inter-Korean summits suggests that silence is not always intended to send a signal: North Korea's hyper-centralised political system limits the speed with which decisions can be made and policy formed. Previous inter-Korean summits provide a comparative case. Kyle Pope, “The road to Pyongyang: Inter-Korean summits and North Korean media”, *Sino-NK*, 31 March 2018.

¹⁷ “Remarks by Republic of Korea National Security Advisor Chung Eui-yong”, transcript, White House, 8 March 2018. Chung and intelligence chief Suh took Kim's message around the world: to Washington on 8 March, then Beijing on 12 March and Tokyo the next day. “Seoul envoy Chung Eui-yong in China for talks on North Korea developments”, Associated Press, 12 March 2018; “Japan cautious while South Korea upbeat after North Korea talks in Tokyo”, Reuters, 13 March 2018.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

his top White House advisers on the Korean peninsula.¹⁹ Asked by Trump to make public his acceptance at the White House, the South Koreans spoke to the press from the West Wing driveway,²⁰ leaving Washington's foreign policy establishment surprised, anxious and confused.

Although Trump had spoken previously, including during his campaign, about talks with Kim, there was little public indication in 2017 that this was even a remote possibility. Beyond his "little rocket man"²¹ reference and "fire and fury"²² rhetoric in August and September 2017, the reports that emerged from the U.S. government over the course of the year painted a picture of an administration starting to wrestle with an option that previously would have been unthinkable. It appeared to be giving serious thought to initiating a so-called "preventive" war with North Korea that might cost tens or even hundreds of thousands of lives in neighbouring South Korea and Japan even if limited to conventional weapons – and that could conceivably escalate to a nuclear exchange.²³ Inside the administration, a senior official spoke of two camps advising the president on peninsular matters.²⁴ One, which included McMaster and the National Security Council staff, reportedly took the view that North Korea's intent in developing nuclear weapons was not purely defensive. This line of thinking held that Pyongyang sought the capacity to extort concessions from its neighbours, drive U.S. troops from the peninsula, force the rollback of sanctions and possibly, ultimately, broker the reunification of the peninsula on its own terms. This camp tended to treat the prospect of a first strike as a more serious possibility than the second, led by Secretary of Defence James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Mattis and Tillerson saw North Korea's nuclear arsenal as a defensive hedge, and they believed that a deterrence strategy could manage any threat from Pyongyang the same way it had for years with Beijing and Moscow.²⁵

While there is a range of views about whether anyone in the administration truly had the appetite for a conflagration of the magnitude that would have been involved – least of all a president who ran on a platform of diminishing foreign entanglements – they certainly seemed to want to give the impression they did.²⁶ A senior U.S. official suggested to Crisis Group that President Trump's pressure strategy required the existence of a credible military option, and that his team understood that their

¹⁹ Stephen Collinson and Nicole Gaouette, "Talks bombshell sets up stunning Kim-Trump summit", CNN, 9 March 2018.

²⁰ "South Korea's National Security Adviser Remarks," video, C-Span, 8 March 2018, www.c-span.org/video/?442361-1/president-trump-meet-north-korean-leader-kim-jong.

²¹ Steven Nelson, "Trump: 'Little rocket man' Kim Jong Un is a 'sick puppy'", *The Washington Examiner*, 29 November 2017.

²² Noah Bierman, "Trump warns North Korea of 'fire and fury'", *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 2017.

²³ Uri Friedman, "Lindsey Graham: 'There's a 30 percent chance Trump attacks North Korea'", *The Atlantic*, 14 December 2017. The U.S. military has long planned for scenarios involving a North Korean attack on South Korea or a North Korean regime collapse. The Trump administration also called for plans under which the U.S. might initiate the conflict. Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, March 2018.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

options would not be credible unless they believed in them.²⁷ Thus, they proceeded with a mix of method acting and brinkmanship to project a seriousness about the development of possible military options that may or may not have reflected any such likely scenario.²⁸

The flurry of discussion and occasionally heated public rhetoric around military options had a number of important ripple effects. First, the sabre rattling formed the backdrop for an unprecedented campaign of economic pressure centred around tough UN Security Council resolutions enacted in June, September and December 2017. Debate continues about the extent to which concerns about the outbreak of war – by design or through miscalculation or misjudgement – encouraged tighter sanctions enforcement by countries other than the U.S. Some U.S. officials privately note that North Korea itself may have helped drive some Asian countries into the fold through its accelerated and often provocatively timed testing schedule, its gross flouting of international norms with the February 2017 nerve gas assassination of Kim Jong-un’s half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, in Kuala Lumpur and its cyber-meddling.²⁹ Still, it is hard to discount the impact of Washington’s bellicosity. China’s senior leadership was deeply concerned about the risk of conflict,³⁰ and Beijing threw its weight behind the maximum pressure sanctions regime more robustly than U.S. officials had previously thought achievable.³¹

Second, the perception of a rising risk of catastrophic war may have had the effect of limiting the president’s freedom of action. While answering the president’s call to develop options, the military made clear that it did not support a first strike and that there was no easy military solution for removing North Korea’s nuclear capability; any effort to rid the country of its nuclear weapons would require a ground invasion.³² At the same time, legislators from both parties indicated publicly and privately that they would not support a first strike without congressional authorisation.³³ When the White House signalled it wished to discuss the contents of a notional Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), it was rebuffed. A Senate Republican leader told Crisis Group that it would be unwise to push too hard for an AUMF because “there’s no way in hell they would get it”.³⁴

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, March 2018.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, March 2018; Phil Stewart, “Mattis visits Seoul for defense talks as tensions climb”, Reuters, 26 October 2017.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, February 2018.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, former U.S. official recounting another former senior U.S. official’s consultation with Chinese leadership in Beijing, December 2017. Crisis Group discussions, Chinese officials, scholars and analysts, and foreign diplomats, Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai, September 2017-January 2018.

³¹ One official said, “if you had told me two years ago that we’d have this level of success I’d have been very surprised”. Crisis Group interviews, U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

³² Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

³³ “New Bill: No War in North Korea Without Congressional Authorization”, press release, Senator Bernie Sanders, 31 October 2017, www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/new-bill-no-war-in-north-korea-without-congressional-authorization; Crisis Group interview, Senate Republican, March 2018.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Senate Republican, March 2018.

A third effect of the Trump administration's brinkmanship, as Crisis Group has noted earlier, was that over time it began to push the president into a corner.³⁵ The more often Trump and reinforcing voices like Senator Lindsay Graham and (then private citizen) John Bolton threatened the concrete possibility of war, the more the administration was squeezed by two opposing pressures. On one hand it needed to demonstrate that the U.S. government's threats were not those of a paper tiger and on the other it needed to avoid walking the United States into a war that neither Congress nor the military supported, and for which the American public had not been meaningfully prepared.

What was unclear as 2017 drew to a close was how the U.S. government would find its way out of the corner into which it had backed itself. To little avail, the Trump administration had sent feelers out to Pyongyang throughout 2017, suggesting in a Track 1.5 channel between civil society representatives and North Korean officials that it would be interested in what it called a fresh start, and that it would welcome a testing moratorium, in return for which it would be prepared to ratchet down military exercises.³⁶ Over the course of the year, Washington went even further, signalling that it was prepared to talk without preconditions.³⁷ But the combination of slender olive branches and stepped-up pressure did not seem to make much of an impression. For most of 2017, Kim raced to demonstrate Pyongyang's ICBM and hydrogen bomb capabilities. Only at the end of the year, after Kim appeared to have tested a hydrogen bomb and an ICBM, and when he declared North Korea's nuclear force complete, did Pyongyang show interest in South Korea's invitation to the PyeongChang Games and did openings for meaningful progress appear.³⁸

Even then, however, the U.S. government did not seem to have a coherent sense of what its next move would be. U.S. officials interviewed in January and February expressed conviction that the sanctions were taking their toll on North Korea ("their economy is in a shambles", said one) and seemed to think that several more months of pressure might improve Washington's negotiating position should it wish to move toward talks then.³⁹ But as one U.S. diplomat acknowledged in February, moving from pressure to talks would be tricky for U.S. policymakers, as there was a strong perception inside the U.S. government that those who previously pushed the United States toward high-stakes diplomatic engagement with the DPRK had ended up with "egg on their face" because of "bad faith" performance by the North Koreans.⁴⁰ Moreover, there was no consensus about what kinds of concessions the United States might be willing to make, and in what sequence, in order to reach a deal.⁴¹

³⁵ Crisis Group Reports, *The Korean Peninsula Crisis (I): In the Line of Fire and Fury* and *The Korean Peninsula Crisis (II): From Fire and Fury to Freeze-for-Freeze*, op. cit.

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, U.S.-based Track 1.5 participants, May 2018.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, former U.S. government official, May 2018.

³⁸ Uri Friedman, "North Korea says it has completed its nuclear program: What does that mean?" *The Atlantic*, 29 November 2017.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, U.S. government officials, January-February 2018.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, February 2018.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Against this backdrop, Trump, reportedly frustrated with then-Secretary of State Tillerson's failure to deliver breakthrough options, took matters into his own hands when the South Korean delegation arrived in early March.⁴²

C. Enter Pompeo and Bolton

Shortly after accepting the invitation, Trump fired Secretary Tillerson, and announced that CIA Director Mike Pompeo would take his place.⁴³ Soon after that, he announced that John Bolton, who had an acrimonious relationship with Pyongyang from his time in the George W. Bush administration and had been an outspoken proponent for preventive war in North Korea, would replace H.R. McMaster as National Security Advisor. Both announcements had a significant impact on the trajectory of preparations for the summit.

It was clear from the outset that Pompeo would be a more influential secretary of state than his predecessor. Having gained the president's confidence in a way that Tillerson never succeeded in doing, Pompeo would be in a position to represent the U.S. position authoritatively in a way that Tillerson could not. Pompeo also presumably had the benefit of getting to know DPRK contacts through a longstanding channel between U.S. and North Korean intelligence services.⁴⁴ Finally, while Pompeo cultivated a hawk's persona (including through comments at a summer 2017 public forum that were interpreted as support for regime change), he projected a different image privately. One Senate Republican observed to Crisis Group that there appeared to be a split between those who see Pompeo as a "neocon" who encourages Trump's hawkish instincts and those who characterise him as a "whisperer," who steers Trump away from bad decisions. This legislator spoke positively about Pompeo, adding that he "leans forward" in the direction of hawkishness but – in what was clearly intended as a compliment – is "not crazy".⁴⁵

For several weeks, Pompeo was visibly at the centre of summit preparations. Even before his confirmation on 25 April, President Trump confirmed that Pompeo, supported exclusively by CIA staffers, had travelled secretly to Pyongyang around 1 April for high-level meetings, including with Kim Jong-un himself, leaving behind CIA staffer Andrew Kim to oversee preparations.⁴⁶ Pompeo then returned to Pyongyang in mid-May to secure the release of three Americans in DPRK custody.

In public speaking, Pompeo relayed a relatively hardline U.S. position with regard to the summit, but in a measured tone. He said the U.S. government wished to

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

⁴³ Peter Baker, Gardiner Harris and Mark Landler, "Trump fires Rex Tillerson and will replace him with CIA chief Pompeo", *The New York Times*, 13 March 2018.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018; prominent Washington-based North Korea scholar, May 2018.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Senate Republican, March 2018.

⁴⁶ Shane Harris, Carol D. Leonnig, Greg Jaffe and David Nakamura, "CIA Director Pompeo met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over Easter weekend," *The Washington Post*, 18 April 2018; "백발의 한국계 007 수차례 방북... 억류자 석방 키맨 활약," ["Silver-haired Korean 007 several visits to North Korea ... key man in release of detainees"] *Donga Ilbo*, 11 May 2018; Anna Fifield and Min Joo Kim, "South Korea asks, 'Who is that mystery man with Pompeo and Kim'", *The Washington Post*, 17 May 2018.

make an agreement “such that the North Korean leadership will step away from its efforts to hold America at risk with nuclear weapons, completely, irreversibly and verifiably”.⁴⁷ And while he acknowledged at his confirmation hearing that no one could work out all the elements of a deal with North Korea in a single meeting, he also said in public appearances that the administration does not support a deal in which the two sides would move symmetrically through a sequence of mutual concessions – ie, follow an action-for-action approach along the lines laid out over a decade ago in the Six-Party Talks.⁴⁸ He told a Sunday morning television show:

We’ve done this before, right? We’ve done trade for trade, moment for moment; you give me X, I give you Y. And it has failed repeatedly. I think Chairman Kim understands that. I think he appreciates that this is going to have to be different and big and special, and something that has never been undertaken before.⁴⁹

But while Pompeo drew occasional fire from Pyongyang – including for his suggestion that North Korea might be prepared to reach a grand deal for denuclearisation based on economic inducements alone⁵⁰ – the tension between the North Koreans and National Security Advisor Bolton has had a different tone altogether. After keeping a relatively low profile in his new role for several weeks, Bolton appeared on television on 29 April suggesting that the U.S. had in mind for North Korea to follow the “Libya model” for denuclearisation.⁵¹ This phrase refers to the George W. Bush administration’s deal with Libya to eliminate the latter’s nuclear capabilities in 2003 and 2004. Over the course of several months in 2004, the U.S. government physically transported out of the North African country design documents, centrifuge rotors, SCUD missile sets, two tonnes of uranium hexafluoride and 1,000 tonnes of other materials.⁵²

Bolton’s message was poorly framed on three levels. First, at a substantive level, it challenged Pyongyang to match a disarmament protocol that was both impracticable, given the extent to which the country’s weapons and missile program has developed, and, from the DPRK’s perspective, politically infeasible.⁵³ Second, the reference to Libya was strikingly impolitic given that several years after Muammar al-

⁴⁷ Jesse Johnson, “Mike Pompeo optimistic on Kim-Trump summit, but ‘America first’ remarks likely to trigger concern in Tokyo and Seoul”, *Japan Times*, 13 April 2018.

⁴⁸ The Six-Party Talks were a series of multilateral talks, involving China, Japan, Russia, North Korea, South Korea and the U.S., launched in 2003 to seek a peaceful resolution to the security challenges posed by the North Korean nuclear program. The transcript of the Pompeo confirmation hearing is at: CNN, 12 April 2018, www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1804/12/ath.02.html.

⁴⁹ Interview with Chris Wallace of Fox News Sunday, 13 May 2018, www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/05/282048.htm.

⁵⁰ “Mike Pompeo: US ready to help make North Korea rich if it gives up nukes”, *Deutsche Welle*, 11 May 2018. The North Korean ministry of foreign affairs issued a statement noting, “we have never had any expectation of U.S. support in carrying out our economic construction and will not at all make such a deal in the future, either”. “Press statement by first vice minister of foreign affairs of DPRK”, KCNA, 16 May 2018.

⁵¹ Chas Danner, “John Bolton says U.S. is considering Libya model for North Korea’s disarmament”, *New York Magazine*, 29 April 2018.

⁵² Rod Lyon, “North Korea and the Libya model”, *The Strategist*, 15 May 2018.

⁵³ Rick Noack, “How Kim-Trump tensions escalated: The more the U.S. said ‘Libya,’ the angrier North Korea got”, *The Washington Post*, 24 May 2018.

Qadhafi agreed to his country's denuclearisation, the U.S. helped overthrow his government, leading to his bloody death. Third, and most salient for the DPRK, Bolton played a central role in unravelling the 1994 Agreed Framework between the U.S. and North Korea, which was the focus of U.S.-DPRK nuclear diplomacy for eight years. Fiercely contemptuous of the Kim regime, Bolton has described his role vividly in published writing.⁵⁴

Pyongyang reacted with predictable sharpness. In a denunciatory statement, Kim Kye-gwan, first vice minister for foreign affairs and veteran nuclear negotiator, singled out Bolton by name, calling him “repugnant”, made clear that the DPRK did not intend to share Libya's “miserable fate” and suggested that if Washington was trying to force it into “unilateral nuclear abandonment”, then Pyongyang would call off the talks.⁵⁵ President Trump seemingly tried to defuse the situation, saying, “[the] Libya model is not a model we have at all when we are thinking of North Korea”, but followed that by noting that what happened in Libya was “decimation” and “that model would take place [in North Korea] if we don't make a deal most likely”.⁵⁶ Vice President Pence reinforced the “decimation” part of the message, stating that, “as the president made clear, this will only end like the Libyan model ended if Kim Jong-un doesn't make a deal”. Pence's remark drew another furious DPRK response, this time from Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Choe Son-hui, who among other things called Pence a “political dummy” and suggested that diplomatic failure could lead to a “nuclear showdown” between the U.S. and North Korea.⁵⁷

South Korean officials reportedly saw this sequence of maladroit messages as evidence of Bolton trying to play the spoiler – and perhaps he was – but there was simultaneous turbulence on other fronts that also aggravated tensions.⁵⁸ Annual U.S.-ROK joint military exercises from 11-25 May were another source of friction. North Korea had suggested in its earlier talks with South Korea that it would not object to such exercises.⁵⁹ But North Korea had also previously made clear its sensitivities about the inclusion in prior exercises of “decapitation drills” (ie, simulated at-

⁵⁴ In his memoir of service in the George W. Bush administration, *Surrender is Not an Option*, Bolton includes a sub-chapter captioned “Driving a Stake through the Agreed Framework” (p. 100). There he describes President Bill Clinton's North Korea policy and the Agreed Framework as “classic illustrations of the delusion that a rogue state could be coaxed out of nuclear weapons” and “embarrassments to the United States” (p. 101). He also relates how by the end of 2001 he was able to “move onto the offensive toward dismantling the Agreed Framework and its various manifestations” (p. 103) and how the discovery that North Korea was enriching uranium provided him with “the hammer I had been looking for to shatter the Agreed Framework” (p. 106). In reflecting that the last practical aspects of the Agreed Framework were wrapped up in November 2002, the sub-chapter concludes, “Thank God that was done”. John Bolton, *Surrender is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad* (New York, 2008).

⁵⁵ “Press statement by first vice minister of foreign affairs of DPRK,” KCNA, 16 May 2018.

⁵⁶ “Trump walks back Bolton comment on Libya denuclearisation,” *Asia Times*, 18 May 2018; “White House appears to walk back Bolton's ‘Libya model’ comment,” CBS News, 16 May 2018.

⁵⁷ Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea, calling Pence remarks ‘ignorant and stupid’, issues new warning on summit,” *The New York Times*, 23 May 2018.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, former South Korean intelligence official, May 2018; Anna Fifield, “Who's to blame for the hiccup in North Korea talks? South Koreans say Bolton,” *The Washington Post*, 21 May 2018.

⁵⁹ “Military exercises with South Korea to start April 1,” Associated Press, 19 March 2018.

tacks on the DPRK leadership) and nuclear-capable bombers.⁶⁰ It should therefore not have come as a surprise that Pyongyang expressed outrage at the inclusion of F-22 stealth fighters, which are associated with decapitation drills, and nuclear-capable B-52 bombers in the May exercises. Pyongyang also cancelled senior-level meetings that had been scheduled for Panmunjom to ease military tensions and discuss ways to increase ties.⁶¹

Washington and Seoul quickly scaled back the exercises involving the B-52s, seeming to recognise that the bombers were unnecessarily provocative, but the exchanges over joint exercises and the Libya remarks soured the buoyant public tone that until then had surrounded summit preparations.⁶² On top of that, preparations had hit some other bumps, with a U.S. planning team reporting that its North Korean counterparts had been no-shows for meetings in Singapore, and Pompeo suggesting that his team's counterparts were not receiving answers to their queries.⁶³

The escalatory cycle crested on the morning of 24 May, when President Trump issued a public letter to Kim Jong-un withdrawing from the summit. He had reportedly expressed concern about the increasingly bellicose messages from Pyongyang, had been advised by Bolton that these were a "bad sign" and feared Pyongyang might embarrass Washington by pulling the plug first.⁶⁴ The letter itself included elements of both conciliation and threat. It was rich in honorifics, addressing Kim as "Mr Chairman", and left the door ajar for a rapprochement, even as it alluded to the prodigious U.S. nuclear capabilities and offered a prayer that these would never have to be used.

Within 24 hours, Pyongyang had put out a statement saying it was still open to a summit "at any time and in any way", and Trump was suggesting that the 12 June summit might still go ahead.⁶⁵ On 27 May, President Trump announced that a U.S. team comprising seasoned experts and negotiators from the Departments of State and Defence, and the National Security Council, had crossed into North Korea to make summit arrangements, and by the end of May the administration was confirming it "expected" the meeting would happen.⁶⁶

The quick and sometimes erratic swings in the administration's posture drew a mix of loud criticism and muted concern from Washington policy circles. Most vocal have been Democratic leaders and left-of-centre commentators, who worry that the summit will inevitably leave the president disappointed and on a fast track to war or,

⁶⁰ "KCNA blasts U.S. and S. Korea for staging large-scale military drill against DPRK", KCNA, 16 May 2018.

⁶¹ Choe Sang-Hun and Mark Landler, "North Korea threatens to call off summit meeting with Trump", *The New York Times*, 15 May 2018.

⁶² Michael R. Gordon and Nancy A. Youssef, "U.S. scrapped training exercise with South Korea involving B-52s", *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 May 2018.

⁶³ Philip Rucker, Ashley Parker and Josh Dawsey, "'A lot of dial tones': The inside story of how Trump's North Korea summit fell apart", *The Washington Post*, 24 May 2018.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Robert Delaney and Catherine Wong, "Trump says Kim summit could still happen, as China worries about being caught in U.S.-North Korea cross fire", *South China Morning Post*, 25 May 2018.

⁶⁶ Jesse Johnson, "In push to salvage North Korea summit, team of veteran American diplomats faces high hurdles", *The Japan Times*, 28 May 2018; Oren Dorrell, "Trump-Kim summit 'expected' on June 12, U.S. top diplomat says", *USA Today*, 31 May 2018.

alternatively, that Trump's eagerness for a legacy diplomatic achievement might lead him to mortgage U.S. national security interests, for example by accepting a withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea.⁶⁷ Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer advanced both of these arguments in a statement on 24 April.⁶⁸ Senator Robert Menendez has suggested that he might put forward legislation granting Congress a vote over any deal that might emerge.⁶⁹ He also joined a letter from top Senate Democrats stating that offering sanctions relief for anything short of "the verifiable performance of its obligations to dismantle [North Korea's] nuclear and missile arsenal" would be "a bad deal".⁷⁰ Republicans have quietly echoed anxieties about how Trump will comport himself.⁷¹ To date, however, Trump has tended to wave off criticism – for example as coming from "failed experts"⁷² – and he is under no evident pressure from his political base to adjust tactics or shift course.⁷³

D. *Moon and Kim Set a Wobbly Stage*

While always careful to credit President Trump for his leadership and overall approach to resolving the peninsular crisis, President Moon has worked assiduously to maintain diplomatic momentum between Pyongyang and Washington at key moments in 2018.⁷⁴ Moon's goal was to provide shuttle diplomacy and mediation services to the two adversaries. Given Seoul's existential stake in the Washington-Pyongyang dynamic, it is unsurprising that it would take up this mantle. Even so, President Moon's diplomacy over the course of 2017 and 2018 has been noteworthy for moving South

⁶⁷ Alex Ward, "North Korea is already getting concessions ahead of Trump-Kim talks", *Vox*, 18 May 2018.

⁶⁸ "Schumer Floor Remarks on President Trump's Impending Talks with Kim Jong-Un and the Need to Protect Special Counsel Mueller's Investigation", Senate Democrats website, 19 April 2018, www.democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/speeches/schumer-floor-remarks-on-president-trumps-impending-talks-with-kim-jong-un-and-the-need-to-protect-special-counsel-muellers-investigation.

⁶⁹ Daniel Wertz, "Making a deal with North Korea: What role for the U.S. Congress", *NK Pro*, 29 May 2018.

⁷⁰ "In New Letter To President Trump, Top Senate Democrats Outline Conditions For Any Deal With North Korea – Dems Say Sanctions Relief Should Be Contingent On Complete Denuclearization, Destruction Of Test Sites, End Of Ballistic Missile Tests & More", press release, Office of Senator Menendez, 4 June 2018, www.menendez.senate.gov/news-and-events/press/in-new-letter-to-president-trump-top-senate-democrats-outline-conditions-for-any-deal-with-north-korea--dems-say-sanctions-relief-should-be-contingent-on-complete-denuclearization-destruction-of-test-sites-end-of-ballistic-missile-tests-and-more.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, members of Congress and Washington-based advocacy community, March-May 2018.

⁷² In a 4 January 2018 tweet, for example, Trump referred to "all of the failed 'experts'" weighing in on then ongoing talks between North and South Korea. @realDonaldTrump Twitter account, 4 January 2018, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/948879774277128197?lang=en>.

⁷³ "Americans support talks with North Korea, remain skeptical of outcome", *Voice of America*, 15 May 2018, <https://blogs.voanews.com/all-about-america/2018/05/15/americans-support-talks-with-north-korea-remain-skeptical-of-outcome>; Anthony Salvanto, Jennifer De Pinto, Fred Backus and Kabir Khanna, "CBS News nation tracker poll: Americans give Trump credit for good economy, mixed reviews on North Korea", *CBS News*, 20 May 2018.

⁷⁴ Benjamin A. Engel, "South Korea's strategy to bring peace to the peninsula: Credit Trump", *The Diplomat*, 3 May 2018.

Korea to centre stage and making clear that it would not be a bystander in discussions of its future.

Moon and Kim had their first meeting in the southern half of the Korean War truce village of Panmunjom on 27 April, and their second one less than a month later in the northern half. The April 27 inter-Korean summit, the first since 2007, was an important step forward for inter-Korean relations, not least because while it was rich in pre-peninsula division historical symbolism, there was also substance.⁷⁵ Kim and Moon had a 100-minute meeting with other officials in the morning, and spent 40 minutes in private discussion in the afternoon, giving every appearance of establishing a bond.⁷⁶ Senior officials accompanying the leaders had opportunities to form relationships and discuss their individual remits. And most notably, the two sides ended the day by issuing the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula.

The Panmunjom Declaration contains positive language and a small number of concrete steps that, pending successful negotiation of the details and implementation, have the potential to produce shifts in inter-Korean relations.⁷⁷ The most significant of these steps are the reaffirmation of plans for regular communication through a dedicated phone line linking the two leaders, as well as the commitment to launch three- and four-party talks with the U.S., and in the latter case, China, to bring about an end to the Korean War and institute a “peace system” on the Korean peninsula. The news that Moon Jae-in is to visit Pyongyang in the autumn implied the intention to continue moving the relationship in a positive direction.

As for Washington-Pyongyang dynamics, the meeting and declaration were also calibrated to set the stage for the U.S.-North Korea leader-level meeting and encourage preparatory engagement. The declaration provided the first public, written confirmation since North Korea’s recent turn toward diplomacy that Pyongyang is at least nominally willing to denuclearise. By specifying tri- and quadrilateral meetings on the creation of a peace regime for the peninsula, the declaration also endorsed the importance of a multilateral peace dialogue, while allowing space for nuclear discussions to proceed on a bilateral track.

Whereas the 27 April summit was displayed to the rapt attention of the global media, when the leaders of the two Koreas met again on the northern side of Panmunjom just 29 days later, they did so behind closed doors.⁷⁸ The meeting was hastily convened at Kim’s request on the heels of President Trump’s May 24 letter cancelling the Singapore summit, and together with conciliatory messaging from Pyongyang sent a signal of constructive seriousness to Washington that appeared to help get the

⁷⁵ Every element, from the size of the conference table to the dinner menu, suggested a search for deeper meaning. The pine tree Kim and Moon planted near the inter-Korean border was nourished with soil from the highest mountains in North and South Korea, Paektu and Halla, and water from the Han and Taedong rivers that run through the two Korean capital cities.

⁷⁶ Tweet from the official presidential account, @TheBlueHouseKR, during the course of the summit, 27 April 2018; “Moon and Kim take a friendly stroll to discuss the future of the Korean peninsula”, *Hankyoreh*, 28 April 2018.

⁷⁷ “Panmunjom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of Korean Peninsula”, KCNA, 28 April 2018; Stephan Haggard, “Parsing the Panmunjom Declaration”, NK News, 29 April 2018.

⁷⁸ “Kim Jong Un meets Moon Jae In again,” video, YouTube, 27 May 2018. Before 2018, there had been only two inter-Korean summits, in 2007 and 2000.

Singapore meeting back on track.⁷⁹ The leaders also moved forward on questions arising from the implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration, including a firm agreement to hold high-level inter-Korean talks on 1 June.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Kim Tong-Hyung, “With U.S. talks in limbo, Korean leaders hold surprise summit”, *The Washington Post*, 26 May 2018.

⁸⁰ “Leaders of two Koreas hold surprise meeting as Trump revives summit hopes”, Reuters, 26 May 2018. At the 1 June talks, the two sides agreed to hold military-to-military talks on 14 June and Red Cross talks on 22 June. The fate of both meetings thus largely depends on the success or failure of the U.S.-DPRK meeting on 12 June. “Koreas agree to hold military talks, Red Cross meeting this month”, Yonhap, 1 June 2018.

III. Views from the Region

While the Trump-Kim summit will focus on the fraught bilateral relationship between the U.S. and North Korea, it must also take into account the complex dynamics among North Korea and its closest neighbours – China, South Korea and Japan – not least because their actions could positively or negatively affect the outcome of negotiations.

A. *Beijing Manoeuvres*

As North Korea's largest and most powerful neighbour and economic lifeline – not to mention a great power and UN Security Council member – China has a critical role to play in any resolution of the crisis on the peninsula. It has the potential to provide Pyongyang security guarantees and economic support that could form an essential part of any final denuclearisation deal. It also could loosen the sanctions regime and thus lessen pressure on North Korea to compromise. Importantly, Beijing's interests are distinct from Washington's in key respects. Whether Kim is sincere about denuclearisation or just tactically stalling is a deal-breaking question for Washington, but not for Beijing; China is driven in its approach to the DPRK chiefly by its desire to avert conflict and maintain the strategic status quo, and where possible enhance its own stature.

1. President Xi receives a visitor and Beijing reasserts itself

As the new phase in relations between Washington and Pyongyang has unfolded, Chinese officials and analysts publicly welcomed the shift to dialogue, characterising it as the U.S. and North Korea heeding China's advice.⁸¹ The decrease in tensions came in the wake of months of mounting anxiety in Beijing, which felt caught between two unreliable leaders, Trump and Kim. "There are a lot of uncertainties, and the DPRK and U.S. may change positions", said one Chinese analyst. "That's what really worries us".⁸² Setting out China's official position, foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said:

China unwaveringly supports the hosting of the North-U.S. summit. We think a person-to-person encounter and dialogue between the leaders of North Korea and the U.S. is the key to solving problems. We hope both the North and the U.S.

⁸¹ This section draws on several Crisis Group discussions with Chinese government and military officials, analysts and scholars, and Western and Asian officials, diplomats, scholars and analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Jilin, Liaoning, Boston, New York and Washington, March 2017-May 2018. For previous Crisis Group research on China-DPRK relations, see Asia Reports N°112, *China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?*, 1 February 2006; N°122, *Perilous Journeys: The Plight of North Koreans in China and Beyond*, 26 October 2006; N°179, *Shades of Red: China's Debate over North Korea*, 2 November 2009; N°200, *China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea*, 27 January 2011; and N°254, *Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close*, 9 December 2013. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference on March 9, 2018", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 9 March 2018; "Commentary: Bold compromises, restraints needed to make Trump-Kim meeting a reality", Xinhua, 9 March 2018.

⁸² Crisis Group discussion, Chinese government analyst, Beijing, March 2018.

show patience and good faith to focus on resolving concerns and carry out the process to denuclearise the Korean peninsula.⁸³

Behind the supportive language, however, Beijing has been acutely concerned about another outcome: being sidelined and presented with a completed deal as a fait accompli. Viewing both Kim and Trump as inexperienced, mercurial figures inclined to provocation and sudden reversals, and also perceiving a lack of seasoned hands in Washington to manage negotiations, many Chinese analysts worry that bilateral talks could disregard China's interests and produce dramatic, uncontrollable changes to the status quo. One still lingering concern is the possibility that talks might fail and that U.S. hardliners might use that failure to justify either military action or harsher sanctions that could trigger regime collapse. A very different worry is that Washington could strike a secret deal that would somehow "flip" Pyongyang into the U.S. camp. That some Chinese analysts can envision such an improbable outcome is an indication of their deep suspicion of both North Korean and American intentions.⁸⁴

Kim Jong-un's surprise 25-28 March visit to China for his first ever meeting with the Chinese president was a golden opportunity for Beijing to reassert its role. Finally meeting Kim in person enabled President Xi Jinping to better assess him and his intentions, and perhaps advise him on how to handle Presidents Trump and Moon. The timing, just after key meetings of the Communist Party and National People's Congress, and a month ahead of the inter-Korean summit, made it possible for a fully empowered Xi to adjust China's posture toward the Korean peninsula. It also helped China seize the initiative in shaping the diplomatic process. Being the first foreign leader to meet Kim also likely strengthened Xi's hand in influencing the course of future negotiations by trading on Kim's evident desire for diplomatic and economic support – a position enhanced even further by a second surprise Xi-Kim meeting in Dalian on 7-8 May, during which more details were probably discussed regarding Beijing's red lines and the conditions for its support.⁸⁵ Kim's subsequent

⁸³ "China expresses support for Trump-Kim summit", Yonhap, 25 May 2018.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group discussions, Chinese officials, analysts and scholars, and foreign diplomats and analysts, Beijing and Washington, November 2017-May 2018; "Prospect of improved U.S.-N. Korea ties stir unease in China: expert", Kyodo, 27 February 2018; "Talks with North Korea? China approves (no matter the outcome)", *The New York Times*, 7 March 2018; "China's goal for Trump-Kim talks: Ensure they don't collapse", Bloomberg, 11 March 2018; "Beijing 'shouldn't feel marginalized' by Kim-Trump talks, ex-senior foreign affairs official says", Caixin, 23 March 2018; "Chinese diplomat gets key role on North Korean issues as Beijing fights to remain relevant", *South China Morning Post*, 27 March 2018; "South Korea preparing for summit with North Korea and US, diplomat says", *South China Morning Post*, 28 April 2018.

⁸⁵ In an unusually detailed report, China's state news agency Xinhua said Xi proposed that the two countries meet regularly at the level of decision-makers, communicate early and often, prioritise economic development and promote people-to-people exchanges. Xi also said that "China sticks to the goal of denuclearization of the peninsula". "Xi Jinping, Kim Jong Un hold talks in Beijing", Xinhua, 28 March 2018. Crisis Group discussions, Chinese analysts and scholars and foreign diplomats, Beijing, January-May 2018. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "What China Gained from Hosting Kim Jong Un", *Foreign Affairs*, 9 April 2018; Crisis Group Commentary, "China Moves Centre Stage in Korean Peninsula Peace Efforts", 30 March 2018; "Xi, Kim meet over peninsula issue", *China Daily*, 8 May 2018; "40多天两度会晤，习近平同金正恩谈了哪些大事" [In two meetings within 40 days, Xi Jinping talked with Kim Jong-un about major issues], Xinhua, 9 May 2018.

closing of the Punggye-ri test site, which is about 100km from the Chinese border, was likely at least partly a response to Xi's demands.

The Beijing and Dalian meetings also had benefits for Kim, in that they began to heal the rift with Xi, enhanced his prestige at home and strengthened his position ahead of talks with the U.S. A prolonged cold spell now seems to be thawing, and strained relations have clearly not led to a total falling out.⁸⁶

2. Beijing's vital interests and red lines

Even as China moves to maximise its influence over the emerging diplomatic process, its core interest continues to be maintaining stability – on its periphery, in North East Asia and in relations with the United States – so that its government can focus on urgent domestic challenges and continue to expand its influence through economic statecraft such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing's oft-stated red lines are that there be no war, no chaos and no nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula. Its policy seeks the balance point of that tripod that minimises the risk of all three.⁸⁷

North Korea's relentless weapons testing from 2013-2017 drove that balance close to its tipping point. While there is some strategic value to Beijing when North Korea preoccupies and divides Washington, Seoul and Tokyo, if Pyongyang's belligerent rhetoric and weapons program goes too far and prompts regional military build-ups, particularly the deployment of ballistic missile defence systems, it then undermines one of China's long-term strategic objectives in the region. That objective is an orderly reduction of America's military and geopolitical influence in East Asia, along with a steady increase of its own.⁸⁸

Pyongyang's testing provocations over the course of 2017 crossed this line. War on China's doorstep became a clear and possibly imminent danger as the DPRK approached the threshold of a deliverable nuclear ICBM and the U.S. responded with preventive strike plans. While ICBMs are not a game changer for China, fear of conflict that could devastate the region drove China to set aside (if grudgingly) its strategy of economic engagement and agree to impose increasingly harsh UN sanctions in an effort to halt Pyongyang's provocations.⁸⁹ China has, however, resisted measures

⁸⁶ "With secretive China trip, North Korea's Kim builds bargaining power", Reuters, 27 March 2018; Fyodor Tertitskiy, "The first China-North Korea summit: what did we learn?", *NK News*, 28 March 2018; "Kim-Xi meeting presents a new challenge for Trump on North Korea", *The Washington Post*, 28 March 2018.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group discussions, Chinese, Asian and Western officials, diplomats and analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Jilin, Liaoning, Boston, New York and Washington, March 2017-May 2018; Crisis Group Report, *Fire on the City Gate*, op. cit.; Nele Noesselt, "China's Contradictory Role(s) in World Politics: Decrypting China's North Korea Strategy", *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 7, 2014; Carla P. Freeman (ed.), *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York, 2015); Fei Su and Lora Saalman, "China's engagement of North Korea: Challenges and opportunities for Europe", SIPRI, February 2017; Patricia Kim, "How China sees North Korea: Three critical moments in history and future directions", Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 17 January 2018.

⁸⁸ Chinese and Western analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong and Washington, March 2017-May 2018; Bo Zhiyue, "Does China want the Koreas to reconcile?" *ChinaFile Conversation*, 25 April 2018.

⁸⁹ "China's Xi grapples with rising cost of backing Kim Jong Un", Bloomberg, 13 August 2017; "China uses economic muscle to bring N Korea to negotiating table", *Financial Times*, 30 March 2018.

that might precipitate a catastrophic collapse of the DPRK's government and economy, fearing that would create an unacceptable risk to the security of their shared border and the geopolitical balance on the peninsula.⁹⁰

Pyongyang's subsequent self-imposed moratorium on testing has helped its position with Beijing measurably. Beijing can quietly accept a modus vivendi in which Pyongyang has a basic level of deterrence, as Kim claimed in November 2017, and commits to halting testing. As China sees it, Kim's nuclear sprint is part of a quest for regime security in the face of a hostile, vastly more powerful and often unreasonable United States. Until the two parties resolve that fundamental security dilemma, denuclearisation – which for China must include the removal and ban of nuclear assets from the entire peninsula – remains in Beijing's view a worthy but distant objective.⁹¹

Washington, of course, has a very different perspective, prompting the question of whether China and the United States will be working cooperatively or at cross-purposes in the coming period of diplomatic engagement. Certainly, cooperation cannot be taken for granted. In April and May 2018, several Chinese strategists expressed frustration with what they considered erratic and inconsistent U.S. statements about North Korea and aggressive and unwelcome American moves toward China on trade, Taiwan and the South China Sea. They warned that souring dynamics on those sensitive issues would reduce Xi's willingness to coordinate with Trump on a deal with Kim.⁹² Beijing's efforts to restore its influence over a more pliant Pyongyang will also have an impact on cooperation. Even as China reassures its interlocutors that it will hold the line on the current sanctions, it will be tempted to loosen implementation and enforcement and to use the prospect of doing so to maintain its influence on negotiations, or as leverage in other disputes.⁹³ Indeed, President Trump

⁹⁰ While China could probably cause North Korea's economy to collapse, it views such an outcome as unacceptably fraught with risk. But if Chinese trade data for 2017 and 2018 is accurate, Beijing has been implementing sanctions relatively thoroughly, likely putting significant economic pressure on Pyongyang despite remaining loopholes and smuggling. General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China; Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency; Report of China on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2375 (2017) S/AC.49/2017/143, 13 December 2017; Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009), United Nations Security Council S/2018/171, 5 March 2018; "China, finally, clamps down on North Korea trade – and the impact is stinging", *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 March 2018; "North Korean exports to China fall by 95% over two years", *NK News*, 29 March 2018; "China uses economic muscle to bring N Korea to negotiating table", *Financial Times*, 30 March 2018; "How sanctions are likely changing North Korea's strategic calculus", *NK Pro*, 30 April 2018; Crisis Group discussions, former Western intelligence analyst, diplomats, journalists and Chinese analysts, Beijing, Boston, Hong Kong and Washington, February-May 2018.

⁹¹ "Report of China on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2375 (2017)", UN Document S/AC.49/2017/143, 13 December 2017; Crisis group discussions, Chinese government officials, Beijing, December 2017.

⁹² Crisis Group discussions, Chinese analysts and scholars, Beijing, April-May 2018; Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Why Xi Jinping Wants to Broker the Trump-Kim Deal", *The National Interest*, 28 March 2018.

⁹³ Crisis Group discussions, Chinese officials, analysts and scholars, Asian and Western diplomats and analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong and Washington, November 2017-May 2018; "China wants North Korea denuclearisation but at its own pace", *Financial Times*, 25 May 2018; "With summit cancellation, China reclaims strategic influence over North Korea", *Globe & Mail*, 25 May 2018.

tweeted his concern on 21 May that some loosening of enforcement may already be happening.⁹⁴

But there is also room for the U.S., South Korea and Japan to shore up cooperation with China by agreeing on common means and ends that satisfy common interests. To keep China on side, the U.S. and South Korea will need to reassure it, perhaps eventually formally, in writing, that they do not seek regime change or collapse in Pyongyang, and that an eventual peace treaty or unification would not result in a peninsula aligned against Beijing.⁹⁵ They may also need to find a way to satisfy China's desire for further talks to include a multilateral framework for negotiations through which it could work directly to keep them on track and prevent changes to the regional strategic balance that are not in its favour; the clause in the Panmunjom Declaration that speaks of four-party talks would be the starting point.⁹⁶

As for how to pursue denuclearisation, China's preferred scenario is the phased, sequenced and reciprocal approach that North Korea favours and South Korea seems willing to accept. It would trade incremental benefits and assurances for halts in testing and steps toward dismantling existing capabilities. Denuclearisation as a long-term goal would emerge through addressing the regime's security concerns, ideally on a dual track that includes steps toward a peace treaty and normalisation of relations. From Beijing's perspective, heavily front-loaded U.S. alternatives are either infeasible or against its interests.⁹⁷

B. *Seoul Moves to Centre Stage*

For Seoul, North Korea is much more than a strategic or security question. North Korea poses a military threat, to be sure, but the factious situation on the Korean peninsula also places other strains on South Korean society.⁹⁸ It compels costly male military conscription in South Korea, putting a drag on the economy, and is a signifi-

⁹⁴ Donald J. Trump Twitter account, 21 May 2018, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/998528928259170305>.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group discussions, Chinese officials and analysts, and foreign diplomats, Beijing, September 2017–May 2018; Patricia Kim, "How to Persuade China to Squeeze North Korea's Lifeline", *Foreign Policy*, 27 February 2017; Patricia Kim, "If We Want to Stop Kim, We Have to Trust Each Other", *Foreign Policy*, 30 June 2017.

⁹⁶ China's foreign ministry stated: "The Six-Party Talks serves as an important platform for promoting the settlement of the Korean peninsula issue and striving to resume it at an early date represents a direction that all relevant parties should work for". Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's regular press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 28 March 2018. "China, Russia and Japan seek seats at the table with Kim Jong-un, Moon Jae-in and Donald Trump", *South China Morning Post*, 26 April 2018.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group discussions, Chinese officials, analysts and scholars, and foreign diplomats and analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong and Washington, November 2017–May 2018. Zhu Feng, "China's North Korean Liability: How Washington Can Get Beijing to Rein in Pyongyang", *Foreign Affairs*, 11 July 2017; David Lai, "Solving the North Korea problem the Chinese way", *The Diplomat*, 28 December 2017; Alice Ekman, "Does China want the Koreas to reconcile?" ChinaFile Conversation, 27 April 2018; "On U.S.-North Korea talks, China may hold the cards", *The New York Times*, 11 May 2018; "Xi Jinping can make or break any deal between Trump and Kim", Bloomberg, 21 May 2018.

⁹⁸ Han Kang, "While the U.S. talks of War, South Korea shudders", *The New York Times*, 7 October 2017.

cant macroeconomic risk variable.⁹⁹ As upward stock market movements prior to the 27 April inter-Korean summit highlight, it is also a potential source of economic opportunity, which matters to the current government.¹⁰⁰

As in the U.S., denuclearisation attracts bipartisan South Korean support as the end goal of North Korea diplomacy.¹⁰¹ Seoul is also firmly committed to the U.S.-ROK alliance as the bedrock of its defence, and to its position as a responsible international stakeholder.¹⁰² This does not mean, however, that Seoul and Washington share precisely the same perspective, motivations or risk thresholds when it comes to addressing tensions on the Korean peninsula.

Among other things, Seoul tends to be more comfortable than Washington with the prospect that Pyongyang could keep its nuclear weapons for some time.¹⁰³ It leans toward a phased and reciprocal process, as opposed to Washington's demands for quick, comprehensive denuclearisation that defers economic gains for North Korea to the end.¹⁰⁴ Until Trump suddenly seemed to endorse phased denuclearisation, after his eleventh-hour meeting with Kim Jong-un's representative Kim Yong-chol in Washington on 1 June,¹⁰⁵ the South Koreans had required rhetorical gymnastics to appear united with the U.S. "We start with a comprehensive agreement and implement it in a phased manner", according to one South Korean official.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ See Kirsten Younghee Song, "Between Global Dreams and National Duties: The Dilemma of Conscripted Duty in the Transnational Lives of Young Korean Males", *Global Networks*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2015): 60-77. One sign of the impact on the economy is the so-called Korea discount, whereby South Korean stocks trade at prices 15 to 30 per cent lower than those of comparable stocks elsewhere in Asia. (Lack of corporate transparency and Korean conglomerates' unwillingness to pay generous dividends also contribute to the so-called discount.) Tae H. Choi, Eunuchul Lee and Jinhan Pae, "The Equity Premium Puzzle: Empirical Evidence for the 'Korea Discount'", *Asia-Pacific Journal of Accounting and Economics*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2012): 143-166; "End of Korean War might spark end to 'Korea discount' for stocks", Bloomberg, 22 March 2018.

¹⁰⁰ "South Korean stocks rally on hopes N Korea may open up," *Financial Times*, 24 April 2018.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, past and present South Korean government officials, August 2017 and April-May 2018. "FM says S. Korea, US share goal of complete denuclearization of NK", *Korea Herald*, 4 April 2018; "Ruling party welcomes, opposition party downplays N.K.'s pledge to dismantle nuclear test site", Yonhap, 13 May 2018.

¹⁰² The alliance is a "linchpin for security, stability and prosperity on the Korean peninsula, in the Asia Pacific, and increasingly around the world", according to the summit statement released following the first meeting of Presidents Trump and Moon in Washington on 30 June 2017. "Full text of joint statement issued by S. Korea, U.S.", Yonhap, 1 July 2017. See also Jongryn Mo, "South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: A Case of Growing Compatibility Between Regional and Global Roles", *International Journal*, vol. 71, no. 4 (2017): 587-607.

¹⁰³ Some in the Moon administration privately dismiss North Korea's nuclear weapons as a paper tiger, impossible for the DPRK to use without guaranteeing its own destruction. As such, they play down the significance of achieving denuclearisation. Rather, having watched the threat of war recede, they see credible progress in denuclearisation talks and keeping the United States engaged in dialogue as the keys to unlocking opportunities for broader economic engagement with Pyongyang. Crisis Group interview, former South Korean intelligence official. May 2018.

¹⁰⁴ One of President Moon's special advisers, Moon Chung-in, provided an outline of a phased denuclearisation deal in an April speech at Waseda University in Japan. "Moon Chung-in provides outline for a potential denuclearisation deal", *Hankyoreh*, 2 April 2018.

¹⁰⁵ "Trump discusses meeting with North Korean official Kim Yong Chol", video, YouTube, 1 June 2018.

¹⁰⁶ "Is there a 'third option' for resolving US-NK nuclear standoff?" *Korea Herald*, 3 April 2018.

For South Korea, with its more expansive timeframe and willingness to ride out periods of tension, as well as its limited military options, economic engagement with North Korea is vital. That cannot happen without progress in talks between Washington and Pyongyang, which South Korea sees as the path to long-term stability for the region.¹⁰⁷ For that reason, Seoul is likely to continue focusing first on denuclearisation, seeing that as the gateway to economic freedom of manoeuvre with Pyongyang.

Liberal South Korean politicians and voters¹⁰⁸ – and much of the business community¹⁰⁹ – favour engaging economically with North Korea. This view presently is in the ascendant politically, with Moon enjoying a 75 per cent favourability rating and the government’s North Korea policy popular with 83 per cent of respondents the week after the first inter-Korean summit this year,¹¹⁰ although the summit drew sharp criticism from some quarters.¹¹¹ There is the belief, shared at the highest levels of government, that the closure in early 2016 of the most significant inter-Korean engagement project to date, the Kaesong Industrial Complex, was a poor decision driven by the Park Geun-hye government’s ideological zeal, the legitimacy of which the Moon government has questioned in the aftermath of Park’s subsequent impeachment.¹¹² From the incumbent administration’s point of view, economic cooper-

¹⁰⁷ “If sanctions lead to a change in the North Korean nuclear program, our first priority will be tackling the issue of reopening the Kaesong Industrial Complex”. “Unification Minister raises possibility of reopening Kaesong Industrial Complex”, *Hankyoreh*, 27 August 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Even at the height of 2017 tensions, one survey showed public support for reopening Kaesong trumping opposition by 49.4 to 39.9 per cent. “국민 절반 개성공단 재가동에 찬성 ... 리얼미터 여론조사 결과” [“Half of citizens support Kaesong restart ... result of RealMeter public opinion survey”], *JoongAng Ilbo*, 20 June 2017. Other surveys tell slightly different stories depending on the question asked. In both 2016 and 2017 surveys run by the Korea Institute for National Unification, a small majority of people said they supported the 2016 Kaesong closure itself. Only 36.2 per cent of people supported the closure in a corresponding 2018 survey. “South Koreans increasingly favourable to N. Korea: poll”, *Yonhap*, 23 May 2018.

¹⁰⁹ “현대그룹, 남북 경제협력 재개 시동...준비 TF 발족” [“Hyundai Group, putting in motion resumption of South-North economic cooperation ... preparatory task force launched”], *Hankyoreh*, 8 May 2018. Of course, the enthusiasm of industry is tempered by a history of failed economic initiatives and concerns for the security of prospective new investments. 권영경, “신남북경협시대의 전망과 과제” [Kwon Yeong-gyeong, “Prospects and challenges of the new era of South-North economic cooperation”], *KDI Review of the North Korean Economy*, May 2018, pp. 21-24.

¹¹⁰ “한국갤럽 데일리 오피니언” [“Gallup Korea Daily Opinion”], Gallup Korea, 4 May 2018 and 1 June 2018.

¹¹¹ The main opposition Liberty Korea Party expressed consternation at the outcome of the 27 April inter-Korean summit, branding it as appeasement of North Korea. The party has urged the United States to reject signing a peace treaty and other measures to secure the North Korean regime and to maintain its maximum pressure policy until irreversible denuclearisation has been achieved. “자유한국당의 『2018 남북정상회담』 관련 입장” [“Liberty Korea Party’s view of the ‘2018 South-North Summit’”], press release, Liberty Korea Party, 2 May 2018; “자유한국당의 미북정상회담에 대한 요청사항” [“Liberty Korea Party’s demands for the U.S.-DPRK summit”], press release, Liberty Korea Party, 17 May 2018.

¹¹² “통일부 ‘개성공단 전면중단은 박근혜 구두지시 따른 것’” [“Ministry of Unification, ‘Overall closure of Kaesong Complex done in accordance with Park Geun-hye’s verbal order’”], *Hankyoreh*, 28 December 2017. This point of view ignores the 6 January 2016 North Korean nuclear test. The possibility that Kaesong monies were funding North Korea’s nuclear program was the reason for closure given at the time.

ation projects such as Kaesong provide “not just economic effects, but also peaceful effects”.¹¹³

While supporters of the Kaesong initiative see economic engagement as being in large part about peace and security, economic engagement with North Korea could also portend a major boost to the South Korean economy. South Korea’s economy has not been generating enough jobs for young people, and many sectors have suffered losses due to competition with China.¹¹⁴ South Korea would very likely receive third-country assistance and international loans for investment in rebuilding North Korean infrastructure using South Korean companies. That windfall could put spare capacity to work, reduce youth unemployment and yield very significant new economic growth.

The Panmunjom Declaration commits both Koreas to implement economic development plans originally included in the 2007 inter-Korean summit agreement, the details of which Moon Jae-in gave Kim Jong-un on a USB drive on 27 April.¹¹⁵ If carried out, these plans could improve the inter-Korean security environment and significantly boost South Korea’s economy.¹¹⁶ Given the military, political and economic interests at play, should a loosening of sanctions permit greater economic engagement along these lines, South Korea will be motivated to foot a large share of the bill to do so.¹¹⁷ As Trump noted on the White House lawn following his meeting with

¹¹³ “개성공단 중단 2년, 실태와 과제” [“Two years after the closure of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, actual conditions and tasks”], Korea Development Bank Weekly Report, 12 February 2018.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, former South Korean intelligence official, May 2018; “청년실업률 9.9% ... 지난해 역대 최고” [“Youth unemployment rate 9.9% ... last year the highest on record”], *Hankook Ilbo*, 10 January 2018; “South Korean shipbuilders’ recovery gathers pace”, *Financial Times*, 30 August 2017; “국토부 ‘남북경협’ 속도 낸다 ... ‘하늘길까지 염두에 두고 준비’” [“Land, Infrastructure and Transport ‘inter-Korean economic cooperation’ gains pace ... ‘ready for anything’”], *News 1*, 4 June 2018.

¹¹⁵ Article Six of the Panmunjom Declaration states, “South and North Korea agreed to actively implement the projects previously agreed in the 4 October 2007 Declaration, in order to promote balanced economic growth and co-prosperity of the nation”. These projects are: (1) a special peace and cooperation zone in the West Sea centred on the North Korean city of Haeju; (2) second-stage expansion of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, originally envisioned as being four times its largest size to date; (3) repairs to the Kaesong-Sinuiju railway; and (4) joint shipbuilding activities at Anbyeon and Nampo. Crisis Group interview, South Korean government official, Seoul, May 2018; Lee Sang-keun and Moon Chung-in, “South Korea’s Economic Engagement toward North Korea,” KEIA Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Series, October 2016; “Seoul resurrects plan for joint shipbuilding with North Korea”, *The Maritime Executive*, 4 May 2018; “문 대통령, 김정은에 ‘신경제구상’ USB로 건넸다” [“President Moon gave Kim Jong-un ‘new economic plan’ on USB”], *Hankyoreh*, 30 April 2018; Lee Jeong-ho, “Seoul offers Kim Jong-un grand bargain to link North and South Korean economies with China”, *South China Morning Post*, 7 May 2018; “South Korea hands Kim Jong-un a path to prosperity on a USB drive”, *New York Times*, 10 May 2018.

¹¹⁶ “[한겨레 사설] ‘신남북경협’으로 한국 경제 재도약 기회 열기를” [“‘New South-North economic cooperation’ to bring chance for new South Korean economic leap”], *Hankyoreh*, 29 April 2018].

¹¹⁷ South Korea played a similar role in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, set up to implement the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework. Whereas then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher assured Congress that the U.S. would contribute no more than \$30 million annually toward the project, much of it for shipments of heavy fuel oil to North Korea, Seoul agreed to pay up to 70 per cent of the total cost of light-water reactor construction, estimated at \$5 billion. Japan agreed to pay 20 per cent and the EU a further 15 per cent. “What Did We Learn from KEDO?” Stanley Foundation Policy Dialogue Brief, November 2006.

Kim Yong-chol, “what’s going to happen is South Korea will [give North Korea economic assistance, not the United States]”.¹¹⁸

Seoul’s ability to play its preferred role in the absence of U.S. cooperation would be limited, however, should the summit or subsequent negotiations fail. Seoul would be unable to pursue its current path on its own and its diplomatic opening with Pyongyang likely would quickly end, especially were North Korea to resume missile or nuclear testing. This could also prompt heightened domestic political polarisation in the South. For this reason, if Washington-Pyongyang diplomacy hits another rough patch at or in the aftermath of the summit, Seoul is almost certain to try to play the role of mediator between the U.S. and North Korea. This is a role it has played effectively over the course of 2018 – when National Security Advisor Chung Eui-yong visited Pyongyang and Washington in quick succession in March,¹¹⁹ when President Moon visited Washington on 22 May, and when Moon then met Kim Jong-un at Panmunjom four days later to help rescue the U.S.-DPRK summit.¹²⁰

Domestically, the Moon administration will also need to ensure that public opinion is prepared for the economic support South Korea will be asked to provide to the North if progress is achieved on 12 June or in subsequent discussions, so that the momentum of the fledgling process can be maintained.¹²¹ That won’t be straightforward – conservative opposition is certain to flare up – but it is a key task.¹²²

C. *Tokyo Frets*

Japan, like its regional neighbours, strives to maintain stability and avoid a conflict on the Korean peninsula that would inevitably involve it and potentially have a devastating impact on the region. It seeks to preserve its alliance with the United States and the features it regards as key, including continued U.S. military presence and nuclear deterrence, and through it avoid any erosion of the strategic balance in North East Asia, particularly vis-à-vis China. Tokyo also wants to ensure that Pyongyang does not set a precedent pursuant to which it would threaten the use of nuclear weapons to blackmail other countries.¹²³

¹¹⁸ “Trump discusses meeting with North Korean official Kim Yong Chol”, video, YouTube, 1 June 2018.

¹¹⁹ “U.S. meets with South Koreans bearing a ‘message’ from Pyongyang”, *Wall Street Journal*, 8 March 2018. Chung’s shuttle diplomacy also attracted criticism, however, with some accusing him of misrepresenting North Korea’s position in order to drive dialogue forward. Dong-bok Lee, “Mounting risks confronting Moon’s nuclear ‘shuttle’ diplomacy”, ICASINC, 2018.

¹²⁰ “North Korea willing to talk about ‘complete denuclearization’”, *The New York Times*, 26 May 2018.

¹²¹ S. Nathan Park, “The man behind the North Korea negotiations”, *The Atlantic*, 12 March 2018.

¹²² Even relatively benign visits from North Korean officials during the Winter Olympics sparked conservative anger, with more than 100 prominent politicians staging a sit-down protest in an unsuccessful attempt to block the path of the arriving North Korean motorcade on 25 February. “Protesters target North Korean VIPs heading for games ceremony”, Reuters, 25 February 2018.

¹²³ This section draws on Crisis Group discussions, Japanese former foreign minister, senior foreign ministry officials, diplomats, analysts and scholars, as well as other diplomats and analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong, New York, Singapore and Washington, October 2017-June 2018; Hirofumi Tosaki, “The North Korean Nuclear Issue and Japan’s Deterrence Posture”, *Japan and the World*, March 2017; “Japan and the North Korean dilemma: Thinking the unthinkable”, Tokyo Foundation for Policy

Given its geographic location, Japan's most urgent interest may well be in addressing North Korea's missiles which – as shown by multiple tests in 2017 – are now capable of reaching the islands. The DPRK's 6 March 2017 simultaneous test-launch of four Hwasong-6 medium-range ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan/East Sea was particularly troubling, Japanese analysts say, because so many missiles at once likely would overwhelm existing ballistic missile defence capabilities. Longer-range missiles fired on a lofted trajectory could likewise be dangerous due to their speed of descent. The 29 August flight of a Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) over Japan's northern island of Hokkaido further heightened public anxiety.¹²⁴

Such concerns lie behind Japan's insistence that any deal with Pyongyang should not be limited to nuclear warheads and ICBMs but must include restrictions on short-, intermediate- and long-range ballistic missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and biological and chemical weapons, and that until such time, maximum pressure must be applied. Japan also wants inspections and verification conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency and Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. These concerns explain in part why Japan is planning further upgrades to its missile defence and strike capabilities. And they explain Tokyo's trepidation at any suggestion that a U.S.-North Korean deal will not be so expansive and that, U.S. nuclear anxieties having been addressed, Washington will turn its attention elsewhere.¹²⁵

Finally, the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by the DPRK between 1977 and 1983 is emotionally charged for the Japanese public, and so remains politically relevant to Tokyo's policy. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made the return of all abductees a personal priority, pressed the point in meetings with his American, Chinese and South Korean counterparts, and reportedly secured their agreement to raise it when they meet Kim Jong-un.¹²⁶

Research, 9 May 2017; Kazuto Suzuki, "Japan's view of the North Korean threat", *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, 26 March 2018; Gregory Kulacki, "Japan's nuclear hawks could block US-North Korean agreement on denuclearization", *All Things Nuclear*, Union of Concerned Scientists, 22 April 2018; Mintaro Oba, "How Japan can stay relevant on North Korea", *NKNews*, 26 April 2018; "The Inter-Korean Summit (Statement by Foreign Minister Taro Kono)", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 27 April 2018; Meng Xiaoxu, "The Abe Government's Policy on North Korean Nuclear Issue", *China International Studies*, no. 70, May/June 2018.

¹²⁴ "North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles raises new worries", *The New York Times*, 5 March 2017; "Abe says latest North Korean missile launch represents 'new level of threat'", *Japan Times*, 6 March 2017; "North Korean missile flies over Japan escalating tensions and prompting an angry response from Tokyo", *The Washington Post*, 28 August 2017; Erik Isaksson, Lars Vargö and Liam Palmbach, "Japan and North Korea: Toward engagement for regional security", Institute for Security and Development Policy, Policy Brief No. 206, 13 October 2017; Crisis Group discussions, Japanese and Western diplomats and analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore, January-June 2018.

¹²⁵ Japan's military build-up is also motivated by concerns about China and Russia. Crisis Group discussions, Japanese, Chinese and Western analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore, January-June 2018.

¹²⁶ The Japanese government lists seventeen abductees, but North Korea has admitted to only thirteen. Pyongyang eventually allowed five living abductees to go home, claimed the other eight had died and provided death certificates, as well as remains, for two of them. It has since insisted that the issue is resolved. Japan disagrees and says forensic studies show the remains returned are not genuine. "North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens", [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Korean_abductions_of_Japanese_citizens); "For families of Japanese ab-

Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera summarised Japan's priorities in a June speech:

[I]t is strongly hoped that the summit will become an opportunity for concrete, substantial progress toward a complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all North Korea's weapons of mass destruction including biological and chemical weapons and ballistic missiles of all flight ranges, in addition to a breakthrough in the Japanese abduction issue.¹²⁷

In this context, and despite difficulties and disagreements with the Trump administration (particularly over trade policy), Abe arguably has been the staunchest supporter of Trump's "maximum pressure" policy, which he has seen as insurance against excessive concessions to Pyongyang. As one Japanese scholar put it, "we're on the same plane as the U.S. and so we have to root for the pilot".¹²⁸

As a leading economic power with significant capacity in its Self-Defence Forces, Japan would be a key actor under virtually any scenario: if there were a conflict or collapse; if a peace agreement were concluded that enabled North Korea's economic development; or if the U.S. and others reverted to a strategy of deterrence, containment and non-proliferation. But in the current diplomatic drama, its role so far has been limited. Japan has cut off all diplomatic and trade relations with North Korea. It has direct influence only through restricting remittances from ethnic Koreans and sanctions enforcement, including naval interdictions of ship-to-ship transfers. Tokyo has been active in urging other countries to maintain pressure and enforce sanctions on Pyongyang. And it has strengthened its military posture (including through land-based ballistic missile defence systems and military relationships across the Indo-Asia-Pacific) while engaging in efforts that might one day revise its pacifist constitution, an aspiration that raises significant concerns in China and on the peninsula.¹²⁹

Even as Tokyo has maintained a tough line vis-à-vis Pyongyang, all other relevant players are now directly talking with Kim, which has triggered a discussion in Japan over whether a change in tactics is necessary. To an extent, it has already occurred. Prime Minister Abe has toned down his rhetoric on North Korea. He has also engaged in multiple discussions with Trump, made his first-ever phone call to Xi, visited Moscow and hosted a 9 May trilateral summit with China and South Korea, which

ducted by North Korea, Trump visit brings spotlight", *The New York Times*, 3 November 2017; "Japan PM Shinzo Abe wants abduction issue resolved in denuclearisation talks between North and South Korea", *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2018; "Abe wins promise that Trump will raise abductions issue with North Korea's Kim", *Japan Times*, 18 April 2018.

¹²⁷ Speech by Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera, "De-escalating the North Korean Crisis", IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, 2 June 2018.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group discussion, Japanese scholars, January 2018.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group discussions, Japanese, Chinese and Western analysts, Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore, January-May 2018; "Prime Minister Abe urges encirclement of North Korea at G20", Jiji, 5 July 2017; "What are Japan's options against North Korea?" CNN, 6 July 2017; Yaechan Lee, "Japan's North Korean Diaspora", *The Diplomat*, 5 January 2018; Philip Orchard, "Japan's North Korea strategy: A solid defense", *Geopolitical Futures*, 13 February 2018; Julian Ryall, "Abe's nuclear disaster: Why has Japan been shut out of North Korea talks?" *South China Morning Post*, 18 March 2018; "LDP panels OK proposal for capability to strike enemy bases", *Kyodo*, 25 May 2018; "LDP calls for scrapping 1% cap on Japan's defense budget", *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 May 2018.

produced a consensus statement calling for North Korea's denuclearisation. During those meetings, Moon encouraged Abe to reopen a dialogue with Kim. Abe reportedly asked Moon to convey his willingness to do so and has also floated the idea of normalising ties if the above issues could be resolved.¹³⁰

If U.S.-DPRK negotiations move forward, Tokyo can be expected to continue making the case for maintaining sanctions and holding out for a comprehensive deal, while debating internally about its bottom lines on missiles, abductees and the incentives it could offer. Should talks widen to include South Korea and China, Japan is likely to argue for a return to a six-party framework.

Tokyo's policymakers likely recognise they will not get everything they want. But a bad deal from Japan's perspective would send a worrying message about the U.S. commitment to the entire regional security environment and concern about the emergence of such a deal could drive Tokyo to throw up obstacles that would slow if not entirely derail the process. Washington may find it more useful to draw on Japan's long experience negotiating with North Korea and its capacity to offer economic incentives.¹³¹

D. *Pyongyang Keeps 'em Guessing*

Pyongyang has much to gain on the security, political, and economic fronts from some form of accommodation with Washington. What is less clear is how far Kim Jong-un is willing to go toward denuclearisation in order to achieve these objectives – and indeed whether he himself knows the answer.

1. "Peaceful coexistence"

Pyongyang has long argued that it is uniquely targeted by the United States as part of the latter's attempt to consolidate power in Asia. This in turn fuels North Korea's longstanding demand that the United States guarantee that it will not overthrow the regime by force; its assertions that nuclear weapons are "the only way to protect the peace of the Korean peninsula and the region"; and its claim that it will de-nuclearise and improve bilateral relations only if and when Washington ends its current "hostile policy".¹³²

¹³⁰ "Japan seeking own North Korea summit as Abe risks being left out", CNN, 29 March 2018; "Japan fears being sidelined by Trump on trade and North Korea", *The New York Times*, 29 April 2018; "Japan, China agree to tackle N. Korea nuclear issue", Kyodo, 4 May 2018; "Joint Statement on the '2018 Inter-Korean Summit' by the Leaders of Japan, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 9 May 2018; "Japan says to normalize North Korea ties if nuclear, abduction issues are solved", Reuters, 9 May 2018; "Prime Minister Abe says Japan will coordinate strategy with the U.S. after the U.S.-North Korean summit", *Mainichi Shimbun*, 14 May 2018; "Abe starts to soften hard-line stance toward North Korea", *Asahi Shimbun*, 15 May 2018; Michael Kovrig, "Trilateral North East Asia Summit Signals a Return to Cooperation", Crisis Group Commentary, 23 May 2018; "Shinzo Abe, Donald Trump to meet before planned U.S.-North Korea summit", Kyodo, 29 May 2018.

¹³¹ Mintaro Oba, "How Japan can stay relevant on North Korea", *NK News*, 26 April 2018; Yuki Tatsumi, "A role for Japan on the Korean peninsula", *Japan Times*, 26 April 2018.

¹³² A senior North Korean diplomat explained Pyongyang's concern about "hostile intent" in 2012 as follows: "At the root of the U.S. hostile policy against the DPRK that has continued for over half a century lies its intention to destroy the ideas and system chosen by our people and to occupy the

Analysts disagree as to what the regime would require as reassurance given the nebulous nature of its demand. Some are convinced it will never voluntarily denuclearise because it views its military capacity as an invaluable insurance policy; its nuclear weapons as an inviolable legacy of past leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il; and the U.S. as untrustworthy.¹³³ It is certainly true that past formal efforts to declare an end to “hostile intent” – such as the 2000 Joint Communiqué in which the U.S. and North Korea stated that “neither government would have hostile intent toward the other”¹³⁴ – did not lead Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear efforts.

Others, based on official North Korean statements and Track 1.5 encounters, argue that a series of cumulative steps could convince Pyongyang that the U.S. will not seek regime change or threaten its security and thus lead it to accept denuclearisation.¹³⁵ These steps might include formal security guarantees and a peace treaty to bring an official end to the Korean War,¹³⁶ smaller-scale U.S.-ROK military exercises and stopping deployments of U.S. strategic assets to the peninsula.¹³⁷ At the far end of the spectrum would be the removal of South Korea from under U.S. nuclear pro-

whole of the Korean peninsula to use it as a stepping stone for realising its strategy of dominating the whole of Asia. From the first day the DPRK was founded, the U.S. designated the DPRK as her enemy and refused to recognise its sovereignty. Since then, it has pursued all sorts of sanctions, pressures and military provocations against the DPRK for more than half a century”. “Statement by H.E. Mr. Pak Kil Yon, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of Delegation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea at the General Debate of the Sixty-Seventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 1 October, Juche 101 (2012)”. North Korean officials again articulated the rollback of hostile intent as Pyongyang’s core demand in 2017. “North Korea says U.S. has to roll back ‘hostile policy’ before talks”, Reuters, 19 May 2017. See also DPRK Ambassador to the United Kingdom Choe Il’s comment that “our nuclear power is a result of the U.S. hostile policy against us”. “Exclusive: North Korea UK ambassador’s first interview”, Sky News, 9 May 2017.

¹³³ In anthropologist Heonik Kwon’s estimation, in 2013, after North Korea had declared its new *pyŏngjin* line of simultaneous nuclear and economic development, “[Kim Jong-un] claimed that this two-pronged pursuit of nuclear power and economic prosperity was Kim Jong-il’s teaching – an all-purpose, infallible theory”. Kwon further noted that *Rodong Sinmun*, the Korean Workers’ Party daily publication said at the time, “This is the strategic guideline with which we can preserve our great leaders’ achievement and build an undefeatable mighty country”. Heonik Kwon, “North Korea’s new legacy politics”, *E-International Relations*, 16 May 2013.

¹³⁴ “U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué”, 12 October 2000. The Joint Communiqué was signed upon the visit of Vice Marshal Jo Myong-rok, first vice chairman of the National Defence Commission of the DPRK, to Washington as a special envoy of Kim Jong-il from 9-12 October 2000.

¹³⁵ Based on Track 1.5 engagement with North Korean officials in 2013, Joel Wit suggests that ending a hostile policy would entail “U.S. recognition of North Korea as a sovereign state through establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries,” ending the state of war by “replacing the temporary armistice agreement ... with a permanent peace treaty,” and “lifting trade restrictions and sanctions imposed on the North over the decades since the Korean War”. Joel S. Wit, “What the North Koreans told me about their plans”, 38 North, 5 June 2018.

¹³⁶ See, for example, “DPRK terms U.S. hostile policy main obstacle in resolving nuclear issue, memorandum of DPRK ministry of foreign affairs”, KCNA, 31 August 2012.

¹³⁷ “U.S. should not go against atmosphere of dialogue”, KCNA, 30 May 2018. Ankit Panda, “Coming to Foal Eagle 2018: US Marine Corps’ Wasp Expeditionary Strike Group”, *The Diplomat*, 30 March 2018.

tection, which Pyongyang has called the “main source of misfortune that gravely threatens peace and security on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia”.¹³⁸

Together with these security demands are the DPRK’s political demands, which range from diplomatic recognition to shows of respect that elevate the DPRK leadership’s international stature.¹³⁹ These latter demands are in part directed at ending the country’s political and economic isolation and the strategic vulnerabilities these create. Whether any of these forms of reassurance over time would persuade the regime to renounce its nuclear weapons – or, alternatively, whether Pyongyang deliberately frames them broadly and vaguely to always allow it to claim it has not been satisfied – would need to be tested during the negotiating process.

2. The right sort of money

Much as Pyongyang highlights its security and political demands, and forcefully rejects any mercenary intent, certain financial and economic objectives inform its approach to negotiations over denuclearisation.

The DPRK’s political system is a personalist dictatorship sustained through patronage networks, which has for decades lacked the resources to comfortably maintain a domestic base of support. Until the early 1980s, the leadership shored up a coalition through direct distribution of food and other hard-to-obtain goods to privileged groups through special state channels. Then, when the collapse of the North Korean economy took its toll on flows of hard currency into state coffers in the early 1990s, it switched to giving loyalists opportunities to exploit North Korea’s natural resources and engage in international trade.¹⁴⁰ However multilateral sanctions adopted in 2017 threaten this system of patronage.

As a result, Pyongyang is keen to see the lifting of key sectoral sanctions – on textiles, seafood and some natural resource exports – and for China to loosen its enforcement of those that remain. These measures would ensure continuation of the hybrid economy the regime is constructing, in which there are controlling state and elite interests, but also an emerging entrepreneurial class operating in the expanding market economy, an institution that Kim Jong-un appears willing to tolerate to a far greater extent than his father Kim Jong-il ever did.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ “Arguments for U.S. nuclear umbrella denounced”, Korean Central Broadcasting, 13 September 1991. Under the so-called nuclear umbrella, Washington vows to use nuclear weapons to deter and, if necessary, defeat an attack on South Korea; and Seoul formally consents to the potential use of U.S. nuclear weapons in its defence. See “Nuclear umbrellas and umbrella states,” ILPI Weapons of Mass Destruction Project, www.nwp.ilpi.org; Terence Roehrig, “The U.S. Nuclear Umbrella over South Korea: Nuclear Weapons and Extended Deterrence”, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 132, no. 4 (Winter 2017-2018), pp. 651-684; “U.S. ‘nuclear umbrella’ over ROK denounced”, KCNA, 28 September 1987.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, analysts and former military and government officials, Beijing, Hong Kong, Jilin, Liaoning, New York, Seoul and Washington, May 2017-May 2018.

¹⁴⁰ 박형중, “북한 시장에 대한 정치학적 분석,” [Park Hyeong-jung, “Toward a Political Analysis of Markets in North Korea”], *Bulletin of the Korean Political Science Association*, vol. 46, no. 5 (December 2012), pp. 207-224.

¹⁴¹ Andrei Lankov, “The Resurgence of a Market Economy in North Korea,” Carnegie Moscow Center, 3 February 2016.

By the same token, however, Pyongyang is neither willing nor able to accept a massive influx of foreign direct investment. Openness to global economic forces could threaten elite vested interests in the current economic architecture.¹⁴² The regime also wishes to limit the population's contact with the outside world and ensure that no opening or outside investment sparks political instability or enables foreign influence. The overarching aim is to bring in revenue without substantial economic reform.

In sum, Pyongyang is neither indifferent to the economic aspects of a possible deal with Washington nor motivated by an aspiration to “achieve prosperity on a par with our South Korean friends”, as Secretary Pompeo suggested in May.¹⁴³ Commenting on Pompeo's misplaced emphasis on wealth maximisation, a former senior South Korean official suggested, “it is the curse of humanity to always imagine everyone sees the world the same as oneself”.¹⁴⁴

3. Assessing Pyongyang's intentions?

North Korea finds itself in an unprecedented position. It claims to have achieved its nuclear deterrent, freeing Kim Jong-un to focus on the other promise that underpins his reign, namely improving North Korea's economic development. It has confronted unusual U.S. belligerence and Chinese muscle flexing on sanctions enforcement. And, in Donald Trump, it faces an unpredictable U.S. leader who sometimes seems as capable of going to war as he is of negotiating a far-reaching deal, and who mixes unparalleled personal insults with unmatched personal praise. The result is a regime that seeks to balance pursuit of its political, economic and security goals against an often precarious position vis-à-vis Washington and Beijing.

What does this augur for denuclearisation? The majority view among experts – including senior defectors – appears to be that since Pyongyang cannot entrust its security to outsiders (let alone to the U.S.), denuclearisation is a step too far for now, except as a rhetorical gesture.¹⁴⁵ By this theory, Kim is making tactical moves to avoid U.S. military action, extract concessions, amass political prestige and run out the clock until Trump leaves office or loses interest. Moreover, if, as many observers suspect, North Korea's diplomats are on a quest for nuclear normalisation – de facto acceptance of Pyongyang's possession of nuclear weapons even if it is never accepted as a full nuclear weapons state – then the differences between the two parties may prove insurmountable, at least for the foreseeable future.¹⁴⁶

There is a contrary view, however, which holds that the U.S. has undersold the importance to Pyongyang of a redefined, non-hostile political relationship and has missed opportunities as a result. A U.S. administration with a different attitude might find an unexpected willingness among North Koreans to cooperate (including on the

¹⁴² “ROK: Defector Interviewed on DPRK Economic, Social Situation”, *Munwha Ilbo*, 25 April 1996.

¹⁴³ “Mike Pompeo: US ready to help make North Korea rich if it gives up nukes”, *Deutsche Welle*, 11 May 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, former senior South Korean intelligence official, May 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group discussions, multiple analysts and former military and government officials, Beijing, Seoul and Washington, April-May 2018; “Thae Yong Ho shares insights on inter-Korean summit”, *Daily NK*, 8 May 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. See also “Thae Yong-ho on prospects for peace and denuclearization”, *NK News*, 4 June 2018.

nuclear file) if it can find a way to address regime concerns and meet its demands in this area.¹⁴⁷

A third, untested possibility is that Kim's own calculus is evolving, a work in progress whose final destination will emerge only as he probes U.S. intentions and assesses the likely domestic and international consequences of each course of action. Accordingly, so the argument goes, Kim conceivably could settle on one of several options: from engaging in tactical moves to ensure survival, and gaining short-term advantage, to heading toward peninsula-wide denuclearisation. The latter course he would only pursue providing his security, political and economic conditions are met and he assesses, from the perspective of domestic dynamics, that the state would remain intact at the conclusion of such a dramatic process.

Whichever it is – whether Pyongyang is playing for time; genuinely open to denuclearisation; or still feeling its way – the best way to test the regime's intentions and mindset is a phased, action-for-action approach that puts both denuclearisation and a peace agreement on the table. While some in the Trump administration apparently fear that this would leave excessive room for the regime to reverse course, and thus lay a trap, it also likely is the only approach Pyongyang will accept.

¹⁴⁷ See eg, Leon V. Sigal, "Bad history makes for bad policy", 38 North, 27 March 2018. "Kim may also be willing to commit to denuclearize and even take some steps to disarm if Trump commits to end enmity and take reciprocal steps in that direction. An end to US enmity remains Kim Jong Un's aim just as it was his grandfather's and father's for the past thirty years". Carla Freeman and Mel Gurtov, "Unpacking a US decision to engage North Korea: What it entails and what it could achieve", 38 North Special Report, April 2018.

IV. A Successful Summit and a Roadmap Beyond

As the two parties finalise their preparation for the 12 June summit, doubts remain whether the meeting can produce further momentum toward a more stable situation on the peninsula. On the more hopeful side, the two leaders' commitment to the summit has been resilient. The escalatory exchange of rhetoric in April and May 2018, which culminated in President Trump's cancellation letter of 24 May, afforded both parties an off-ramp from the summit that neither ultimately chose to take. Still, having the political will to attend such a high-profile meeting is not necessarily tantamount to having the political will to take the necessary risks and make the requisite compromises. Neither Trump nor Kim has been seriously tested in this regard.

A first test concerns the seemingly mismatched expectations that nearly led to the summit's cancellation, ie, the gulf between Washington's earlier expressed preference for a "big bang" agreement in which CVID happens at a breakneck pace before the U.S. reciprocates with its own concessions, and the phased "action-for-action" approach that Pyongyang (as well as Beijing and Seoul) favours. In this respect, the bulk of compromise likely will have to come from Washington. Short-order comprehensive, verifiable, immediate denuclearisation simply is unrealistic from either a practical or a political perspective. The strategic implications are too great, the bilateral trust deficit too profound, and the program too big and advanced for North Korea to follow the path that Libya took toward denuclearisation. A team of experts on North Korea and nuclear proliferation from Stanford University (including two individuals, Siegfried Hecker and Robert Carlin, with extensive on-the-ground experience in North Korea) recently published a "technically informed roadmap" suggesting that denuclearisation would take up to ten years to accomplish.¹⁴⁸ As a political matter, they observed:

Insisting on immediate CVID along a "Libya model" to eliminate everything up front and virtually all at once is tantamount to a North Korean surrender scenario. It is unimaginable that Kim will agree to a Libya model.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ The roadmap is informed by both technical and political considerations, including the authors' belief that trust and confidence will need to be established in order for denuclearisation to proceed: "North Korea will not give up its weapons and its weapons program until its security can be assured. Such assurance cannot be achieved simply by an American promise or an agreement on paper; it will require a substantial period of coexistence and interdependence." Siegfried S. Hecker, Robert L. Carlin and Elliot A. Serbin, "A technically informed roadmap for North Korea's denuclearization", 28 May 2018, https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/hecker_carlin-serbin_denuc_rlc.pdf. The roadmap also takes into account that North Korea may insist on retaining some aspects of a civilian nuclear program and space program and suggests that the attendant risks are manageable through appropriate verification protocols. Ibid. A different group subsequently issued a technical note that took issue with the Stanford group's findings and suggested that it should be possible to dismantle the key parts of North Korea's nuclear weapons program within two years assuming full cooperation on Pyongyang's part. "Technical note on a time line for North Korean denuclearization," Institute for Science and International Security, 29 May 2018, http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Technical_Note_North_Korean_Denuclearization_Time_line_29May2018_Final.pdf.

¹⁴⁹ Hecker, Carlin and Serbin, "A technically informed roadmap for North Korea's denuclearization", op. cit.

President Trump's 1 June remarks in the context of his meeting with Kim Yong-chol suggest that he has moved away from the so-called big bang position, at least for the time being. The U.S. might still insist on significant early, visible steps on the path toward denuclearisation, especially given Trump's predilection for dramatic moves. These could include measures such as destruction of facilities (along the lines of the 24 May demolition of the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri);¹⁵⁰ or disclosing previously undeclared facilities; decommissioning reactors; or halting certain enrichment activities.¹⁵¹

A further issue the parties need to address is the appropriate form and content of the summit's outcome document. Negotiating arms control agreements tends to be labour- and time-intensive. North Korea's nuclear and missile complex and production capabilities are far more extensive than Iran's, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action took 20 months of near constant high-level talks to nail down.¹⁵² Moreover, giving negotiations short shrift would be unwise, as history shows that when Pyongyang and Washington paper over differences, deals tend to fall apart.¹⁵³ Finally, an arms control agreement is not likely to be the only element to be negotiated. As seen, North Korea's overarching strategic objective is to redefine its political and security relationship with the United States. A peace treaty or agreement that replaces the 1953 armistice agreement therefore almost certainly will need to be negotiated.¹⁵⁴ A legally binding instrument of this nature would likely touch on complex issues relating to, among other things, the deployment of international forces on the peninsula and the status of the U.S.-led UN Command.¹⁵⁵ While U.S. lawyers have been working to explore the contours of a political declaration about the end of the war that the parties could adopt in Singapore, it does not appear realistic to expect a formal treaty or agreement will be negotiated by the time of the summit.¹⁵⁶

Against this backdrop, it will be important to calibrate expectations and steer them away from the idea that a major agreement might emerge from the summit. Instead, the parties could focus on a statement of principles that sets forth the key political commitments that will guide the coming period of engagement. Such a statement could, for example, reaffirm that denuclearisation of the peninsula remains the parties' mutual long-term objective (thereby addressing Washington's concern while framing it as pan-peninsular to satisfy Pyongyang); commit the United States to

¹⁵⁰ That said, such demolitions (which are reminiscent of the 2008 destruction of a cooling tower at the Yongbyon nuclear facility) could be viewed by some more as stunts than as substantial concessions. See Siegfried S. Hecker, "Why did Kim Jong-un blow up his nuclear test site?" *The Washington Post*, 30 May 2018.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interviews, former U.S. official, April-May 2018.

¹⁵³ The 29 February 2012 Leap Day deal, for example, failed to establish a meeting of the minds on space launches, and unravelled when North Korea attempted a space launch on 23 April 2012. Leon V. Sigal, "What Have Twenty-Five Years of Nuclear Diplomacy Achieved?" in Kyung-ok Do, Jeong-Ho Roh and Henri Feron (eds.), *Pathways to a Peaceful Korean Peninsula: Denuclearization, Reconciliation and Cooperation* (Seoul, 2016).

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, U.S.-based Track 1.5 negotiators, May 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Uri Friedman, "The deceptively simple promise of Korean peace", *The Atlantic*, 27 April 2018

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, June 2018 (noting that the idea for a political declaration emerged from South Korean President Moon Jae-in and is reflected in the Panmunjom Declaration of 27 April 2018, which refers to the objective of "declaring an end to the War"); Crisis Group correspondence, former senior U.S. government official, June 2018.

abandoning any “hostile intent”; formalise and strengthen North Korea’s current freeze on nuclear and missile testing; include other confidence-building measures; and set out a program of future meetings.

The parties could draw language from the rich history of prior texts they negotiated. In their 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, for instance, North Korea committed to “abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs”;¹⁵⁷ in their October 12, 2000 Joint Communiqué, they stated that “neither government would have hostile intent toward the other”.¹⁵⁸ Because neither of these instruments proved durable, similar commitments inevitably will be greeted with scepticism; the more specific they can be in terms of content and timetable the better.

Finally, the parties will need to define their substantive goal for after the summit. Even if it has formally given up the “Libya model”, Washington is likely to push for a roadmap that gets as close and as quickly to CVID as possible. Pyongyang can and should accept denuclearisation as the ultimate goal of engagement, as it has in the past and which both regional stakeholders and the UN Security Council have affirmed. But for the regime to spell out in detail what denuclearisation will entail as well as how and when it will occur likely will prove a bridge too far, as U.S. intelligence reports suggest.¹⁵⁹

But, without forsaking the end goal, the two parties could agree to define a way station of a sort set forth in section V below – meaningful enough to bring the North Koreans significantly closer to denuclearisation, but without forcing them to commit to steps that would be unrealistic for Pyongyang at this stage.

There are many ways to go about constructing such a way station. In order to begin addressing Washington’s preeminent concern – that North Korea could develop the capacity to strike the continental U.S. with a nuclear-tipped missile – the parties could agree on a freeze and verification regime that halts production of nuclear weapons, material that can be used to make them, ICBMs and possibly missiles of lesser range as well.¹⁶⁰ The scope of such a “deep freeze” would greatly exceed what North Korea has agreed to in the past – in part because the scope of North Korea’s

¹⁵⁷ “Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks”, 19 September 2005, www.atomicarchive.com/Reports/Northkorea/JointStatement.shtml.

¹⁵⁸ “U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué”, 12 October 2000, https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eap/001012_usdprk_jointcom.html.

¹⁵⁹ Courtney Kube, Ken Dilanian and Carol E. Lee, “CIA report says North Korea won’t denuclearize, but may open a burger joint”, NBC News, 29 May 2018.

¹⁶⁰ While President Trump and Prime Minister Abe have seemed to present a united front on the dismantlement of all North Korean ballistic missiles (including intermediate-range missiles capable of striking Tokyo), Secretary Pompeo’s confirmation testimony called into question whether the administration sees the elimination of IRBMs as essential to any deal. Readout of President Donald J. Trump’s Call with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, 28 May 2018. “The President and Prime Minister affirmed the shared imperative of achieving the complete and permanent dismantlement of North Korea’s nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and ballistic missile programs”. See also Jesse Johnson, “Mike Pompeo optimistic about Kim-Trump summit, but ‘America First’ remarks likely to trigger concern in Tokyo and Seoul”, *The Japan Times*, 13 April 2018. One argument the U.S. government may advance for focusing narrowly on ICBMs is that Washington will have greater freedom to defend Tokyo and other allies if Pyongyang is unable to hold Seattle and San Francisco at risk. Crisis Group interview, former senior U.S. government official, April 2018.

program has also dramatically expanded. The United States therefore would need to offer security guarantees and other inducements to motivate Pyongyang to share extraordinarily sensitive information about its nuclear weapons program.

Focusing on such a deep freeze as an interim goal on the way to denuclearisation would have benefits for all stakeholders. Pyongyang could demonstrate its seriousness of purpose without taking the strategic step of denuclearisation in the near term, while it determines what a post-nuclear environment would entail for itself. Washington would secure Pyongyang's cooperation in a series of measures that are essential for its ultimate objective of full denuclearisation. Seoul would benefit from the two adversaries coming together in a framework that could expand trust and cooperation, lower tensions on the peninsula and reduce the risk of war. Tokyo will be concerned about any agreement that does not immediately eliminate nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as the full complement of ballistic missiles, and will also be keen to settle the abductee issue, but Washington has a unique ability to reassure Tokyo that these goals remain priorities and that it will ensure Japan's security and defence as they are pursued. Last but not least, Beijing would almost certainly welcome a continuing reduction of tensions and the prospect of North Korean economic stabilisation; moreover, such a gradual approach would soothe its fears of a dashed U.S.-North Korean rapprochement that could alter the regional balance of power.

V. A Possible Four-step Plan

Consistent with these principles (an end goal of denuclearisation; a meaningful and detailed “deep freeze” as a way station to get there; and economic/security inducements of corresponding scale by the U.S. and other stakeholders along the way), Crisis Group offers a possible plan. This notional proposal for a “deep freeze” involves four major steps (further detailed in Appendix A), as well as reciprocal U.S. measures described below.

Four-Step Plan

The **first step**, ideally concluded at the summit itself, would be to formally flesh out, define and commit to the elements of the current pause that Pyongyang has carried out unilaterally. While North Korea has ceased all missile and nuclear testing, it is not clear (for example) whether it intends to refrain from all short- and medium-range missile launches, or from space launcher development. These matters should be clarified. As a reciprocal measure, given the experience of the past month relating to military exercises, the U.S. and ROK should agree as part of this step to certain understandings and protocols about the assets that will be included in future drills and exercises.

The **second step**, which will take months to negotiate and implement, would involve measures to broaden the scope of the pause and make it more resilient. It would include North Korea signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which would mean taking on a commitment not to test nuclear weapons and introducing (or in some cases reintroducing) outside observers or remote monitoring equipment at key sites in North Korea, to both begin answering questions about its baseline capabilities and create some practical obstacles to the resumption of paused activities.

The **third step**, which would likely be the most labour- and time-intensive stage of the plan, would involve expanding the monitoring regime to encompass the entirety of North Korea’s nuclear and long-range missile production capabilities (ie, capabilities relating to ICBMs and other missiles that the parties agree to include), including the science and production base that support these capabilities. At the end, this step would include the introduction of observers or monitors at additional sites in order to form a comprehensive baseline of the nuclear and missile-related activities to be frozen. This step is more difficult than either of those preceding it because it would require disclosure of secret locations to the U.S., which theoretically could use that information for military purposes should relations revert to earlier form. It is therefore almost sure that certain security guarantees will need to be in place at or before this step.

The **fourth step** would be the establishment of a full production cap and freeze for nuclear weapons, weapons-usable materials, long-range missiles and other programs and technology related to the capability to produce strategic weapons. In defining what North Korea would and would not be able to do in a deep freeze, the parties will presumably need to address limits on the production and stockpiling of components required for nuclear and missile production, including uranium mining and milling, centrifuge production, and the production of missile engines.

Corresponding Measures

As for corresponding measures the U.S. and other stakeholders might offer, these would likely be drawn from the following categories. The U.S. will likely wish to hold some measures in reserve, to be put forward only once full denuclearisation has been achieved.

Transformation of political relationship. Pyongyang persistently conveys to Washington through Track 1.5 negotiators that it views this category with great interest, insofar as it sees the transformation of its political relationship with the U.S. as essential to ending its political and economic isolation from the world.¹⁶¹ The linchpin would be negotiation of a peace agreement to replace the 1953 armistice agreement and bring a formal peace to the peninsula; this achievement would then be followed by the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, and the establishment of diplomatic outposts (if not full embassies) in each country. Generally, the signature of such an agreement has been treated as an end-game development that would happen only at the same time as denuclearisation, but some U.S. commentators and President Trump himself recently have suggested that it could come earlier.¹⁶² (A non-binding political declaration is reportedly under consideration for Singapore.¹⁶³) An early stage signature would be a significant signal of an end to “hostile intent” and could, in theory, pave the way for major North Korean moves on transparency and access with respect to its facilities. The U.S. could also agree to formally establish a liaison office in Pyongyang or permit North Korean diplomats to travel in the U.S. outside the New York region, which at present they cannot leave.

Security guarantees. The further North Korea goes in revealing sensitive information about the location and extent of its capabilities, or in committing to dismantle or eliminate those capabilities, the more Pyongyang likely will look to the United States for security-related assurances. Early-stage commitments could include a redefinition of the scope of joint military exercises with South Korea to scale back or eliminate provocative actions, such as “decapitation drills” that mimic attacks on North Korean leadership or that are scheduled for national holidays. (Because South Korea fields a conscript force, U.S. officials maintain that it is important to hold exercises regularly, to bring new personnel up to speed, but they also allow that there is likely space to ratchet down the drills.¹⁶⁴) As talks progress, the U.S. could suspend flights by its strategic bombers and visits by strategic submarines to South Korea, provide written security guarantees, enter into a “non-aggression” pact by which each side forswears undertaking a first strike upon the other, or issue a statement that the U.S. will not initiate the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea. Ultimately, if the stage of considering genuine and comprehensive denuclearisation is reached, North Korea almost certainly will seek a nuclear non-deployment pledge for the entire Korean peninsula that could be entered into by the U.S., as well as

¹⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, U.S.-based Track 1.5 participants, May 2018.

¹⁶² James Clapper, “Ending the dead end in North Korea”, *The New York Times*, 19 May 2018.

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, June 2018.

¹⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, February 2018; retired senior U.S. Forces Korea officer, April 2018.

North and South Korea. Because of the strategic implications for the entire region, this is likely to be a complex and contentious end-game issue.

Sanctions/economic support. Sanctions continue to place heavy economic pressure on North Korea, and Pyongyang is almost certain to insist on progressively greater steps toward relieving this pressure in return for progressively more meaningful steps down the path toward a deep freeze.¹⁶⁵ A gradual approach that matches the magnitude of economic relief afforded with the magnitude of the steps North Korea is taking starts with the commitment that President Trump has already made not to impose further sanctions unless and until talks “break down”.¹⁶⁶ It might include a commitment to reverse U.S. rules that bar U.S. passport holders from travelling to North Korea and North Korean nationals from travelling to the United States.¹⁶⁷ Further along in the process, it will be necessary to look at relaxing or suspending bilateral and multilateral sanctions against North Korea in certain key economic sectors such as textiles, seafood, and some natural resources exports. The ultimate economic measure – and therefore one that would probably be held for a late stage of either the four-step plan or possibly beyond – would be comprehensive repeal of sanctions unrelated to nuclear proliferation (ie, dual-use goods and proliferation technology) and the facilitation of economic support to help modernise the North Korean economy.

Cultural and educational exchange opportunities. These initiatives are unlikely to have a profound impact on Pyongyang, although U.S. officials note that cultural and educational exchanges carry meaningful symbolism and are relatively easy for the United States to put forward. They could also contribute to Pyongyang’s long-term economic objectives (eg, through training opportunities in fields relevant to future growth).¹⁶⁸ The most prominent recent example of cultural exchange was the appearance of the New York Philharmonic in Pyongyang in 2007. At the time, however, U.S. officials acknowledged even that gesture to be less than consequential.¹⁶⁹ Further such gestures – though perhaps useful for atmospheric purposes – seem unlikely to be seen as serious trading chips by either side. (Cultural exchanges are also subject to being criticised as providing entertainment for the Pyongyang elite.)

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, U.S.-based Track 1.5 participant, May 2018.

¹⁶⁶ “The Latest: Japan’s defense chief urges caution over North Korea”, Associated Press, 2 June 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Keith Luse, “The trouble with the new U.S.-North Korea travel ban”, *The Diplomat*, 11 October 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, present and former U.S. government officials, January-April 2018.

¹⁶⁹ “U.S. anthem gets orchestral airing in Pyongyang”, *Chosun Ilbo*, 27 February 2008. The article quotes White House spokesperson Dana Perino as saying, “we consider this concert to be a concert, and it’s not a diplomatic, you know, coup”.

VI. Conclusion

A tentative summit, two unorthodox leaders and swirling politics make today a moment of both risk and opportunity for the Korean peninsula. The United States and North Korea find themselves in a better place today than they did six months ago, but that could end very quickly if the summit fails to produce a common vision for how to continue down the de-escalatory path that began with the Olympic truce. The biggest risk is that the parties are unable to bridge their mismatched expectations. If the United States insists on massive up-front concessions and a short-order denuclearisation process, and North Korea insists on building confidence through a phased process, then things could go poorly.

Still, there is ample room for a significant result if the parties can manage expectations for the summit and reach agreement on a phased “action-for-action” sequence that puts the parties on a path toward denuclearisation without pushing Pyongyang to get there at a pace it cannot accept. This seems to be the only politically and pragmatically realistic approach. Within that framework, the parties could then pursue the four-step plan toward a deep freeze that is laid out in this report, mitigating proliferation risks, building trust and confidence and establishing the foundation for further steps toward denuclearisation.

Of course, diplomacy still could fail, either at the summit or in the weeks and months that follow, in which case the parties could well find themselves once again in an escalatory scenario. Washington has not made clear what it would do if Pyongyang were to resume testing, but based on past statements, one can imagine some kind of military response.¹⁷⁰ And that is not the only concern. Although he appears to have been sidelined for the time being,¹⁷¹ the U.S. national security advisor remains John Bolton, who suggested – prior to entering government – that the primary benefit of the talks would be to “foreshorten” the amount of time spent on what he views as pointless diplomacy.¹⁷² Separately, Bolton wrote that:

When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you don't wait until it has struck before you crush it. ... I would argue that today North Korean nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and Iran's while we're on the subject, are the rattlesnakes of the 21st century.¹⁷³

It was a reckless suggestion, and it would be even rasher to act upon it. The risks and costs of conflict on the peninsula, even if fought exclusively by conventional means, remain staggeringly high, and greater still if weapons of mass destruction are em-

¹⁷⁰ Uri Friedman, “Lindsay Graham: There's a 30 percent chance Trump attacks North Korea”, *The Atlantic*, 14 December 2017. Graham suggested that if nuclear testing resumes the chance the U.S. takes military action against North Korea jumps to 70 per cent.

¹⁷¹ Kevin Liptak, Jeff Zeleny, Jeremy Diamond and Michelle Kosinski, “Bolton sidelined as Trump readies for North Korea”, CNN, 5 June 2018.

¹⁷² Colin Kahl and Jon Wolfsthal, “John Bolton is a National Security Threat,” *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2018; John Bolton on Trump's decision to meet with Kim Jong-un, Fox News, 9 March 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JTY559R4v4.

¹⁷³ John Bolton, “FDR's ‘rattlesnake’ rule and the North Korean threat”, *The New York Post*, 5 September 2018.

ployed. The U.S. has for decades relied on deterrence to manage perceived nuclear threats from Russia and China, and that should be the fallback strategy with North Korea. Should events nonetheless turn in a military direction, it will be critical for the U.S. Congress to step in in a much bigger way than it has to date, with hearings to warn the American people of the costs of war, and legislation making clear both that to wage a so-called preventive war on the Korean peninsula is improper without congressional authorisation and that no such authorisation has been given.

Washington/Seoul/Beijing/New York, 11 June 2018

Appendix A: Four Step Plan to a “Deep Freeze” in North Korea

Step 1: Define and Formalise the Current Freeze

At or soon after the summit, the parties should be in a position to take the first step, which would be to define and formalise the boundaries of the pause that Pyongyang has already unilaterally put in place. A six-part 20 April announcement by official North Korean news sources is a good starting place for this conversation. That announcement suggests that North Korea has officially committed to suspending nuclear and ICBM testing and closing the since-demolished North Korean nuclear test site at Punggye-ri, while showing a willingness to join global nuclear test ban efforts.¹⁷⁴

Still, there are quite a few open questions about the contours of the current pause. For example, although the 20 April announcement commits only to the cessation of ICBM testing, as a practical matter North Korea also has refrained from any short- or intermediate-range ballistic missile tests since the start of the 2018 Olympics,¹⁷⁵ and there could be some ambiguity in the parties’ minds about whether the resumption – for example – of short-range, liquid-fueled missile tests would be inconsistent with the testing pause.¹⁷⁶ It is also not clear if North Korea has been conducting “static” tests of large solid rocket motors directly related to the development of ICBMs during the test pause. Given the risk for a rapid unravelling of progress if the United States perceives Pyongyang to have violated the perceived status quo, it will be important for the parties to confront and clearly answer questions about whether or not the present arrangement covers these and similar activities.¹⁷⁷ Specific questions that should be answered might be grouped under the following topics.

Which missiles are covered by the testing pause?

- ❑ Are all missile tests prohibited or, if any are allowed, what specific limitations apply with respect to range, thrust and weight parameters?
- ❑ Do the prohibitions also cover the testing, production and deployment of submarine-launched missiles, including through cold or ejection tests of missile systems?
- ❑ Does the current freeze address any space launch vehicle launches, work and preparations?

¹⁷⁴ “3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK held in presence of Kim Jong Un”, KCNA Watch, 21 April 2018, <https://kcnawatch.co/newstream/1524400229-922732211/3rd-plenary-meeting-of-7th-c-c-wpk-held-in-presence-of-kim-jong-un>.

¹⁷⁵ North Korea has not launched a ballistic missile of any kind in 2018. See the CNS North Korea Missile Database at: www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database.

¹⁷⁶ The extent to which the current pause (and ultimate freeze) addresses missiles with a shorter range than ICBMs is likely to be of particular interest to Japan as discussed in section III.C.

¹⁷⁷ A failure to define terms with precision has contributed to the demise of previous denuclearisation arrangements between the U.S. and North Korea. The 2012 Leap Day deal, for example, did not expressly ban space launch vehicles, and the 1994 Agreed Framework did not include independent language addressing enriched uranium. In both cases, the unaddressed activities became the focus of later disputes.

Which forms of testing are covered by the testing pause?

- ❑ Do the prohibitions apply to North Korean means of testing missiles short of flight testing?
- ❑ What specific activities will and will not be allowed at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site?
- ❑ Do prohibitions apply to high explosive testing that does not produce nuclear yields?

What technology and capabilities are covered by the testing pause?

- ❑ Do prohibitions on missile testing apply solely to the testing of solid-fueled rocket motors (SRMs) (which can fire more quickly and have longer ranges than liquid-fuelled motors) or also to liquid-fuelled motors (which are also capable of powering ICBMs)?
- ❑ Does the current freeze include any restriction on the ability of North Korea to expand its current nuclear power, nuclear material production and nuclear handling capabilities?

Step 2: Incremental Transparency, Resiliency and Setting the Stage

The second step in the path toward a deep freeze would be a series of measures to signal the parties' commitment to the pause, increase transparency and create some modest impediments to backsliding – all of which could increase the resiliency of the pause already in place and set the stage for farther-reaching measures at later stages in the process.

Sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and invite the CTBTO to Punggye-ri

Given the references to joining global test ban efforts in Pyongyang's 20 April announcement,¹⁷⁸ one early step that North Korea could take to signal its seriousness would be to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Signature by itself would commit North Korea not to take steps that defeat the object and purpose of the treaty, such as nuclear testing, and would put it on the same footing as the U.S. and China. It would send a strong signal about Pyongyang's commitment to refrain from testing. It might also modestly increase the diplomatic costs of backsliding.¹⁷⁹ The U.S. could at least partially reciprocate this gesture by maintaining its current status as a CTBT signatory and committing not to carry out nuclear testing notwithstanding statements in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review that the United States will not seek ratification of the CTBT.

¹⁷⁸ "3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK held in presence of Kim Jong Un," KCNA Watch, 21 April 2018, <https://kcnawatch.co/newstream/1524400229-922732211/3rd-plenary-meeting-of-7th-c-c-wpk-held-in-presence-of-kim-jong-un>.

¹⁷⁹ As a matter of international law, North Korea would not be bound by the specific terms of the CTBT until the treaty has come into force (which has not yet happened because certain key states have not yet ratified it) and North Korea has ratified it. See Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Article 18.

Moreover, signature of the CTBT could usefully be paired with the more operational step of inviting monitors from the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) to conduct certain inspection and monitoring activities inside North Korea. CTBTO experts and officials have never visited North Korea's testing facilities or operated inside the country. Kim's demolition of the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri in late May¹⁸⁰ creates a good opening to press for Pyongyang to allow, as an early step toward verification, the CTBTO to verify the closure of the site after the fact, and to install nuclear test monitoring equipment in North Korea.¹⁸¹

Invite monitors back to Yongbyon and its surroundings

In addition to bringing observers to North Korea's nuclear testing site, Step 2 also could include measures to increase transparency with respect to North Korea's current and planned nuclear reactors.

According to available information, there are three such reactors of different sizes at or near Yongbyon at different stages of operational readiness. The smallest, a 5 megawatt electrical (MWe) reactor, is already operating. Two larger reactors – at 50MWe and 200MWe – are both incomplete. (The 200MWe reactor is located approximately 20km northwest of Yongbyon.) The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and American monitors have previously operated at Yongbyon and monitored the freeze on construction at the 50 and 200MWe reactors remotely. Similar and new monitoring protocols could be negotiated as part of a new transparency and verification regime. The question of whether North Korea would be able to maintain and operate any of the three reactors under a denuclearisation scenario would be a topic for negotiation between the parties but whether they are to be frozen, eliminated or allowed to operate, an ongoing access and inspections regime will be required. Early visits by IAEA inspectors as part of Step 2 would be critical to prepare for talks about such a future inspections regime.

Associated with North Korea's 5MWe electric reactor at Yongbyon is the chemical separation facility also located there. The ability of this site to produce weapons-grade plutonium for use in nuclear weapons will make it a key focus of any transparency and inspection regime. U.S. and IAEA inspectors previously had sufficient access to the separation facility to verify its lack of operations under the 1994 and 2005 agreements with Pyongyang. Assuming that reprocessing would be addressed as part of any deep freeze arrangement, allowing Step 2 access to survey this facility would be an important step in that direction.

Start tackling the missile challenge

One of the biggest challenges that the parties will confront is how to regulate North Korea's missile capabilities. Even threshold questions about the specific capabilities are likely to be fraught. Some of these questions may be dealt with up front as part of

¹⁸⁰ Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea invites the world to watch closing of nuclear test site", *The New York Times*, May 13, 2018.

¹⁸¹ The U.S. and China – both unratified signatories to the CTBT – have allowed the CTBTO to install seismic and other sensors in their countries in support of the CTBTO and its International Monitoring System.

Step 1 discussions about the metes and bounds of the current pause but a deeper discussion will almost certainly be necessary as the parties proceed down the path to a deep freeze – starting with the question of which missile capabilities other than ICBMs will be covered by the freeze (eg, whether submarine-launched ballistic missiles or short- or medium-range ballistic missiles will be covered).

Among other key questions that will require consideration are whether the freeze will solely address North Korea's development of solid rocket motors (SRMs) (which has been a focal point of U.S. concerns because SRMs are the primary technology used in the development of North Korea's ICBM and submarine-launched ballistic missile programs) or whether it will also address liquid-fuelled systems. (This mirrors the conversation in Step 1 about whether the testing pause covers both SRMs and liquid-fuel systems but applies it to the question of whether the production freeze will reach both technologies.) Because both SRMs and liquid-fuelled systems can be used to produce reliable ICBMs, it is likely that the U.S. will seek to constrain development and possession of both technologies. In this case, any verification provisions will need to focus on how to monitor a prohibition on the development, construction, testing and possession of both types of systems.

Beyond agreeing on what the focus of the verification regime should be lies the challenge of figuring out how to implement that regime. Unlike in the area of nuclear or nuclear test monitoring, where there are recognised and experienced UN-affiliated agencies like the CTBTO and the IAEA to provide technical and operational support, no such organisation currently exists to monitor ballistic missile production or use. This means that missile-related constraints will likely have to be verified and monitored under a bilateral arrangement between the U.S. and North Korea. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency, which exists within the U.S. Department of Defense, plays a central role in conducting arms control inspections in Russia under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty,¹⁸² and may have the most relevant expertise within the U.S. government. If acceptable to Pyongyang, it could – as part of Step 2 – be given some access to North Korean officials and facilities in order to begin preparing to undertake a comprehensive baselining exercise to establish North Korean capacity in the areas to be covered by the ultimate freeze. (The more comprehensive exercise would take place as part of Step 3.)

In this connection, it would serve multiple purposes to deploy U.S. or third-party nationals to missile-related testing sites like Sohae, or to install cameras and sensing equipment with a live feed out of Korea at those sites. Beyond creating the framework for verification and monitoring activities, these measures could also serve as a modest bulwark against backsliding. While this presence won't create lengthy delays should North Korea choose to restart missile testing, the expulsion of monitors and removal of equipment (which would presumably precede any such restarting) would provide at least a few days warning, and an opening for last-minute diplomacy.

¹⁸² The parties should consider other ways in which U.S.-Russia experience in the context of START and New START could be relevant to the present exercise. For example, the U.S. and Russia agreed on detailed procedures to eliminate items controlled under their Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces agreement, including by cutting up missiles or expending their fuel through static firings. The New START Treaty contains procedures for the conversion or elimination of controlled items including missiles, aircraft and silos.

Finally, another missile-related effort the parties could undertake as part of Step 2 would be to start setting up a “procurement channel”. Under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the parties established such a channel to ensure transparency over the import into Iran of materials that were subject to control under the terms of the deal. Any decision by Iran to import any controlled material (for example, carbon fibre, which is critical for the manufacture of centrifuges, missile bodies and solid rocket engines) needs to be submitted and approved in advance by a multilateral joint commission created under the JCPOA. In the North Korean context, a procurement channel could be particularly helpful for monitoring and regulating the development of solid rocket motors, which requires specialised equipment and materials including carbon fibre and electronics for missile guidance. The international Missile Technology Control Regime control lists for equipment, software and technology might be a starting point for the development of a list of items that could be monitored through a procurement channel.¹⁸³

Step 3: Expanded Transparency

The biggest and possibly toughest step in the road between the summit and denuclearisation is Step 3, which focuses on significantly expanding the scope of the transparency regime. This would be a way station to a full freeze of all production of nuclear weapons, weapons-usable material and long-range ballistic missiles, which would happen in Step 4 of the process.

Step 3 is likely to be especially difficult because it will require North Korea to increase significantly both the known information about and access to some of its most sensitive strategic military capabilities. For North Korea, this would be considered in some respects to be an irreversible step. It will require Pyongyang to put in the hands of the U.S. the location of facilities that it has not yet publicly identified – information North Korea’s leadership would justifiably fear could be used by the U.S. in some future scenario to develop targets for military action. North Korea would also likely be asked to provide extensive information about its past procurement and production activities, perhaps including data about its smuggling and covert import operations. Such disclosures would curtail North Korea’s ability to use those networks in the future. Reconstitution of such links would take considerable time and money. For all these reasons, North Korea can be expected to balk, or at a minimum to seek significant economic and security incentives and guarantees in return.

Nuclear Transparency – North Korea’s nuclear infrastructure includes nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors, plutonium separation facilities and a full-scale uranium enrichment capability (including for the production and operation of uranium gas centrifuges), as well as uranium mining and processing, and a stockpile of weapons-grade and non-weapons-grade special nuclear materials (enriched uranium, separated plutonium or plutonium in spent fuel). In order to prepare for the deep freeze to be implemented as part of Step 4, North Korea would be asked to provide trans-

¹⁸³ Missile Control Technology Regime – Equipment, Technology and Software Annex, 19 October 2017, http://mtrc.info/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/MTCR-TEM-Technical_Annex_2017-10-19-corr.pdf.

parency and access either to monitors from the U.S. or a trusted third party (eg, the IAEA) to key facilities that relate to this infrastructure and the U.S. and South Korea would need to gain confidence that everything has been declared and is now subject to monitoring. In particular, monitors will need access to facilities related to the following activities and capabilities:

- ❑ With respect to **plutonium production**, monitors will need access to (or, in the case of facilities to which it has gained preliminary access in Step 2, deeper access to) the 5MWe, 50MWe and 200MWe reactors at or near the chemical separation (reprocessing) facility at Yongbyon, and spent fuel and nuclear waste storage at Yongbyon and elsewhere.
- ❑ To assess activities relating to **enrichment of uranium**, access will be required to known sites at Yongbyon as well as suspected and other undisclosed sites. Similarly, monitors will need access to facilities for uranium mining, processing and conversion.
- ❑ To understand **enrichment capabilities**, monitors will need to be able to visit, among other things, centrifuge research and manufacturing sites.
- ❑ Monitors will also need to be able to inspect facilities that house work on **nuclear weapons development, production and storage**, as well as the storage of sensitive material (such as highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium) and handling facilities.

Missile Transparency – As with North Korea’s nuclear capabilities, only some of the key sites for North Korea’s missile development and production complex are known to Western countries. Non-governmental organisations like the Middlebury Institute’s Center for Nonproliferation Studies and the Nuclear Threat Initiative have done a great deal of work using open-source information to identify specific missile locations, but the information they have developed is not comprehensive,¹⁸⁴ and the learning curve for the U.S. will be steep. Decisions about the capabilities to be controlled with respect both to missile range and underlying technology (solid vs liquid-fuelled motors) will have an impact on transparency and verification requirements. Nevertheless, sites that need to be declared and opened to some degree of transparency will almost certainly have to include those relating to:

- ❑ **Long-range missile and missile-production capabilities** including assembly and storage facilities, missile body and engine production facilities, and missile test and diagnostic facilities. (“Long-range missiles” refers to ICBMs and other missiles that the parties agree will be covered by the freeze.)
- ❑ The procurement, manufacturing and fabrication of relevant **transporter/erector/launcher (TEL)** capabilities, which allow missiles to be moved around, and therefore make them less vulnerable to attack;
- ❑ **Raw material production and handling** for relevant rocket fuel, carbon fibre and precision machining capabilities.

¹⁸⁴ “North Korea,” Nuclear Threat Initiative, as of 6 May 2018, www.nti.org/learn/countries/north-korea/delivery-systems.

Finally, in order to make Step 3 work, the parties will need to answer some technical and procedural questions – including which countries will have access to the information that emerges and what organisation or agency will be responsible for verifying that the terms of the agreement are being observed. There will also need to be legal agreements governing the protection of people and information, and a mechanism for dispute resolution. These and many more complex questions were addressed and answered during several years of negotiations with Iran over the JCPOA, in a country that was more transparent and accessible than North Korea. The time it will take to address them in the context of North Korea should not be underestimated.

Step 4: Deep Freeze

While a step short of dismantlement and elimination, achieving a “deep freeze” of the production of nuclear weapons, weapons-usable material and long-range missiles (and associated technology) would be a highly significant accomplishment. It would mark a huge leap forward in trust between the parties and provide a plausible foundation from which to eventually pursue dismantlement and elimination. If the parties build up to a freeze with the steps described above, then much of the work will be done and many of the key questions answered by the time Step 4 is ready to be taken. These questions include the following:

Will the parties create impediments to restarting frozen activities so that resumption takes a certain amount of lead time? As with previous agreements with North Korea, it will be impossible to design a freeze that is truly irreversible. North Korea will always retain the ability and knowledge to begin the development of new facilities and equipment. The parties can, however, create hurdles to resumption that will help ensure that it takes a certain amount of time and be clearly visible to the outside world, including by disabling certain equipment and facilities. U.S. officials are mulling over how to design such a bulwark for North Korea that takes into account its unique circumstance, but their work is far from complete.¹⁸⁵

As for how to create comparable “lead time” with respect to frozen activities for the production, development and testing of missiles, some activities of concern, such as flight testing missiles, can be observed remotely. Building on measures recommended above for Step 3, the parties could agree to install cameras and real-time data feeds from key missile test and production facilities to augment its own satellite and other intelligence capabilities (although many of the production and development constraints that are likely to be part of any deep freeze will require intrusive on-site access by either U.S. or third-party entities). Such data feeds, or their termination, would help alert U.S. officials if any banned activities are taking place at proscribed sites.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ David Sanger and William Broad, “Verifying the end of a nuclear North Korea ‘could make Iran look easy’”, *The New York Times*, 6 May 2018.

¹⁸⁶ Under the START agreement between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union, the U.S. used to have a continuous monitoring system that also allowed for the U.S. to remotely scan the contents of containers leaving the main missile production facilities in the former Soviet Union. This allowed the U.S. to gain confidence that Russia was not producing missiles with banned range and technical

How will the legal framework be constructed? The nuclear aspects of a freeze might be at least partly governed by bilateral agreements between Pyongyang and either the IAEA or the U.S. (whichever is providing the personnel to perform requisite tasks), or a combination of both. To give the arrangements a multilateral imprimatur, the UN Security Council could adopt a resolution that provides an overarching framework for the arrangements and lays out the rights and responsibilities for all parties under the agreement. A Security Council resolution will also be required to roll back UN sanctions on North Korea.

The parties may also have to decide whether bilateral arrangements are memorialised in an executive agreement, or are structured in the form of a treaty that will require the advice and consent of the Senate before it can be ratified. A deep split between President Obama and the Republican-controlled Senate made it impossible to memorialise the JCPOA in a formal treaty, but depending on the deal that is struck, President Trump may be in a better position to secure congressional support. Especially given the decision by President Trump to violate the terms of the JCPOA, North Korea may feel that a Senate-approved treaty is likely to prove more durable in future administrations, although it is widely accepted that a president can also unilaterally withdraw from a Senate-approved treaty.¹⁸⁷

What activities will remain unfrozen? As they decide how to implement the deep freeze in the context of Step 4, the parties will also need to determine what if any residual nuclear capabilities North Korea will be able to possess at the end of an implementation process. If any nuclear reactors or enrichment capabilities are allowed to remain in North Korea, then the task of verifying a cap will become much harder. A complete ban would be easier to verify since entire categories of activities would be therefore unnecessary. Nevertheless, even the Track 1.5 negotiators who see the most promise in getting close to denuclearisation tend to doubt that North Korea will be prepared to abandon fully its nuclear capabilities.

characteristics. A similar system might be employed in North Korea, should a future agreement ban the production of certain long-range solid rocket motor-fuelled systems.

¹⁸⁷ Josh Rubin, “No, making the Iran deal a treaty wouldn’t have stopped Trump from withdrawing from it”, Just Security, 25 May 2018.

Four-step Plan to a “Deep Freeze” – Key Elements

Step 1: Formalise Current Test Pause

- Define what is allowed, what is prohibited
- No nuclear weapons tests
- No missile tests (unless exceptions are agreed)
- Define what else is allowed, prohibited

Step 2: Build out the Pause

- Monitor key nuclear and missile tests
- North Korea signs Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Step 3: Comprehensive Monitoring

- North Korea declares all its nuclear weapons and long-range missile production sites (ICBMs + others agreed by parties)
- Inspectors verify production sites, capabilities

Step 4: Deep Freeze

- No production of enriched uranium and plutonium
- No production of nuclear weapons
- No production of long-range missiles
- Limits on components needed for production

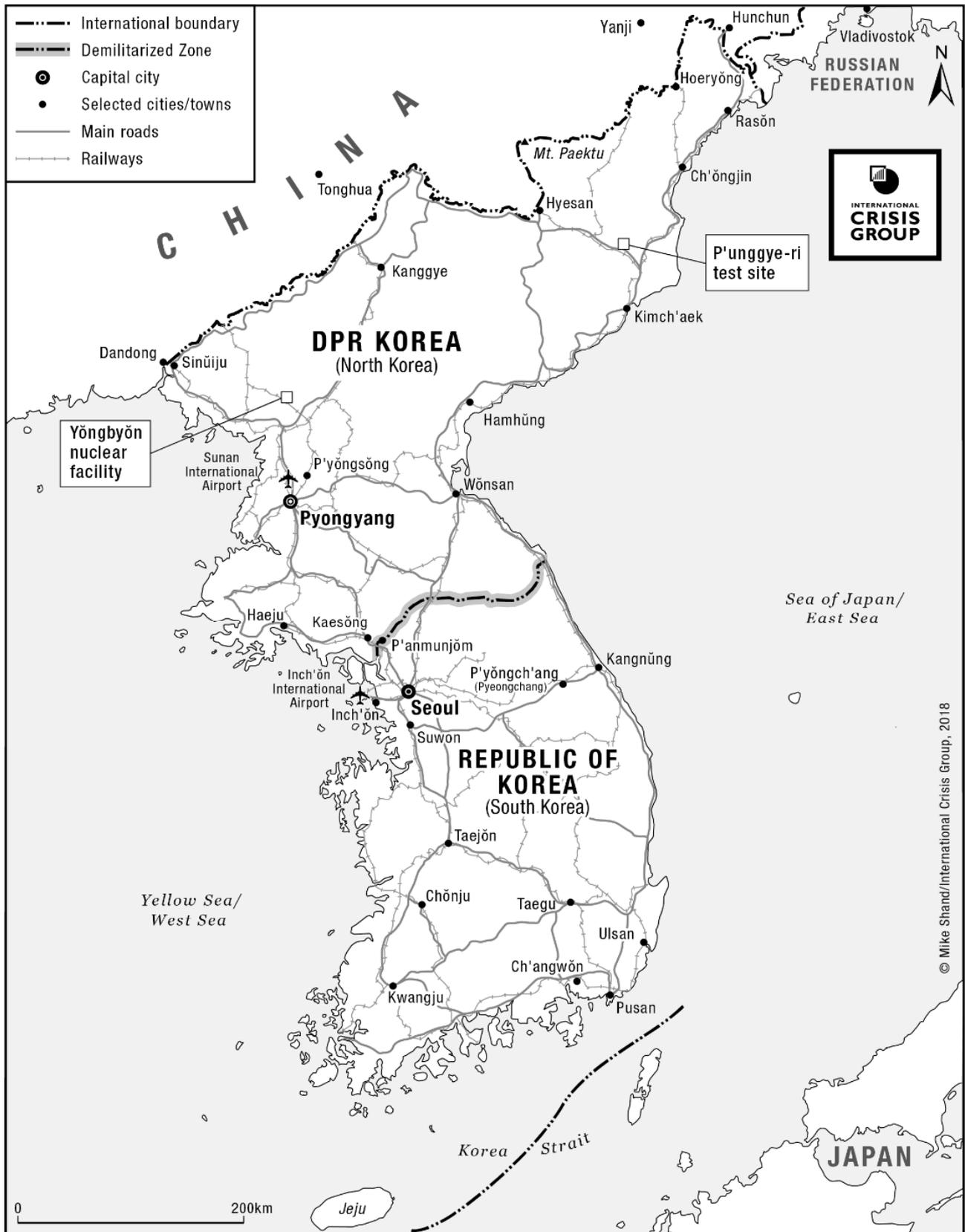
Corresponding U.S. Measures

- Political normalisation
- Sanctions relief and economic assistance
- Security guarantees
- Cultural exchanges

Appendix B: Map of North East Asia



Appendix C: Map of the Korean Peninsula



Appendix D: Acronyms

AUMF	Authorization for Use of Military Force
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
CTBTO	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization
CVID	Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Dismantlement (of nuclear capability)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IRBM	Intermediate-range Ballistic Missile
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MWe	Megawatt electrical
ROK	Republic of Korea
SRM	Solid Fuelled Rocket Motors
TEL	Transporter/erector/launcher

Appendix E: About the International Crisis Group

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June 2018

Appendix F: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2015

Special Reports

Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

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Stirring up the South China Sea (III): A Fleeting Opportunity for Calm, Asia Report N°267, 7 May 2015 (also available in Chinese).

North Korea: Beyond the Six-Party Talks, Asia Report N°269, 16 June 2015.

Stirring up the South China Sea (IV): Oil in Troubled Waters, Asia Report N°275, 26 January 2016 (also available in Chinese).

East China Sea: Preventing Clashes from Becoming Crises, Asia Report N°280, 30 June 2016.

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The Korean Peninsula Crisis (I): In the Line of Fire and Fury, Asia Report N°293, 23 January 2018 (also available in Chinese).

The Korean Peninsula Crisis (II): From Fire and Fury to Freeze-for-Freeze, Asia Report N°294, 23 January 2018 (also available in Chinese).

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Mapping Bangladesh's Political Crisis, Asia Report N°264, 9 February 2015.

Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan, Asia Report N°265, 8 April 2015.

The Future of the Afghan Local Police, Asia Report N°268, 4 June 2015.

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Sri Lanka Between Elections, Asia Report N°272, 12 August 2015.

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Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh, Asia Report N°277, 11 April 2016.

Sri Lanka: Jumpstarting the Reform Process, Asia Report N°278, 18 May 2016.

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South East Asia

Myanmar's Electoral Landscape, Asia Report N°266, 28 April 2015 (also available in Burmese).

Southern Thailand: Dialogue in Doubt, Asia Report N°270, 8 July 2015.

Myanmar's Peace Process: A Nationwide Ceasefire Remains Elusive, Asia Briefing N°146, 16 September 2015 (also available in Burmese).

The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications, Asia Briefing N°147, 9 December 2015 (also available in Burmese).

Thailand's Lengthening Roadmap to Elections, Asia Report N°274, 10 December 2015.

The Philippines: Renewing Prospects for Peace in Mindanao, Asia Report N°281, 6 July 2016.

Myanmar's New Government: Finding Its Feet?, Asia Report N°282, 29 July 2016 (also available in Burmese).

Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue: No Traction, Asia Briefing N°148, 21 September 2016.

Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue, Asia Briefing N°149, 19 October 2016 (also available in Burmese).

Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State, Asia Report N°283, 15 December 2016 (also available in Burmese).

Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar, Asia Report N°287, 29 June 2017 (also available in Burmese).

Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar, Asia Report N°290, 5 September 2017 (also available in Burmese).

Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace, Asia Report N°291, 8 November 2017 (also available in Thai and Malay).

Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis Enters a Dangerous New Phase, Asia Report N°292, 7 December 2017 (also available in Burmese).

The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar's Rohingya Refugee Crisis, Asia Report N°296, 16 May 2018 (also available in Burmese).

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