



The September 2018 Inter-Korean Summit

September 25, 2018

From September 18 to 20, South Korean President Moon Jae-in visited North Korea and held approximately five hours of meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. During the summit, their third since April 2018, the two leaders issued a Pyongyang Joint Declaration pledging denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, improvements in inter-Korean relations, and confidence-building measures to ease military tension. Kim promised to visit Seoul “at an early date.”

The Moon-Kim summit has created potential opportunities and obstacles for the United States. The summit appears to have injected new momentum into North Korea-U.S. denuclearization talks, which had stalled in the months after President [Trump’s summit with Kim](#) in Singapore in June. Meeting with Moon days after the inter-Korean summit, President Trump said that he and Kim would be holding a second summit “[in the not too distant future](#).” The September inter-Korean summit, however, also may have constrained the United States’ freedom of action, particularly if North Korea does not follow through on its pledges.

Major Outcomes

- **Kim’s reciprocal visit to Seoul:** Moon said that the two leaders agreed [the visit should occur by the end of 2018](#), “if possible.” If realized, it will be the first trip to Seoul by a DPRK leader since the end of the Korean War in 1953.
- **Nuclear and missile programs:** The two leaders agreed that they would “cooperate ... in the process of pursuing complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” and that “substantial progress toward this end must be made in a prompt manner.” Kim repeated his June [pledge](#) to Trump to dismantle the Tongchang-ri (also called Sohae) missile and satellite launch site, adding for the first time that international experts could be present. Kim pledged to take additional steps, including the “permanent dismantlement” of its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, “as the United States takes corresponding measures.”
- **Military confidence-building measures:** Among other steps, the two Koreas [agreed](#) to reestablish communications links to prevent accidental military clashes, create a no-fly zone along the DMZ, withdraw many of their guard posts within the DMZ, and create in effect a “no military drills zone” and a joint fishing zone in the Yellow Sea.

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- **Economic measures:** Moon and Kim pledged to hold a groundbreaking ceremony for reconnecting east and west coast roads and railroad tracks by the end of 2018. They also agreed, “as conditions ripe [sic],” to reopen the inter-Korean [Kaesong Industrial Complex \(KIC\)](#) inside North Korea that Moon’s predecessor closed in February 2016 following Pyongyang’s fourth nuclear test. Moon’s 200-person contingent included business leaders, including the heads of Samsung, Hyundai, and LG.
- **Other exchanges and cooperation:** Moon and Kim pledged to jointly participate in the 2020 Olympics and bid to co-host the 2032 Summer Olympics, as well as strengthen medical and environmental cooperation, especially in forestry. They also agreed to create a permanent facility in North Korea for temporarily reuniting the thousands of families separated since the Korean War. Having already established their first-ever permanent liaison office, at the KIC in North Korea, the declaration said the leaders wished that “current developments in inter-Korean relations will lead to reunification.”
- **Symbolism:** The summit, which received TV coverage in both countries, included the two leaders’ motorcade through Pyongyang and joint visit with their wives to the peak of the Peninsula’s tallest mountain, Mt. Paektu, the Korean people’s [mythical birthplace](#). In the first direct [speech](#) by a South Korean president to a large North Korean audience, Moon gave a short address to a crowd of approximately 150,000 North Koreans attending a gymnastics performance.

Questions

- **How significant are Kim’s nuclear and missile pledges?** Moon has [said](#) that if North Korea follows through on Kim’s existing promises, it essentially will be unable to advance its nuclear and missile programs. However, many U.S. and ROK experts are [skeptical](#) because North Korea has yet to disclose the composition and/or size of its nuclear material or warhead stocks and facilities, including those *not* at Yongbyon. North Korea and the United States also have not agreed upon what constitutes “denuclearization.” Nor have they agreed upon a timeline or verification measures for dismantlement. North Korea “continue[s] to produce fissile material,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [testified](#) in July, shortly after U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly gathered [evidence of DPRK efforts to conceal](#) parts of its nuclear programs. Pyongyang also reportedly has continued working on [more advanced long-range missiles](#).
 - **What are the “corresponding measures” the United States must take for North Korea to dismantle Yongbyon?** Moon has aligned with Kim’s view that concessions by the United States and DPRK be made in a “[balanced manner](#),” and that the United States should “put an end to hostile relations” and “provide security assurances to the North,” as Trump promised in Singapore. However, the Pyongyang Declaration did not specify which party needs to move first, on what measures. This has stymied progress in U.S.-DPRK relations since the Singapore summit. Without such an agreement, which Moon appears to be trying to broker, the policy logjam could continue.
 - **Do the military agreements limit the U.S.-ROK alliance’s capabilities?** Defense analysts have claimed that the dramatic expansion of existing no-fly zones could curtail the alliance’s ability to conduct surveillance on North Korean military activities north of the DMZ. Together with the removal of guard posts in the DMZ, North Korea may be better positioned to launch a surprise attack on South Korea.
 - **Have the two Koreas limited the United States’ options?** By eroding North Korea’s diplomatic and economic isolation, institutionalizing their rapprochement, and declaring
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- their desire for non-aggression and a peace declaration, the two Koreas over the past nine months may have limited the United States’ ability to return to its expansive “maximum pressure” campaign of 2017. They also may have further reduced the viability of a [U.S. military strike against North Korea](#), which the Trump Administration reportedly was considering in 2017, because it likely will be harder to gain support from South Korea. President Moon has stated that he seeks “an enduring peace regime” to enable “[the South and North to become the masters of Korean Peninsula issues](#) without getting pushed around by any international situation....”

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