



SEIZING A WINDOW OF
OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE ON
THE KOREAN PENINSULA

New Dynamics, New Opportunities

Author: Caroline Kearney

Edited: Mary Anderson, Rachel Gasser

Layout: Boonruang Song-ngam

Published: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, January 2019

Front cover photo: Cable News Network (CNN)

Back cover photo: Matthias Hangst/Getty Images

Seizing a Window of Opportunity for Peace on the Korean Peninsula

New Dynamics, New Opportunities

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

Acknowledgements

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the many Korean Peninsula experts and peace practitioners who reviewed and provided invaluable feedback to strengthen this analysis.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Executive Summary.....	5
Overview	7
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: Advancing the economy in response to domestic demand and international threats.....	10
The Republic of Korea: A desire for government reform and rapprochement with the DPRK	19
The United States: “America-first” foreign policy and a president’s desire for history-making diplomacy	25
Recommendations: A peace process too valuable to let collapse	31
Conclusion.....	37
Chronology of Key DPRK-ROK-US Diplomatic Relations: 2017-2018 ...	38



Photo: Yonhap News

Executive Summary

In 2018, a significant level of rapprochement was achieved between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States (US). This improvement in diplomatic relations was able to materialise due to the manner and timeline in which the domestic political events unfolded in each country paired with the decision by the three national leaders to seize the opportunity. This is a unique window of opportunity which must be carried forward immediately as this opening could expire as early as 2019.

The DPRK has taken concrete measures to demonstrate their dedication to a negotiation process with the ROK and the US, therefore the onus currently lies on the US to choose to participate in a bilateral negotiation process and offer the next concession. The US will need to offer security guarantees and the incremental lifting of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions in order for negotiations to move forward. The DPRK will need to continue to respond with corresponding measures to work towards the dismantlement of its nuclear and missile programs to satisfy US demands.

If the US fails to understand that it must also be at least a near equal participant in negotiations, stalemate will continue and the citizens and government leadership of the ROK and the DPRK will lose patience and this exceptional opportunity will be forfeited. However, peaceful relations on the Korean Peninsula are too valuable to wait another 11 or more years for the next diplomatic opening.



Photo: Evan Vucci, AP

Overview

In January 2018, a remarkable transformation began to occur in the Korean Peninsula Conflict. The political dynamics between the DPRK, the ROK and the US, began to shift from cycles of provocation to diplomatic engagement and cooperation. This overall improvement in relations has continued, albeit with its twists and turns, throughout the year and is highlighted by three inter-Korean summits held in Panmunjom and Pyongyang and a DPRK-US Summit held in Singapore.

The current inter-Korean and DPRK-US negotiations are two parallel windows of opportunity created by the culmination of domestic political events in each country over the past several years which have been seized upon by each country's leader. Not only is it unlikely that this opportunity would exist without these events but they also would not likely exist if these individual leaders were not in power.

It must also be acknowledged that this diplomatic opening will have an expiry date thus progress must be pursued immediately and consistently. With its stops and starts so far, the negotiation process will continue to be arduous and slow moving. However, persistence and perseverance are key, as patience from the domestic populations and leaders of the respective countries may soon run thin. The diplomatic process between the two Koreas has been moving forward at a considerable pace; however, its speed is constrained by the faltering parallel process between the DPRK and the US. Furthermore rapid progress in inter-Korean relations would involve financial transactions which requires exemptions or the lifting of UNSC sanctions, this in turn depends on the approval of the US.

If negotiations are too often deadlocked and the US does not provide proper security guarantees and relief from UNSC sanctions, Chairman Kim Jong Un may lose patience and decide to return to a focus on national security. This would involve shifting the main priority back to the advancement of the country's nuclear and missile weapons programs instead of endless tolerance for unilateral demands from the US. This could result in the DPRK also

turning its back on the ROK if the DPRK decides that the ROK is not making sufficient effort to progress inter-Korean relations and mediate the DPRK-US process.

In the ROK, President Moon Jae-in's approval rating has dropped rapidly, primarily due to a struggling economy, which will have a negative impact on his foreign policy mandate. The South Korean population will choose to place economic considerations of their own lives ahead of rapprochement with the DPRK, as was seen all too well during the Presidency of Roh Moo-hyun.

In the US, President Donald J. Trump's political party lost the majority of seats in the House of Representatives, likely leading to less political support from Congress on diplomacy with the DPRK as well as the initiation of multiple investigations into the Trump administration which will serve to distract and direct the President.

A review of the domestic political events in each country that have led to this fundamental shift in diplomatic relations emphasizes the importance of this moment. Furthermore, an understanding of the fragility of present negotiations demonstrates the need for the US and the ROK to make significant and irreversible progress towards the normalization of diplomatic relations with the DPRK in a timely manner.



Photo: Sputnik

Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Advancing the economy in response to domestic demand and international threats

Initial roots of marketisation in the domestic economy began with local farmers markets in the 1970s and significantly expanded during the country's famine which occurred from the early to late 1990s.¹ While this slow expansion of private markets has allowed for activities to increase until today, the intentional shift in focus to develop the domestic economy is traced back to the coming to power of Chairman Kim Jong Un in December 2011.

In 2012, during Chairman Kim's first public speech in office, he declared the objective to ensure that Korean people "not tighten their belts again and enjoy the wealth and prosperity of socialism as much as they like."² The following year, Chairman Kim announced the *byungjin* line, a parallel pursuit of nuclear weapons development and economic advancement.³ The DPRK implies through this line and subsequent statements that once the nuclear weapons program is complete and national security thus ensured, the country will be able to shift its efforts to focus on economic development. While the *byungjin* line did concentrate a large portion of GDP towards the nation's weapons program, it also improved the economy overall, particularly in Pyongyang.⁴

¹ Park, Hyeong-jung Park and Sahyun Choi. *Fiscal Segmentation and Economic Changes in North Korea*. Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) Study Series 14-05, 14-16. May 2014; Haggard Stephen and Marcus Noland. *Famine in North Korea. Markets, Aid, and Reform*. 2007. Columbia University Press.

² Gray, Kevin & Jong-Woon Lee. *Following in China's footsteps? The political economy of North Korean reform*, *The Pacific Review*, 30:1, 51-73, DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2015.1100666; *English transcript of Kim Jong Un's speech*. North Korea Tech. 18 April 2012. <https://www.northkoreatech.org/2012/04/18/english-transcript-of-kim-jong-uns-speech>

³ *Meeting of WPK Central Committee*. Korean Central News Agency. 31 March 2013. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201303/news31/2013033124ee.html>

⁴ The DPRK does not provide GDP information to the public and exact statistics are unknown. Despite possible declines in 2015 and 2017, experts agree that the DPRK economy has been growing since Kim Jong Un came to power. *Gross Domestic Product Estimates for North Korea in 2017*. 20 July 2018. <https://www.bok.or.kr/eng/bbs/E0000634/view.do?nttlId=10046123&menuNo=400069>; Lankov, Andrei. *North Korea under Kim Jong-un: Reforms without Openness*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. 6 June 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/06/north-korea-under-kim-jong-un-reforms-without-openness/>



Photo: Reuben Teo, Lonely Planet

Under Kim, the DPRK has invested heavily in improving the standard of living in Pyongyang as well as allowing for a “process of marketisation and de-facto privatization” of the economy.⁵ In Pyongyang, hundreds of thousands of new apartments have been built in modern neighborhoods, boutiques sell high-end foreign products, smartphones are becoming the norm and trendy restaurants with global cuisines are opening throughout the city.⁶

The DPRK leadership also overlooks private market activities and even allows them to flourish under an umbrella of government ministries, departments or army units. Private businesses are operated under the name of state-owned enterprises, but are now making most of the managerial decisions and receiving the majority of profits.⁷ There is also an increasing number of informal marketplaces selling food, medicine and other products with the majority of people relying on markets for their basic needs.⁸

Kim has also created and expanded upon special economic zones (SEZs) to experiment with economic models with the idea of eventually applying them to the wider economy. Under his predecessor there were only 4 SEZs, and under Kim, there are 25 currently in operation.⁹ SEZs have also provided the DPRK the opportunity to experiment between different types of economic models to determine the best options for various conditions. This expansion is one of several signals that Kim is prioritising the economy and searching for ways to advance the domestic economy.

Perhaps the most concrete example of policy reform has been the agricultural and industrial reforms implemented under Kim. The measures were initially announced in 2012 and then expanded upon in 2014.¹⁰ The agricultural

⁵ Ford, Glyn. *Talking to North Korea: Ending the Nuclear Standoff*, page 137. Pluto Press. 2018; Lankov, Andrei, Ward, Peter, Yoo, Ho-yeol, & Kim, Ji Young. *MAKING MONEY IN THE STATE: NORTH KOREA'S PSEUDO-STATE ENTERPRISES IN THE EARLY 2000s*. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 17(1), 51-67. doi:10.1017/jea.2016.30.

⁶ Ford, Glyn. *Talking to North Korea: Ending the Nuclear Standoff*, pages 137-138. Pluto Press. 2018.

⁷ Ward, Peter. *Market Reforms with North Korean Characteristics: Loosening the Grip on State-Owned Enterprises*. 38 North. 21 December 2017. <https://www.38north.org/2017/12/pward122117/>

⁸ Harris, Bryan. *Unveiling the North Korean economy*, by Byung-Yeon Kim. *The Financial Times*. 4 September 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/2de06fec-8d6a-11e7-9084-d0c17942ba93>

⁹ Ford, Glyn. *Talking to North Korea: Ending the Nuclear Standoff*, pages 137-138. Pluto Press. 2018.

¹⁰ Gray, Kevin and Jong-Woon Lee. *Following in China's footsteps? The political economy of North Korean reform*. *The Pacific Review*, 30:1, 51-73, DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2015.1100666.

reforms set out to increase incentives for farmers to grow more crops by reducing the size of work teams and providing them a larger share of the profit.¹¹ The industrial reforms provide more decision-making rights to managers in state-owned enterprises, such as which employees to hire and the right to trade and trade-related decisions.

These reforms are a promising sign, not only because they allow for higher wages and for some decision-making freedom, but also because these are quite similar to Chinese reforms made in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹² If the DPRK continues in this direction, it could follow the unspoken paths of China and Vietnam, and develop a similar but revised model that is tailored for its system and makes adjustments based on lessons learned by the other two countries.

However, the DPRK can only improve its economy and raise the standard of living for its citizens to a certain extent without foreign income and cooperation. Less than 20 percent of land in the DPRK is arable. This is not a sufficient amount to grow crops to feed a population of 25 million people (apart from one exceptional harvest in 2014), particularly with the use of out-dated farming equipment.¹³ Also, UNSC sanctions block the DPRK's primary exports, including coal, iron, iron ore, seafood and textiles. These sectors account for over 90% of the DPRK's publicly reported exports, restricting its ability to earn its own income.¹⁴

The agricultural obstacle coupled with international isolation and sanctions have created a serious humanitarian situation in the country. 10.5 million people (40 per cent of the population) are in need of aid and one quarter of children under five are stunted.¹⁵ There is also an impending tuberculosis (TB) crisis in the country with 190,000 patients at risk of losing treatment. The

¹¹ Gray, Kevin and Jong-Woon Lee. *Following in China's footsteps? The political economy of North Korean reform.*

¹² Gray, Kevin and Jong-Woon Lee. *Following in China's footsteps? The political economy of North Korean reform.*

¹³ *Agricultural land (% of land area).* The World Bank. 2015. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.ZS>; Spring Release. *The Economist.* 26 February 2015. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2015/02/26/spring-release>

¹⁴ *FACT SHEET: Resolution 2375 (2017) Strengthening Sanctions on North Korea.* United States Mission to the United Nations. 11 September 2017. <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7969>

¹⁵ *DPR Korea Needs and Priorities 2018.* UN Humanitarian Country Team. March 2018. http://kp.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/dprk/docs/unct_kp_NP2018.pdf

Global Fund previously provided 100 million USD in aid for TB patients, however, due to behind-the-scenes pressure from the US, they chose to withdraw from the country in July 2018.¹⁶ If this gap in funding is not filled it could lead to unquantifiable deaths.¹⁷

International organizations have been working to improve agricultural production and food security in the country; however, UNSC sanctions block imports of agricultural equipment and place heavy restrictions on banking channels which led to the collapse of the banking channel in 2018. These conditions have made it extremely difficult for agricultural organisations to continue their work and many have been forced to cease operations especially within the past year.¹⁸

Furthermore, TB diagnostic equipment, X-Ray machines, medical kits and other life-saving equipment and treatments have been held at the border for months while agents determine whether they meet sanctions exemptions despite containing metal and other components listed in sanctions resolutions. While humanitarian services are intended to be exempt, and the UNSC committee released new guidelines to clarify exemptions for medical use, strict interpretations have created obstacles too high for many international humanitarian organizations to continue their work.¹⁹

As regards US NGOs, in September of 2018, the US State Department stopped granting exemptions to humanitarian NGOs to visit the country to deliver humanitarian goods or carry out their projects. Most US NGOs have since been forced to shut down their programs inside the county.

¹⁶ Luse, Keith. *Maximum Pressure Could End U.S. Humanitarian Assistance to North Koreans*. National Committee on North Korea. 11 October 2018. <https://www.ncnk.org/node/1662>.

¹⁷ Talmadge, Eric. *North Korea running low on TB meds, experts fear epidemic*. Associated Press. 14 July 2018. <https://apnews.com/f748798fb371485aa41b9bbb3ed55156>; *United Nations Resident Coordinator for DPR Korea, "Statement to the 1718 Sanctions Committee on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."* 13 June 2018.

¹⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2397 (2017) and 2321 (2016) <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/resolutions>; Jasper, Dan. *Engaging North Korea, Vol. II: Recommendations from 65 years of humanitarian engagement*. American Friends Service Committee. June 2017. https://www.afsc.org/engagingNK_vol_ii

¹⁹ *Implementation Notice No. 7: Guidelines for Obtaining Exemptions to Deliver Humanitarian Assistance to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. 6 August 2018. United Nations Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/sites/www.un.org.sc.suborg/files/implementation_assistance_notice_7.pdf

Two months later, the US also began restricting humanitarian work at the UNSC level, by indefinitely holding requests for review from international NGOs that are required to request exemptions through the UNSC to ship humanitarian goods to the DPRK.²⁰ Blocking humanitarian assistance solely hurts ordinary people, not high-level government officials, and should not be associated as punishment on the government.

UNSC sanctions are US-led and cannot be lifted without US approval as a permanent member of the council. While the US has the responsibility to detangle the humanitarian from the political and announced in January 2019 that much of this work will be able to continue with the appropriate request, the DPRK will still need UNSC sanctions to be lifted to further advance its economy. It will not be able to do so without improving diplomatic relations with the US, which in turn depends on progress in DPRK-US negotiations on the nuclear issue.

Through the DPRK's overall economic trajectory and the *byungjin* line, it seems to be doing exactly this -- negotiating with the US in order to lift sanctions and open the economy to foreign trade and investment. In November 2017, the DPRK declared the nuclear weapons program a success, and one month later, the DPRK began to engage in diplomacy with the ROK. Kim offered dialogue in his 2018 New Year's Address by calling for improvements to the inter-Korean relationship and proposing to send a delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. The Moon administration accepted this offer and proposed discussions be held days later on the DPRK's participation in the 2018 Winter Olympics.

The successful diplomacy of high-level talks prior to and during the Olympics then led to the inter-Korean Summit held in Panmunjom on April 28, 2018, the first summit between Kim and Moon and the third inter-Korean summit ever held. The progress made between the two Korean leaders led to the DPRK-US Summit in Singapore on June 12.

²⁰ Nichols, Michelle. *U.N. approval for some North Korea aid in limbo as U.S. deliberates*. Reuters. 9 November 2018.

<https://in.reuters.com/article/northkorea-sanctions-un/u-n-approval-for-some-north-korea-aid-in-limbo-as-u-s-deliberates-idINKCN1ND2XK>

In April 2018, Kim officially declared the *byungjin* line a success and announced a new strategic line - a shift in national priority from a dual to a singular approach focusing on the economy.²¹ This official shift to “everything for the economy” in 2018 has been highly publicized by the government for both domestic and foreign audiences.²² State-owned media such as the Korean Central News Agency and Rodong Sinmun highlight Kim’s frequent visits to factories and farms to encourage efficiency and productivity.²³ Furthermore, during Kim Jong Un’s recent visit to Beijing in June 2018, he spent his second day touring a farming science centre, yet another indication his government is looking closely at Chinese models of economic reform.²⁴

The significance of the timing of the DPRK’s decision to engage in dialogue can also be understood by comparing Kim’s past attitudes towards engagement with the ROK and the US with the present attitude. While Moon is the first pro-engagement ROK president in 11 years, and the first since Kim Jong Un came to power in 2011, Moon did offer dialogue to the DPRK from Berlin in July 2017 before the nuclear program was complete, however, the DPRK did not accept.²⁵

In January 2018, the conditions for dialogue between the DPRK and the US were far from ideal. Trump and Kim engaged in exchanges of vitriolic threats throughout the second half of 2017.²⁶ If the DPRK were to engage in negotiations in response to US conciliatory behaviour, the offer would have come during the first half of 2017 or anytime during the administration of

²¹ Carlin, Robert. *Kim Jong Un’s New Strategic Line*. 38 North. 23 April 2018. <https://www.38north.org/2018/04/rcarlin042318/>; *3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK Held in Presence of Kim Jong Un*. Korean Central News Agency. 21 April 2018. <http://www.kcna.kp/kcna.user.article.retrieveNewsViewInfoList.kcmsf-this>

²² Carlin, Robert. *Kim Jong Un’s Risky Gambit*. 38 North. 21 August 2018. <https://www.38north.org/2018/08/rcarlin082118/>

²³ Cheng, Jonathan. *Touring North Korean Farms and Factories, Kim Jong Un Signals a Shift*. Wall Street Journal. 29 July 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/touring-north-korean-farms-and-factories-kim-jong-un-signals-a-shift-1532862001>

²⁴ *N. Korean leader Kim visits agriculture, infrastructure facilities in Beijing*. Yonhap News Agency. 20 June 2018. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2018/06/20/0200000000AEN20180620006251315.html>

²⁵ *Full text of Moon’s speech at the Korber Foundation..* The Korea Herald. 7 July 2017. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170707000032>

²⁶ Saba Hamedy and Joyce Tseng. *All the times President Trump has insulted North Korea*. CNN News. 9 March 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/22/politics/donald-trump-north-korea-insults-timeline/index.html>

former US President Barack Obama. However, the most significant exchange between the Obama administration and Kim Jong Un's leadership was the Leap Day Agreement which failed in 2012.²⁷

Furthermore, in 2018, the leadership's pattern of negotiation behaviour has demonstrated significantly more patience than witnessed in the past. Even after Trump threatened to cancel the Singapore summit, the statement from the first vice-minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK released on May 25 expressed patience, stating that they "have willingness to offer the US side time and opportunity" and that they "have the intent to sit with the US side to solve problems regardless of ways at any time."²⁸ This is a sharp contrast to the DPRK's aggressive responses to Trump's negative or threatening comments in 2017.²⁹

At present, it is in the DPRK's advantage to keep negotiations going while they determine the level of security guarantees and economic incentives that the US is prepared to offer in exchange for steps towards denuclearisation. However, the leadership's level of patience and eagerness to engage will not be open-ended, as Kim will need to demonstrate economic progress to the domestic audience. The leadership also closely observes the levels of public support for Moon and Trump in their respective countries, and if their policies of engagement lose popular support, and the US has not reciprocated with tangible offers, Kim may decide to end negotiations to avoid a certain failure.

²⁷ Carlin, Robert. *Details, Details: History Lessons from Negotiating with North Korea*. 38 North. 14 October 2016. <https://www.38north.org/2016/10/rcarlin101416/>

²⁸ *Statement by First Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK*. Korean Central News Agency. 25 May 2018.

²⁹ *Trump and Kim Jong-un, and the Names They've Called Each Other*. The New York Times. 9 March 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/world/asia/trump-kim-jong-un.html>



Photo: AFP

The Republic of Korea: A desire for government reform and rapprochement with the DPRK

In the summer of 2016, frustration grew over former ROK President Park Guen-hye's handling of certain domestic matters, such as allegations of influence-peddling, neglect during the sinking of the Sewol Ferry and the nature of her relationship with a long-time confidante who was not a presidential advisor but privy to confidential information and appeared to have undue influence over the President's decisions for the country.³⁰

South Korean citizens took to the streets to demonstrate their disapproval via peaceful protests. The movement evolved into the famous Candlelight Revolution, involving millions of South Korean citizens in more than a dozen cities and lasting for 20 consecutive weekends. It became the largest protest in the nation's history and one of the most well-respected protests witnessed in recent decades due to its size, non-violent nature and ability to directly impact government decisions.

The scale and momentum of the Candlelight Revolution drove the National Assembly to pass an impeachment motion which was later upheld by the Constitutional Court. Sixty days later, Moon Jae-in was elected as president based on his campaign promises to weed out corruption in the government, improve inter-Korean relations and revitalise the domestic economy. While foreign policy, including inter-Koreans relations, was not a central issue to the demonstrations, it was well known that Moon served as Chief of Staff under former ROK President Roh Moo-hyun, who carried forward former President Kim Dae Jung's 'Sunshine Policy' towards the DPRK.³¹ Furthermore, Moon narrowly lost the 2012 Presidential Election after campaigning on similar issues. By voting for Moon the people were also electing a policy of engagement and rapprochement towards the DPRK.

³⁰ Ock Hyun-ju. *Candle revolution: how candles led to Park's impeachment*. The Korea Herald. 9 December 2016. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20161209000458>

³¹ *Sunshine Policy for Peace & Cooperation*. Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea. May 2002. <http://www.unikorea.go.kr>

Since his election, Moon has worked tirelessly to pursue engagement with the DPRK and to convince Trump of the importance of doing the same. Moon laid months of groundwork to encourage DPRK participation in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang in the ROK. Together with the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the governor of Gangwon province, the Moon administration quietly delivered invitations and messages to the DPRK to encourage their participation by ensuring them that costs could be covered, security guaranteed and all other logistics would be handled.³² The IOC was concerned that existing tensions with the DPRK could cause a distraction or disturbance during the Olympic games. While this was also one of Moon's concerns, he was also aware that the DPRK's participation in the Olympics could open a wider door to inter-Korean engagement.

With Trump, Moon employed skilful diplomacy by balancing the maintenance of the ROK-US alliance with clear explanations that the administration's stance was to improve relations with the DPRK. During their first Summit in June 2017, Moon secured a phrase in the ROK-US official statement that the US would support the ROK's "leading role in fostering an environment for peaceful unification of the peninsula."³³ And later in the year, Moon congratulated Trump's effort for making America great again and then entered into a weapons purchasing agreement with the US.³⁴

As inter-Korean diplomacy began, Moon was able to continue to balance the relationship between the DPRK and the US, even at times of heightened tension. When Trump announced the cancellation of the DPRK-US summit, two weeks before it was scheduled to take place, the next day Kim invited Moon to meet who immediately accepted. The two Korean leaders held

³² *Several meetings led to Olympics breakthrough: Sources.* Korea Joongang Daily. 3 January 2018. http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/option/article_print.aspx; Perlez, Jane, Choe Sang-Hun and Rebecca R. Ruiz. *The Quiet Diplomacy to Save the Olympics in a Nuclear Standoff.* New York Times. 8 February 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/world/asia/north-korea-olympics.html>

³³ *Joint Statement between the United States and the Republic of Korea.* The White House. 30 June 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-united-states-republic-korea/>

³⁴ *Joint Press Release by the United States of America and the Republic of Korea.* The White House. 8 November 2017.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-press-release-united-states-america-republic-korea/>

their second summit and Moon acted as insider mediator to clarify the miscommunication between the DPRK and the US. The Singapore Summit was back on days later.

Moon again revived a stalled DPRK-US process through his third inter-Korean Summit with Kim held in September 2018. Trump had cancelled US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo's visit to the DPRK weeks earlier, but on the same day that the two Korean leaders signed the Pyongyang Joint Declaration, Pompeo announced the resumption of talks by inviting his DPRK counterpart to meet on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) meeting the next week.³⁵

Moon continued to demonstrate his understanding of the need to win Trump and his administration's approval for this process to continue to move forward. During Moon's visit to the US for the UNGA meetings, Moon prioritised an interview with Fox News, the President's preferred network. In the interview, he affirms the DPRK's commitment to denuclearise and humbly gives Trump the credit and praise for the progress on negotiations due to his decision to hold a summit with Kim in Singapore.³⁶

Following three successful inter-Korean summits, inter-Korean relations have moved forward rapidly and have included cooperation projects, cultural and sports exchanges and a military agreement to demilitarise the areas closest to the border.

³⁵ On the Outcome of Summit Meeting Between President Moon and Chairman Kim. U.S. Department of State. 19 September 2018. <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/09/286039.htm>

³⁶ Moon Jae-in tells Fox News he expects Trump-Kim meeting soon. Fox News. 25 September 2018. <https://video.foxnews.com/v/5840047018001/?#sp=show-clips>



Photo: Reuters

Reunions between separated Korean families resumed with 800 Korean family members spending time together over several days in Mt. Kumgang in the DPRK. The ROK's Ministry of Unification estimates that there are currently about 600,000 to 700,000 South Koreans with immediate or extended relatives in the DPRK, therefore this issue will need to continue to be addressed in future inter-Korean summits.

An inter-Korean liaison office was opened in Kaesong and 285 meetings were held between September and December 2018. An agreement has been made to connect roads, railways and waterways between the Koreas, inter-Korean sports and cultural exchanges continue and they are submitting a bid to jointly host the 2032 Olympic Games. Agreements also include plans to conduct joint excavations of the areas near the shared border to search for remains of soldiers from the war and other exchange activities.

While there has been some push back from the US, such as an initial block by the Commander of US Forces Korea for a joint railway inspection, the US states that it backs the inter-Korean military agreement signed in September 2018. The military agreement has so far seen the complete disarmament of the Joint Security Area (JSA), an area about 800-meters wide, and a plan to convert it into a visitor's centre. Ten guard posts have also been dismantled and removed from each side of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). And for the first time since the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, the two Korean militaries crossed each other's border to inspect and confirm the dismantlement of the guard posts. This was both a historic move and a tremendous confidence-building measure. This agreement also led the Koreas to implement a no-fly zone along the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) — all of these efforts are expected to expand through further negotiations.

It is clear that the majority of South Korean citizens support the pursuit of improving relations with the DPRK. The Panmunjom Declaration, signed after the first inter-Korean Summit between Kim and Moon, received an approval rating of 88%.³⁷

³⁷ [Han Gil Research] Moon has 85.7% approval. Panmunjom Declaration 88.4%. Daum News. <https://news.v.daum.net/v/20180430091444573>

However, while Moon has obtained the mandate to engage with the DPRK, over time, the patience of South Korean citizens will be tested. Recent opinion polls show that Moon's approval rating has dropped from a high of 83 percent after the signing the Panmunjom Declaration in April 2018 to below 50 percent from September 2018 through the end of the year.³⁸ This drop is largely due to domestic issues, in part due to allegations of corruption of his close colleagues, but particularly the still-sluggish domestic economy. This drop in approval reflects both frustration with a declining economy and a growing irritation with Moon's primary focus as President being placed on the improvement of DPRK-ROK relations.

History tends to repeat itself and the ROK was in a somewhat similar position during the presidential administration of Roh Moo-hyun in the mid 2000s. President Roh was a pro-engagement leader making diplomatic strides with the DPRK by carrying forward and expanding the 'Sunshine Policy' into his own 'Peace and Prosperity Policy.'³⁹ But his approval rating dropped to 11 per cent in the final year of his term. While the population still generally supported his policies of engagement towards the DPRK, the domestic economy was suffering, and South Koreans decided that the improvement of their daily lives was a higher priority than growing rapprochement with the DPRK.

Without improvements to the economy, as well as significant progress between the DPRK and the US, Moon could soon lose the popular support needed to continue inter-Korean diplomacy and cooperation. The next parliamentary election will be held in April 2020 and if Moon's popularity continues to slide, and his party cannot maintain the majority after the election, he could already become a lame duck President, providing major obstacles to his pro-engagement policy.

³⁸ *Moon's approval rating rebounds for first time in 10 weeks: poll.* Yonhap News Agency. 10 December 2018. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181210001100315>

³⁹ Kim, ChoongNam. *The Roh MooHyun Government's Policy Toward North Korea.* East-West Center Working Papers. No. 11, August 2005.

The United States: “America-first” foreign policy and a president’s desire for history-making diplomacy

While the reasons behind Trump’s victory during the 2016 US presidential election are many, one of those includes dissatisfaction among some American voters with former President Barack Obama’s domestic and foreign policies. Many of the Americans who voted for and continue to support Trump, promote a self-interested foreign policy, placing America’s interests first and significantly less importance on the relationships with the nation’s traditional allies.

Within the frame of “America first,” Trump has claimed that his diplomatic engagement with the DPRK is in the US national interest. In his speech following the Singapore Summit, Trump declared that diplomacy with the DPRK reduces the nuclear threat towards the US, can lead to additional cancellations of joint ROK-US military exercises which would be a cost-saving measure and may lead to the prospect of bringing home some US soldiers from the peninsula at some point in the future. These factors are presented as points of nationalism, energising his base. This justification along with his supporters’ trust have allowed him to move forward with the Singapore summit and a second DPRK-US summit early 2019.

While Trump’s rhetoric towards the DPRK during his campaign and first year in office were not consistent, his administration did begin negotiations with the DPRK almost immediately after assuming office. Joseph Yun, former US Special Representative to North Korea, was sent to the DPRK two months after Trump became president. Yun went to the DPRK to deliver the message that the US does not intend to be a threat but that denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula is essential.⁴⁰ Negotiations continued at this level with some progress, such as securing the release of one of the US prisoners in the DPRK. Following the ROK’s diplomatic leadership and success, the US was able to transition lower-level negotiations into talks at the highest levels of the US government.

⁴⁰ *NORTHKOREA CHRONOLOGY 2017*. Northeast Asia Cooperative Security Project. Social Science Research Council. 2017. <http://webarchive.ssrc.org/NK/NKCHRON%202017.pdf>



Donald J. Trump, Twitter

In regards to personal motivations, Trump's negotiations with Kim appear to be based on his desire to negotiate a history-making deal that no other president has been able to make and to achieve a deal that eluded Obama in particular.

Trump's unorthodox approach to foreign policy and quick acceptance of Kim's invitation for a summit has led the US out of possible war with the DPRK and toward détente. High-level dialogue to address security concerns have, for now, replaced threats of the use of nuclear weapons by both sides. It is highly unlikely that any other US president would or could have accepted such an invitation so quickly. And the previous cycle of provocation and counter provocations would have continued to define DPRK-US relations.

The fact that Trump has made an investment in diplomacy with the DPRK, and particularly so since the high-profile nature of the Singapore summit, and continues to communicate via Twitter that he is not in a rush, means he will not likely to pull out of negotiations easily. Also during the summit, Kim and Trump were able to build a level of trust and respect which is sustaining the process. However, there have been at least three periods of deadlock in the process between June and December 2018. Moon can only restart talks so many times and patience from both the DPRK and the US will run thin. Furthermore, multiple domestic factors could challenge Trump's ability to continue to pursue DPRK-US negotiations.

The majority of key persons making decisions on the Korean Peninsula issue within the Trump administration, US Congress and US government-supported think tanks are at best highly skeptical of the DPRK and at worse sabotaging the process. One of the most influential of these is National Security Advisor John Bolton. Bolton has a long-standing tense relationship with the DPRK and continues to try to sabotage talks.⁴¹ Because he provides the president with daily briefings, his stance toward the DPRK could undermine the continuation of talks. Within that spectrum are other highly influential members of the administration who are very skeptical of the DPRK's commitments, such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

⁴¹ Saunders, Elizabeth. *This is why North Korea reacted so strongly to Bolton's mention of the 'Libya model.'* The Washington Post. 17 May 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/05/17/this-is-why-north-korea-reacted-so-strongly-to-boltons-mention-of-the-libya-model/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9b0267b32749

While Trump and Kim were able to establish a level of trust during the Singapore Summit, the DPRK has expressed that the talks since taken forward by Pompeo and the State Department have only offered “gangster-like” or “robber-like” conditions, running counter to their understanding of the conversation held between the two heads-of-state. They understood that Trump had agreed to build trust with the DPRK through a process of simultaneous, confidence-building measures contributed by both sides over a period of time, including the signing of a declaration to end the war.⁴²

However, as the US has since only cancelled two joint military exercises and continually asks the DPRK to take additional steps or even achieve final, fully verified denuclearisation before the US offers any additional security guarantees or any lifting of sanctions. In response, the DPRK has stated that they feel as though they were robbed of the promises made to them in Singapore. The present ongoing conflict is a result of mounting distrust over a period of 73 years, therefore rebuilding trust through a series of confidence-building measures over time is a reasonable proposal as it cannot be rebuilt overnight.

Furthermore, as negotiations have been taken forward by the administration, and Trump does not appear to have complete influence over them, the DPRK is becoming increasingly concerned about the disconnect between Trump and his staff and Trump’s ability to deliver on the understandings reached at the summit.

Trump’s ability to continue negotiations may also be impeded by the ongoing investigation by the US Department of Justice into alleged attempts by the Russian government to influence American voters prior to the 2016 presidential election, possible links between Trump’s campaign and the Russian government, as well as investigations into the Trump family’s financial dealings, all of which have the possibility of implicating Trump for wrongdoing.

⁴²*FM Spokesman on DPRK-U.S. High-level Talks*. Korean Central News Agency. 7 July 2018. <http://www.kcna.kp/kcna.user.article.retrieveNewsViewInfoList.kcmsf#this>

In November 2018, the Democrats took back the US House of Representatives from the Republicans in the US Congressional midterm elections. This change will likely lead to resistance from the House against Trump's policy of engagement towards the DPRK as well as allowing the House to launch multiple investigations into Trump's connections to Russia and his financial matters.

Finally, campaign season for the 2020 presidential election will begin in the spring of 2019 and Trump will need to start proving more progress with the DPRK than at present to win voters support for re-election. All of these factors could provide a distraction and lessen Trump's attention and time for pursuing serious negotiations with the DPRK.



Recommendations: A peace process too valuable to let collapse

Over the past several years, the domestic political events in the DPRK, the ROK and the US have provided these nations' leaders an opportunity to move this peace process forward for the first time in 11 years. While they have taken important initial steps, their mandate to continue negotiations will have an expiry date which could occur soon after the second DPRK-US Summit expected to be held early 2019. The DPRK and the US will be re-evaluating their policies every few months and if continued deadlocks continue after the second summit, it could become extremely difficult for both leaders to justify the need for ongoing negotiations to their administrations. To unlock the process the following steps must be immediately taken:

1. Decouple humanitarian assistance from the political process

The first and most crucial step is for the US to immediately decouple humanitarian work in the country from the political disagreement between the two governments. The US needs to immediately and permanently allow American and international humanitarian NGOs to resume their life-saving activities inside the country. The US government, as well as other members of the UNSC, should not link a dire humanitarian situation which will result in the deaths of tens of thousands of ordinary people to the US government's obsession over when, how and if the DPRK will denuclearise. Ordinary people cannot control the DPRK leadership's decisions and should not be punished for it.

There is a glimmer of hope that humanitarian assistance will be allowed to restart early 2019. After the US special representative on North Korea policy, Stephen Biegun, visited Seoul in December 2018, he stated that the government will re-evaluate its ban on citizens' travel to the DPRK early 2019 in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid by American NGOs.⁴³

⁴³ *Remarks on Humanitarian Assistance to the DPRK*. US Department of State. 19 December 2018. <https://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2018/12/288192.htm>

Additionally, after blocking such medicines, the US agreed to assist the ROK to deliver flu medication to the DPRK. These are positive and necessary policy reversals that must be continued regardless of the DPRK's decisions on denuclearisation. While these measures are critical, they should be viewed as mandatory not as a concession in a negotiation process.

Furthermore, while the US was the initial instigator of UNSC sanctions on the DPRK, it is also the responsibility of other countries that support and comply with sanctions and have influence in the UNSC and 1718 Sanctions Committee to consider the impact of their actions on the lives of ordinary people.

UN member countries sitting on the UNSC and 1718 Sanctions Committee may not have the power to lift sanctions without US consent, but they can go on the record to condemn the negative consequences of UNSC sanctions. Countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, France and Russia must be commended for making generous donations to UN humanitarian assistance funds for the DPRK. While this will allow UN humanitarian agencies the ability to provide life-saving medicine and food, it also does not absolve the same countries that support UNSC sanctions from the responsibility for the negative and unintended consequences of sanctions on people in need of aid.

The UN humanitarian country team cited that 60,000 children could be at risk of starvation due to the negative effects of sanctions.⁴⁴ Impact studies will eventually be carried out and countries that are in positions of influence and pride themselves on high standards of humanitarian assistance should contemplate which side of history they want to be on when impact studies are released. Examples of negatives effects on ordinary people from economic sanctions can be seen in impact studies conducted in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *DPR Korea Needs and Priorities 2018*. UN Humanitarian Country Team. March 2018.

⁴⁵ *Vulnerability And Humanitarian Implications of UN Security Council Sanctions in Afghanistan*. OFFICE OF THE UN COORDINATOR FOR AFGHANISTAN. December 2000. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A5B0543784BAE0C0852569B3007A8FBB-afgsanc.pdf>; Moret, Erica S. *Humanitarian impact of economic sanctions on Iran and Syria*. 2015; *European Security*, 24:1, 120-140, DOI: 10.1080/09662839.2014.893427; Wallenstein, Peter, Carina Staibano and Mikael Eriksson. *The 2004 Roundtable on UN Sanctions against Iraq: Lessons Learned*. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. 2005. http://pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/653/c_653520-1_1-k_iraqreport_050210.pdf

2. Remove obstacles and support the progress of inter-Korean relations regardless of the status of DPRK–US nuclear negotiations

Inter-Korean relations have been restricted from advancing more quickly due to economic restrictions from UNSC sanctions. As of late 2018, the UNSC and the US granted the ROK exemptions from sanctions to open an inter-Korean liaison office, conduct an inter-Korean railway study, and to hold a railway ground breaking ceremony. These activities should be allowed to continue as this conflict is not solely a disagreement between the DPRK and the US over the DPRK's possession of nuclear weapons, but more importantly it is an ongoing division of the two Koreas.

The ROK would carry the highest level of risk if the DPRK were to use nuclear weapons as they are closest in proximity and have 28,500 U.S. forces based in the country. However, the Moon administration was democratically elected and 88% of the South Korean population supported the Panmunjom Declaration in April of this year. If the country that holds the highest risk of nuclear war wants to reconcile with the DPRK, it is not for the US, the UNSC, the EU or other members of the international community to block inter-Korean reconciliation, but to accompany and support the process.

3. The US should take the next step by engaging in confidence-building measures with the DPRK to strengthen and sustain the negotiation process

The DPRK has already taken several steps to move negotiations forward. They have suspended missile and nuclear tests and dismantled entrances to a nuclear site and a satellite-launching pad. They also returned the remains of 55 US service personnel killed during the Korean War and released five US prisoners. At the signing of the inter-Korean Pyongyang Declaration in September 2018, the DPRK committed to dismantle a missile engine test site and its launch pad under the observation of international experts.

The Declaration also states that they are willing to take additional steps, such as the permanent dismantlement of nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, if the US also takes corresponding measures. Yongbyon is the primary nuclear facility

and its permanent dismantlement would be a highly significant measure and the US should offer equal concessions to achieve this step.

To date, the US has cancelled two joint military exercises and has made other minor concessions such as granting exemptions from UNSC sanctions for inter-Korean relations to advance. Therefore the onus is on the Trump administration to take additional steps to break the current impasse in negotiations. In Singapore, Trump committed to provide the DPRK with security guarantees and to build a peace regime on the peninsula, which the DPRK understood to include an 'End-of-War' Declaration.

The US continues to perceive this conflict as a problem solely created by the DPRK thus demanding they take additional measures towards denuclearisation to prove themselves trustworthy. However, the US has also played a role as aggressor through the decades and is equally viewed as unreliable by the DPRK.⁴⁶ From this perspective, expecting the DPRK to destroy their deterrence without any security guarantees from the US and any level of trust built between the two countries is unreasonable. The US should pause for a moment, attempt to understand the DPRK's perspective to some extent and become an active participant in the negotiation process.

The DPRK calls for fulfilment of the promises made in Singapore through a series of confidence-building measures (CBMs) such as a declaration to end the Korean War, the lifting of at least some UNSC sanctions, especially those that exacerbate the humanitarian situation. Confidence-building measures such as those outlined in the inter-Korean Summits as well as the return of US service personnel remains from the DPRK to the US are exemplary of the types of CBMs that the DPRK and the US can engage in to build trust.

Particularly CBMs that do not solely focus on the nuclear issue can be an effective tool to strengthen negotiations.⁴⁷ When nuclear negotiations stall, CBMs are an opportunity to continue dialogue and cooperation and maintain

⁴⁶ Kearney, Caroline *Strengthening Understanding through Dialogue: A Peacebuilding Approach to the Korean Peninsula Conflict*, Annex 2, page 79. Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. May 2017. <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/170512-Strengthening-Understanding-Through-Dialogue.pdf>

⁴⁷ Mason, Simon J. A. and Matthias Siegfried. *Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes*. In: *Managing Peace Processes: Process related questions. A handbook for AU practitioners*, Volume 1, African Union and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2013: 57-77. http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/AU_Handbook_Confidence_Building_Measures.pdf

the strengthening of trust instead of halting engagement on all fronts. Additional confidence building measures can include opening US liaison offices in the DPRK, cancelling future ROK-US military exercises, DPRK-US educational and cultural exchanges and allowing at least some UNSC sanctions to be lifted.

The US' current stance is that the DPRK must first achieve final, fully verified denuclearisation before the UNSC can lift any sanctions.⁴⁸ However, the purpose of placing sanctions on the DPRK's weapons program would have been twofold - to place punitive measures on the leadership and to provide leverage to encourage down scaling and eventual destruction of the weapons programs. In order for sanctions to act as leverage, the US will have to adjust its approach and allow for the lifting of certain sanctions in response to concrete and equivalent steps from the DPRK. Unilateral demands from the US thus far have only led to impasse and it is time for a new approach.

One of the US demands has been for the DPRK to provide a full and complete list of nuclear facilities. However, the DPRK has already stated that this is too risky. If negotiations turn sour, the US could use this list for pre-emptive attacks.⁴⁹ Due to the risk, even if a list was provided, it would be to no surprise if some sites weren't included for the DPRK's own safety. Furthermore, this declaration would be immediately followed by verification, which would be time consuming and labour intensive.⁵⁰

A more promising starting point would be to ask the DPRK to begin with halting the production of new nuclear weapons and missiles. The DPRK could suspend the production of fissile material and provide a declaration of the location of these production sites.⁵¹ After freezing and verification, the process would move on to involve the dismantlement of facilities accompanied by international verification.

⁴⁸ *Pompeo says North Korea sanctions to remain until complete denuclearisation*. Reuters. 14 June 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa/pompeo-says-north-korea-sanctions-to-remain-until-complete-denuclearisation-idUSKBN1JA07O>

⁴⁹ *Bad memories of 'confession diplomacy' could be a reason for N.K.'s refusal to declare nuclear program: expert*. Yonhap News Agency. 22 November 2018. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181122009900325>

⁵⁰ Hecker, Siegfried S. *Why Insisting on a North Korean Nuclear Declaration Up Front is a Big Mistake*. 38 North. <https://www.38north.org/2018/11/shecker112818/>

⁵¹ Sigal, Leon V. *Toward a Ban on Deployment and Production of Kim's Missiles*. 38 North. 5 November 2018. <https://www.38north.org/2018/11/lsigal110518/>

As the DPRK closes nuclear and missile testing sites and allows international inspectors to verify said closures, the UNSC could lift economic sanctions as they relate to those closures. For example, UN resolution 2375 was passed in September 2017 in response to the DPRK's nuclear test that month. The resolution restricts the supply, sell or transfer of crude oil to the DPRK above a certain limit. As the DPRK freezes production of certain nuclear facilities and verification is completed, the restriction on crude oil could be lifted or modified to allow for a larger amount to be traded.

Another method for lifting sanctions is to remove those that have the most negative impact on ordinary people. Banning weapons and luxury items is one thing, but blocking the textile industry has risked placing more than 100,000 women out of jobs.⁵² Sanctions should also be lifted to allow farming and medical equipment to be imported and to lift sanctions on industries that feed and employ ordinary people, such as fishing exports.

⁵²Fifield, Anna. *Ban on North Korean clothing exports will hurt women the most, experts say*. The Washington Post. 17 September 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ban-on-north-korean-clothing-exports-will-hurt-women-the-most-experts-say/2017/09/16/2a6ec716-995c-11e7-a527-3573bd073e02_story.html?utm_term=.22d8ecdefc36



photo: Franck Fife, AFP, Getty Images

Conclusion

The domestic political events and the three leaders of the DPRK, the ROK and the US have allowed for the extraordinary diplomatic developments of the past year to occur. However, this opportunity must be seized as the mandate of the three leaders and patience of their citizens will soon expire.

The 73-year division of the Korean people is too tragic, the breakout of war too risky and peaceful relations on the Korean peninsula too valuable to allow negotiations to collapse yet again. Despite heavy restrictions by the UNSC, the two Koreas have taken the lead in the peace process by utilising their creativity to engage in CBMs to build trust between their two countries. The Korean people have demonstrated that they are determined to move forward with reconciliation of the two countries. The international community does not have the jurisdiction or the justification to force the Korean people to wait an indefinite amount of time for the next window of opportunity.

This diplomatic opening provides the US an opportunity to resolve 73 years of tension and mistrust. The US must capitalise on this unique opportunity and participate in negotiations by engaging in CBMs to build trust and by offering security guarantees and sanctions relief to the DPRK. In turn, the DPRK will need to respond by taking concrete measures to first freeze and then dismantle its nuclear and missile programs.

Chronology of Key DPRK-ROK-US Diplomatic Relations: 2017 - 2018⁵³

2017

12 February	DPRK tests new ballistic missile, the Pukguksong-2
6 March	DPRK launches 4 ballistic missiles which land in Japan's economic exclusion zone, 300 kilometers off the coast of Japan
5 April	DPRK tests an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM)
16 April	DPRK tests Hwasong-12 IRBM
2 May	US' Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system becomes operational in the ROK
10 May	Moon Jae-in takes office as president
14 May	DPRK launches Hwasong-12 IRBM
26 May	ROK approves person-to-person civic contact with DPRK
1 June	US imposes sanctions on individuals and entities linked to the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs
5 June	DPRK refuses visit from ROK humanitarian aid organization citing Seoul's support for recent UNSC sanctions resolution

⁵³ *Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy*. Arms Control Association, December 2018. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>;

For years previous see: Annex 1: Highlights of US - DPRK - ROK Relations: 1988 to 2016 in Kearney, Caroline. *Strengthening Understanding through Dialogue: A Peacebuilding Approach to the Korean Peninsula Conflict*. The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, May 2017. <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/170512-Strengthening-Understanding-Through-Dialogue.pdf>;

26 June	ROK approves medical supplies to DPRK
29 – 30 June	Moon Jae-in meets with Trump in Washington, DC for their first summit
4 July	DPRK launches Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)
6 July	Moon gives speech from Berlin and offers to meet Chairman Kim Jong Un “at any time at any place.” No official response from the DPRK is received.
17 July	ROK proposes military and humanitarian talks to the DPRK
28 July	DPRK launches Hwasong-14 ICBM
5 August	UN Security Council passes Sanctions Resolution 2371 on the DPRK placing a complete ban on the export of coal, iron, seafood and lead in response to July ICBM tests
7 August	DPRK state media said it would take "thousands-fold" revenge against the US in response to the latest round of UNSC sanctions
8 August	Trump told reporters that "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States.... they will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen."
9 August	DPRK media statement declares that the military is reviewing a plan to create an "enveloping fire" around Guam, a US territory
25 August	DPRK tests 3 short-range ballistic missiles
28 August	DPRK launches Hwasong-12 IRBM Trump declares that “all options are on the table”

1 September	US bans its citizens from traveling to the DPRK on US passports. The ban states that special validation passports to travel to the DPRK may be granted for professional journalists, humanitarian assistance and visits in the “US national interest”
3 September	DPRK conducts sixth nuclear test
11 September	UNSC passes UNSCR 2375 which includes a ban on textile exports and a cap on refined petroleum product imports
15 September	DPRK launches Hwasong-12 IRBM
19 September	In Trump’s address to the UN General Assembly, he threatens to “totally destroy North Korea,” if the US is forced to defend itself or its allies and that “Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime”
21 September	Trump issues an executive order imposing sanctions on entities that facilitate financial transactions and trade with the DPRK
22 September	Kim, referring to Trump, states, “I will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged US dotard with fire”
23 September	US B1-B strategic bombers fly near the DPRK’s coast Trump tweets that the DPRK “wouldn’t be around much longer” if the DPRK Foreign Minister echoes “Little Rocket Man”
7 November	Trump gives speech from ROK National Assembly stating, “All responsible nations must join forces to isolate the brutal regime of North Korea — to deny it any form of support, supply or acceptance. The longer we wait, the greater the danger grows, and the fewer the options become”
8 November	Moon and Trump hold summit in Seoul
20 November	Trump officially designates DPRK as state sponsor of terrorism

- 29 November DPRK launches Hwasong-14 ICBM
- 29 November Kim Jong Un states the DPRK “finally realised the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force”
- 22 December UNSC adopts Resolution 2397 imposing sanctions on the DPRK to cut refined petroleum imports by 90 percent and expelling DPRK citizen workers from other countries within the next 2 years

2018

- 1 January Kim offers dialogue by calling for improvements to inter-Korean relations and proposing to send a delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang
- Kim also states that he has a nuclear button on his desk and all of the US mainland is within the range of the DPRK’s nuclear strike
- 2 January Moon Jae-in offers high-level talks with the DPRK, the first high-level talks since 2015
- Trump states that he too has a nuclear button on his desk
- 9 January Inter-Korean high-level talks lead the DPRK to agree to send a delegation to the 2018 Winter Olympics
- 9 February High-level DPRK officials join sports and cheer delegations to the Winter Olympics
- 10 February Invitation for an inter-Korean Summit is delivered from Kim Jong Un to Moon Jae-in
- 6 March Two Koreas agree to hold first summit between Kim and Moon and the third inter-Korean summit ever

1 April (approximately)	Kim and Pompeo hold a secret meeting in Pyongyang to discuss a possible DPRK–US summit
27 April	Third inter-Korean summit ever and first summit between Kim and Moon is held in Panmunjom The two Koreas sign the Panmunjom Declaration
8 May	DPRK releases three detained US citizens
24 May	DPRK reports that it destroyed its nuclear testing site at Punggye-ri, setting off explosions to tunnels that could have been used to test nuclear weapons Trump cancels the DPRK-US summit scheduled for June 12 in response to “tremendous anger and hostility” displayed by the DPRK in a statement the previous day
25 May	DPRK first minister of foreign affairs states that the DPRK "has the intent to sit with the U.S. side regardless of ways at any time"
26 May	Kim and Moon meet at Panmunjom for surprise second summit to resuscitate DPRK–US talks and to plan high-level inter-Korean Red Cross talks
1 June	After meeting with DPRK General Kim Yong Chol at the White House, Trump announces that the DPRK-US summit will take place as originally scheduled on June 12
12 June	Kim and Trump hold the first ever DPRK–US summit in Singapore and sign a joint declaration to establish new relations and build a stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula
5-7 July	Pompeo meets with DPRK counterpart Kim Yong Chol in Pyongyang

27 July	The remains of 55 US service personnel who died during the Korean War are returned to the US – as promised during the Singapore Summit
24 August	Trump cancels Pompeo's scheduled trip to Pyongyang citing insufficient progress on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula
September	US stops granting exemptions to US humanitarian NGOs to visit the DPRK
14 September	Inter-Korean liaison office opened in Kaesong, DPRK
18 – 20 September	Kim and Moon meet for their third summit and fifth-ever inter-Korean Summit held in Pyongyang
19 September	Kim and Moon sign the Pyongyang Joint Declaration The Joint Declaration includes military agreement detailing confidence-building measures to take place over the coming months to demilitarise certain sections of the DMZ
26 September	Pompeo accepts invitation from Kim to visit Pyongyang. (Follows the inter-Korean summit and a DPRK-US meeting on sidelines of UNGA meeting)
29 September	DPRK Foreign Minister speaks from UNGA meeting and attributes recent deadlock to lack of corresponding measures from US
7 October	Pompeo meets with Kim in Pyongyang
19 October	ROK-US cancel joint military exercises scheduled for December
25 October	The two Koreas and the UN Command complete removal of firearms and troops from the Joint Security Area (JSA) in Panmunjom (as agreed to in the Panmunjom Declaration)

1 November	Inter-Korean military agreement goes into effect to halt and prevent hostile activities on land and sea near the shared border
2 November	DPRK and ROK agree to submit bid on co-hosting 2032 Summer Olympics
7 November	DPRK and US cancel meeting scheduled for the following day in New York The two Koreas agree to establish joint response system for the diagnosis and prevention of tuberculosis (TB) and malaria
9 November	Announcement that the US has been delaying approval of several requests for UNSC sanctions exemptions to deliver tractors, spare parts and other goods needed for humanitarian relief in the DPRK
22 November	The two Koreas connect road inside the DMZ to support joint project to excavate Korean War remains
24 November	UNSC issues sanctions waiver to allow for an inter-Korean study to connect and advance railways between the Koreas
29 November	DPRK and ROK begin 16-day joint railway study, marking first time in 10 years a ROK train has crossed the border
5 December	Head of US CIA Korea Mission Center meets with DPRK officials at Panmunjom
12 December	The 2 Koreas cross the Military Demarcation Line to inspect dismantlement and disarmament of 11 guard posts on both sides (first cross-inspection since creation of border)
19 December	US states it will re-evaluate its ban on American citizens' travel to DPRK to facilitate aid groups' delivery of humanitarian assistance
21 December	US approves inter-Korean railway ground breaking ceremony



The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies is home to a range of interconnected programmes that promote the advancement of peace processes, research and learning. It creates opportunities for practitioners, students, academics and analysts to access information and resources that are contextually grounded.

www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org