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# The 2018 Singapore Summit: A Milestone towards Solution to the Korean Crisis?

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The case of Korean Conflict has been one of the hot topics in International Relations. It is especially relevant today, as talks about the possibility of denuclearization of the North Korea were recently held at the Singapore Summit. Once again, the possibility shows up for the 65 years old conflict to be resolved, though one has to realize that the process of eliminating hostilities and disputes on Korean Peninsula will take longer time. One of the reasons that makes this case so complicated is the fact that interests of many international actors are intersected in Korea.

The first part of this paper will focus on the steps that have been taken so far in order to resolve the conflict and to establish a lasting peace. Thus, we will mention the inter-Korean summits of years 2000 and 2007. The following section will talk about the events of the Korean Olympic Games where political representatives of North and South Korea showed willingness for a dialogue in a symbolic context. One of the key factors to look into is the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visits to the North Korea, and also, the 3rd inter-Korean summit of April 2018, where the leaders of North and South Korea held talks and have reached a joint statement. Finally, there will be analysis of the recent denuclearization summit, where a joint agreement was signed by the US President Donald Trump and

the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Naturally, the removal of nuclear missiles from North Korea won't happen in a single day after the summit, but the fact that leaders were willing to hold such significant summit together shows signs of a certain progress and leaves hope for the solution of this long conflict.

## Korean Summits of 2000 & 2007

Since the armistice negotiations of 1953-54, the Korean Peninsula has been officially divided into North and South (Boose 2000: 114-116). Even though the agreement was signed by both parties, there have been several attempts of invasion from the North since then. The aggression and hostilities haven't ceased on either side (Boose 2000: 116). Nevertheless, over those 65 years, there were several attempts of negotiations and peace talks at the Korean Demilitarized Zone. The first step towards the history of peace talks between Koreas took place in 2000 (Shin 2018). 18 years ago, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il met in Pyongyang to hold a first inter-Korean Summit. This was the first time for the North and South Korean leaders held a meeting in 50 years since the Korean War. The adopted peace agreement had several concrete ideas regarding the Korean re-unification (United States Institute of Peace 2000) such as the government type model; further

cooperation in spheres such as cultural, economic, health, and environment; working together to overcome political-ideological differences, to reduce military tensions, and to create a special peace zone. After the summit, there were series of reunification programs of families that were separated by the Korean War at the beginning of 50 s (Shin 2018). Kim Dae-jung won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his efforts.

This summit was part of the famous "Sunshine Policy", which nowadays is perceived by many as a failed attempt (Park, 2017) (although, there is a possibility of its revival after the recent summit). This program was meant to promote peace in Korean Peninsula by reducing armed tensions and promote joint cooperation. However, despite the diplomatic effort, many promises that came from the North Korean regime were left unfulfilled. Moreover, North Korea continued to pursue its nuclear program. As it later turned out, the summit was not particularly achieved because of both countries willingness to participate. Three years after, it was revealed that the North Korean government was bribed by the South to allow for the meeting to take place (The New York Times, 2003).

The second summit of the year 2007 was supposed to re-affirm statement of the 2000 inter-Korean summit (Shin 2018). Roh Moo-hyun, the President of South Korean who shared Kim Dae-jung's liberal ideas, held a meeting with Kim Jong-il in 2007. The summit took place as a result of diplomatic efforts of the six countries which were supposed to lead denuclearisation talks. Those six

states (USA, China, Russia, Japan, North and South Korea) were working on an implementation of a denuclearization deal, according to which Pyongyang had to give up its pursuit of nuclear programme (Shin 2018). In return, North Korea should have been released from diplomatic isolation and receive a significant amount of economic aid. At the end of the summit, an eight-point statement was created, which was based upon the key principals of the previous 2000 declaration (Shin 2018). Unfortunately, this summit was not able to stop North Korea's nuclear development program. Furthermore, the next South Korean government decided to abolish the "Sunshine Policy" and resort to hardline approach (VOA 2010).

### A New Era of Korean Détente

Roughly 11 years after the second summit, the South Korean Olympic Games took place. Usually, Olympic Games hold strong symbolic meanings and the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang were no exception. Alongside other symbolical aspects, the world witnessed a truly unique gesture from the North and South Korean athletes when they participated as a united team. Moreover, sister of Kim Jong-un visited the South Korean President Moon Jae-in. She delivered a message from the North Korean leader stating that the South Korean President was invited to North (Fifield and Parker 2018). Shortly after the Olympics, it was announced that the 3<sup>rd</sup> inter-Korean Summit would be held.

In April 2018, the Chairman of Democratic People's Republic of Korea Kim Jong-un, and the President of the South Korea, Moon Jae-in, hold a meeting in a village near the Korean DMZ (Campbell 2018) during which it was agreed that a summit will be held later in the year 2018 to start the process of Korean Peninsula's denuclearization. Together with that, the leaders of both countries pledged to further cooperation between each other and reduce the military tensions that have been escalating years before. Once again, it was agreed upon to later transform the Korean Armistice Agreement into a full peace treaty to formally end the Korean War (Campbell 2018).

Compared to previous two summits, the third one had a pure symbolic meaning, and therefore it was not as influential as the first one. The nuclear testing programs have been paused for now, though they might resume soon just as it happened before. Apart from that there was an evident disagreement between North and South Korea over the precise meaning of "denuclearization"(Campbell 2018). The South believed that both sides should have reduced nuclear tensions, with North Korea making more effort. Kim Jong-un, however, viewed that "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" meant reducing nuclear capabilities of the South Korean-US side mainly.

### The 2018 Singapore Summit

Shortly after the 3<sup>rd</sup> inter-Korean summit, it was announced that the US

President Donald Trump would be holding meeting with the North Korean leader regarding the denuclearization program. However, several issues came up. First of all, there were still questions regarding the actual process of denuclearization, which required further clarification. Secondly, in May Donald Trump cancelled his scheduled travel to Singapore (where the denuclearization summit was planned to be held) in an open letter to Kim Jong-un (Morris 2018). Below the typical 'thanking passage' of the letter, Trump openly blamed the North Korean side for expressing hostile rhetoric towards the USA and said that it would be a "missed opportunity" for both countries, as well as, for the rest of the world to hold the peace talks (Morris 2018). Nevertheless, in the last two paragraphs, Trump stated that he would be still looking forward to dialogue and meeting Kim Jong-un in person, despite the circumstances. He also thanked the North Korean leader for releasing three American hostages and allowing them to return home, saying it was a "beautiful gesture" (Morris 2018). Together with this statement, Trump added that if Kim Jong-un changed his anti-US rhetoric, then the American side would gladly reconsider the meeting.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2018, the US President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea held a first historic summit in Singapore as it was originally planned (Reuters 2018). The in-depth talks primarily focused on launching of new US-DPRK relations and ensuring of a long-term peace on the Korean

Peninsula. Both sides expressed their commitment to the cause. Donald Trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK, while Kim Jong-un reaffirmed his firm position regarding the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. At the end of the summit a joint statement was released where the following points are supposed to be the main action plan for the actors (Reuters 2018):

- The United States and the DPRK commit to establish new US-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the people of the two countries for peace and prosperity.
- The United States and DPRK will join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.
- Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula
- The United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

Naturally, this summit can be considered as one of the major steps in the peace-building process. Now, the crucial task for the United States and the DPRK is to continue their pursuit for this mutual goal and further cooperation in this sphere as the direct dialogue was already established. As stated after the summit, the both countries want to maintain the dialogue through a series of follow-on

negotiations, led by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and a relevant high-level DPRK official, to implement the outcomes of the US-DPRK summit. The groundwork for actual relation-building was prepared and concrete actions need to be taken.

Despite a significant achievement, there are still many questions left. How exactly the US-DPRK relations will manifest? How will be the denuclearization process completed? How will nuclear capabilities be reduced proportionally? For now, just one thing is clear. The US sanctions on North Korea will continue to be implemented until the concrete results are presented.

### Mixed Reactions to the Summit

Apart from those questions, there have been different remarks/opinions regarding the meeting. While some, especially South Korean side, see this as a major historical achievement in peace sector and possibly the solution of the last conflict from the Cold War era, others are viewing this quite sceptically (Ma 2018). Some think that the US will not honour the deal and be the first to back from the agreement. To support their statement, they bring the argument of Iranian case, where the US recently withdrew from the JCPOA, while all the remaining major powers to this day try to salvage this nuclear agreement (RFE/RL, 2018). Some even argue that Donald Trump's 'friendly' attitude with the Korean leader during the summit, almost seems like a support of the dictator regime, which is infamous for human rights violations (Ma, 2018).

However, to draw a historic parallel, the so-called 'friendly' attitude of the US President towards Kim Jong-un in the frameworks of the 2018 Singapore summit, was reminiscent of the attitude of the West relation towards the first Russian President, Boris Yeltsin. Granted both political figures are different, though there is a certain similarity. The rhetoric of the West did change in regards to the new president, when the latter agreed to start West-Russian relations anew (Office of the Historian, n. d.). Both Europe and USA believed that Russia was becoming more open towards the negotiations and therefore reduced pressure on subjects such as human rights violations, Russia's hostile foreign policy towards its neighbours and several other issue areas, since the thought that it was possible to find the common ground with that government more, than its historical predecessor, the USSR (Office of the Historian, n. d.).

As mentioned before, cases of Russia and North Korea have vast number of differences. Despite that, it is evident that the Western powers tend to often soften their rhetoric towards the dictator regimes when there is a possibility for mutual talks on an important issue such as a question of denuclearization. At such times, the West, just as the US now, opts not to pressure the other side of negotiations table too much about their disagreements and possible violations of the international law, as that might result in sinking of the deal. And deals such as the recent one from Singapore, do not happen very often. It is even more valuable diplomatic success if we

consider how hostile character of the relation between the DPRK and USA usually is. It should also be mentioned that right before the Singapore summit, Kim Jong-un ordered several high-ranking military officials to be fired (Smith, 2018). This could be considered as another gesture that the North was seriously willing to hold peace talks with the US.

## Conclusion

After looking at all major proposals and attempts towards peace, it becomes evident how challenging the current situation is. By comparing all the inter-Korean summits and the denuclearization summit of Singapore, it can be said that at this point the outcome is not clear yet. The previous summits showed how despite various attempts to start peaceful negotiations with the North, many of their promises were left unfulfilled. Moreover, North Korea has been continuing its nuclear programs and openly threatening US allies such as South Korea and Japan.

One could say that the aggressive responses of the US lead to current peace talks to be held, but one must also consider previously mentioned factors. Before the denuclearization summit, North Korea released several US hostages during Mike Pence's visit. Additionally, right before the summit North Korean leader changed his high ranking military advisors. The timing of these actions was perfect thus, it can be seen as a well-planned gesture, not as a mere coincidence. The summit of 2000 had some concrete results, nevertheless, it is too early to say whether the 2018 Singapore summit

agreement will be fulfilled. However, the summit can be now considered as a historic success, as it greatly reduced the tensions which were present beforehand. Only a year ago, the whole world was on edge of a nuclear war when North Korea launched nuclear missiles near the Guam base in Japan. This summit gave a good groundwork for working towards peace, which should be utilized to the full. At the end, only time will reveal the results.

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