



### THREE REASONS WHY HANOI SUMMIT BETWEEN THE US-DPRK FAILED

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On May 4th, North Korea tested a new short-range missile.<sup>1</sup> It is important, as this is the first missile test North Korea conducted after the recent breakup of nuclear talks at Hanoi between US-DPRK. Both the countries were engaged in nuclear talks since the Singapore Summit aimed to primarily denuclearise the Korean Peninsula.

However, it now seems that perhaps the optimists rejoiced too soon after the landmark meeting between President Trump and Kim on 12 June 2018. While the first ever meeting of the sitting heads of State of the US and DPRK was something out of the norm of the US-DPRK dynamics, and indeed, this ought to be taken as something to cheer for. However, to the skeptics, it seemed that the meeting promised more than it could deliver; especially on the goal of de-nuclearisation that was set during the Singapore Summit.

The expectations on delivering on this particular goal may or may not have been high- depending

on which way one chooses to look at the glass-half empty or full, but if one observes closely, it can be argued retrospectively that, the progress made from the Singapore Summit (June 2018) till the second Summit at Hanoi (February 2019) was doomed to not work out.

#### ***CVID Implies Looking in the Same Direction Not Looking at Each Other***

The Hanoi meeting was supposed to follow up on the agenda of de-nuclearisation as set previously. Ideally, it was to discuss on the 'deliverables'<sup>2</sup> of de-nuclearisation including: i) a mutually agreed definition of de-nuclearisation – mainly Comprehensive Verifiable Irreversible De-nuclearisation or Dismantlement (CVID) ii) a possible timeline for such an endeavor and iii) a defined pathway towards this end, including a step by step approach of reciprocal sanctions relief along with the dismantlement efforts.

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officials including the Minister of State Security. Indeed, both the leaders established a steady communication channel as despite Singapore Summit being called off once, both were able to bounce back towards dialogue. Both the sides made concessions in terms of US cancelling its (then upcoming) military exercise with Seoul and DPRK exhibiting willingness<sup>3</sup> by dismantling its nuclear site. But CVID as a goal was never discussed.

Yes, the word denuclearisation was used as many times in order to hint that talks are heading in some direction. However, the aforementioned components were not discussed by the two leaders in the course of nine months. It is to be reiterated, that Secretary Pompeo during his swearing-in ceremony had highlighted that their Administration's North Korea strategy would focus on *'seeking permanent, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of its WMDs'*,<sup>4</sup> but CVID wasn't followed. Some US experts have highlighted that the Trump Administration did not have a *'clear road map for how a denuclearization process would work'*.<sup>5</sup> Within the US Administration, there seemed to have been some confusion on how to approach the agenda.

It is reported in the media that Bolton's Libya model<sup>6</sup> might have bulldozed the Hanoi talks by *'demanding unrealistic goals'*<sup>7</sup> such as *'the CVID in a document that was passed to Kim'*.<sup>8</sup> However, it is also true that there existed different perceptions on how to approach the de-nuclearisation pathway, within the US Administration. The US Special Representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun had earlier said that the US would not agree on an *'incremental'* approach to denuclearise, aligning more towards the US NSA's perception. However, President Trump himself was willing to be more accommodating on the CVID, especially considering sanctions.<sup>9</sup> In fact, post the Summit this is more evident as President Trump undercut his own Treasury Department's announcement on recently instated sanctions that *'he had ordered the withdrawal of them'*.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, the possibility of North Korea relinquishing its nuclear weapons programme voluntarily was becoming an impossible mission to accomplish, as Kim himself said during his new

year speech<sup>11</sup>, "... if Washington continues to push for one sided demands or pressure into unilateral disarmament, we may be compelled to find a new way for defending our sovereignty...."<sup>12</sup> One can assert that, North Korea was meaning to put two denuclearisation preconditions on the table sooner than later; one) a complete removal of the American threat from the Korean Peninsula, including the military presence and two) the removal or elimination of US nuclear umbrella to the RoK, as that directly impacts North Korea's rationale for nuclear weapons.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, even if Washington had negotiated from a consensus based approach, the possibility of it going anywhere without US giving concessions on what DPRK considers as a part of denuclearisation goal, would have been difficult to achieve. It has now become evident that the lack of mutually agreed vision on the goal of de-nuclearisation and a mismatch of perceptions within the White House on how to approach the goal in the near and long term played a crucial role in Hanoi talks not leading anywhere. Clearly, while both President Trump and leader Kim intended de-nuclearisation, they both seemed to have been looking at each other rather than in the same direction while discussing de-nuclearisation.

### ***Juche without Nuclear Weapons Possible for North Korea?***

There is no denying in what the philosophy of Juche means for North Korea and how the country's foreign and security policy is more than guided by it. The philosophy of Juche implies independence in politics, self-reliance in economy and self-defense in national defense. While it can be roughly translated as self-reliance; it insists on North Korea's distinctness of identity. It strictly encourages Pyongyang to focus on the autonomy of its own decisions especially with regard to the US, a country that North Korea considers as an imperialist power. While one may debate as to what extent North Korea has internalised the philosophy of Juche in its conduct of interacting with the outside world, however, those who observe the country have often argued that Juche is very much

interwoven in North Korea's thinking. For Kim Sung- the progenitor of Juche and the father of the nation, Juche imply that one is responsible for its own destiny, it implies taking an independent stance- the independence in politics is utmost. Kim Sung in his seminal speech asserted that, "a government that acts under pressure or takes instructions from others cannot be called as the government of people". Establishing Juche implies standing opposed to subjugation – the extension of which in security politics would mean independence in decision especially when it comes to nuclear weapons – for North Korea those weapons are the ultimate guarantor of security against an imperialist power (such as the US).

Thus, giving up of nuclear weapons could be seen in North Korea's eyes as being obedient to an external order of governance. It should be noted here that what the US hoped to extract at the Hanoi Summit was exactly this- a unilateral giving up on nuclear weapons. In all these years (since 2006) - the pursuit of nuclear weapons has become North Korea's way of exerting its sovereignty. Thus, an important question to ask here is how will North Korea be able to realise Juche in its domestic/security politics without nuclear weapons? What is the alternative? This question gives one a peek into the answers of whether North Korea would willingly give up on its nuclear capability.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Compromising Military Exercises in Exchange of CVID possible for US?***

Another externality that is bound to have a major impact every time there are any kind of negotiations about de-nuclearisation concerning North Korea is the US-RoK military alliance. It is established more than once by North Korea that any willingness to reduce or freeze its nuclear

capability and testing would be conditioned by how the US and South Korea would bring about a peaceful environment in the Korean Peninsula.

In fact as recent in 2016, "Pyongyang has indicated it would trade them for a more hospitable security environment..."<sup>15</sup> On the American side as well, it is argued by former diplomats that a right mix of security and economic guarantees might convince North Korea to commit to

denuclearisation. Ironically, the right mix of security guarantees for North Korea would likely to include a hiatus of US-RoK military exercises. Time and again North Korea has consistently insisted on this condition. The US-RoK military exercises have been viewed as a way to intimidate North Korea.

Interestingly, both the US and South Korea have often taken cognizance of this factor and have paused their military exercises in order to address the trust deficit, whenever there have been negotiations with North Korea. In the recent times too, the Trump Administration had halted their annual exercise before

the Singapore Summit. In fact recently (March 2019) an announcement by US-RoK has confirmed that the countries would 'reconfigure their large scale annual military exercises namely- Foul Eagle and Key Resolve to be conducted at much smaller scale or even include virtual training'.<sup>16</sup> While this is indeed a good news for the security of North Korea, it can't be argued with certainty that the temporary halting of military exercises would be able to reduce the threat perception for North Korea in the long term, neither it can be guaranteed if this would become the norm in the US-RoK military alliance. Additionally, it is important to reiterate here that one of the key reasons for the overhaul of these exercises is because President Trump views them as expensive (in a manner that US ends up bearing a disproportionate share of the cost for them).

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While President Trump might be eager to deliver on the agenda of de-nuclearisation by suspending the exercises, his Secretary of Defense may not be of this view. In August last year he had expressed his skepticism on this issue.<sup>17</sup> The suspending of these exercises has often been done as a good faith measure and not because it is not required. Thus, one may argue that the US-RoK military exercises would continue in the long run in order to ensure the robustness of their alliance. They are not likely to wither away, which would influence North Korea's military thinking, thus directly affecting its nuclear behavior.

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> North Korea fires short-range missiles, South Korea official confirms, *NBC News*, 04 May 2019, available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-fires-short-range-missile-south-korea-official-confirms-n1001976>, Accessed on 06 May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel L. Davis, "When demands for denuclearization go too far", *Washington Times*, 25 March 2019, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/mar/25/some-denuclearization-demands-are-unrealistic-unne/>, Accessed on 03 April 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Courtney Kube, "Trump: 'Very disappointed' if North Korea is rebuilding long-range rocket site", *NBC News*, 07 March 2019. It is to be noted that The North Koreans began to dismantle some facilities at Sohae after the first summit between the two leaders in Singapore in June 2018. Available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/trump-very-disappointed-if-north-korea-rebuilding-long-range-rocket-n980251>, Accessed on 04 April 2019.

<sup>4</sup> US State Department, Press Briefing, Department Press Briefing, 03 May 2018 available at <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2018/05/281803.htm>, Accessed on 31 March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> David Nakamura, "Trump administration struggles for path forward on nuclear talks as tensions with North Korea mount", *Washington Post*, 15 March 2019, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-administration-struggles-for-path-forward-on-nuclear-talks-as-tensions-mount-with-north-korea/2019/03/15/016bb090-4739-11e9-8aab-95b8d80a1e4f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5f7ef08cd543](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-administration-struggles-for-path-forward-on-nuclear-talks-as-tensions-mount-with-north-korea/2019/03/15/016bb090-4739-11e9-8aab-95b8d80a1e4f_story.html?utm_term=.5f7ef08cd543), Accessed on 04 April 2019.

<sup>6</sup> "The 'Libya Model' Killed the Hanoi Summit", *Live Trendy News*, 31 March 2019, available at <https://>

[livetrendynews.com/the-libya-model-killed-the-hanoi-summit/](https://www.livetrendynews.com/the-libya-model-killed-the-hanoi-summit/), Accessed on 08 April 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel L. Davis, "When demands for denuclearization go too far", *Washington Times*, 25 March 2019, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/mar/25/some-denuclearization-demands-are-unrealistic-unne/>, Accessed on 03 April 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Lesley Wroughton, David Brunnstrom, "Exclusive: With a piece of paper, Trump called on Kim to hand over nuclear weapons", *Reuters*, 30 March 2019, available at <https://in.reuters.com/article/northkorea-usa-document-exclusive/exclusive-with-a-piece-of-paper-trump-called-on-kim-to-hand-over-nuclear-weapons-idINKCN1RA2OC>, Accessed on 04 April 2019

<sup>9</sup> "Trump was open to easing sanctions at Hanoi summit: N.K. official", *Yohnap News Agency*, 26 March 2019, available at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20190326000200315?section=nk/nk>, Accessed on 04 April 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Rappeport, "Trump Overrides Own Experts on Sanctions, in Favor to North Korea" *New York Times*, 22 March 2019, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/22/world/asia/north-korea-sanctions.html>, Accessed on 08 April 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Tong-Hyung (2019) "North Korea won't give up nukes unless US removes nuclear threat" 04 December 2018, *Nuclear Security Newsletter*, North Korea, Vol. 13, No.05, 01 January 2019

<sup>12</sup> Daniel R. Depatris, (2019) "North Korea Could Have 100 Nuclear Warheads", *Nuclear Security Newsletter*, 15 January 2019, Vol.12, No. 06, pp. 09.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra, "China's Strategic Silence on the Hanoi Summit", *IPCS Commentary*, 22 March 2019, available at [http://ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=5570](http://ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=5570), Accessed on 8 April 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Kim Sung, (1974) "For the Independent, Peaceful Reunification of the Country", pp. 207-2013, and Jina Kim (2014), "The North Korean Nuclear Weapons Crisis: The Nuclear Taboo Revisited", Palgrave Mcmillan Publishers, pp. 50-68, and Charles K Armstrong, (2009), "Juche and North Korea's Global Aspirations", Working paper- April 2009, *Wilson Centre*, The North Korea International Documentation Project Working Paper Series, Working Paper No.1, and Zack Beauchamp "Juche, the state ideology that makes North Koreans revere Kim Jong Un, explained", *Vox*, 18 June 2018, available at <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/6/18/17441296/north-korea-propaganda-ideology-juche>, Accessed on 09 April 2019

<sup>15</sup> Kristian McGuire, "North Korea and the Prestige Dilemma", *Diplomat*, 02 November 2018, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/north-korea-and-the-prestige-dilemma/>, Accessed on 16 April 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Starr and Jamie Crawford, "US- South Korea Scale Back Joint Military Drills to reduce tensions with North Korea", *CNN Politics*, 03 March 2019, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/02/politics/us-south-korea-military-exercises/index.html>, Accessed on 13 April 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Kylie Atwood, "Mattis says no more halt to U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises", 28 August 2019, *CBS News*, Available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/u-s-stops-suspension-of-joint-military-exercises-with-south-korea/>, Accessed on 16 April 2019,



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