



SIX MONTHS AFTER THE SINGAPORE SUMMIT: 'SANCTIONS AND SETBACKS'

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In his New Year's speech, the North Korean leader has expressed his willingness to have a second summit with President Trump. This could usher a new era of hope and prosperity for the prospect of de-nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, as a continued meeting of the leadership on both sides is crucial for the promised goal set during their historic meeting in Singapore (2018). An open channel of communication would imply that sooner or later diplomacy might succeed in getting the required agreement in mutually defining, what – denuclearisation would actually mean for both the sides. This is largely expected because the historic meeting appeared to some observers as a breakthrough in terms of US-DPRK rapprochement as well as for resolving the nuclear conundrum in North East Asia permanently. However, after the recent round of US sanctions pertaining to DPRK's censorship and human rights abuses, the prospect for a second summit transcending into anything substantial remains bleak. More so because in his

New Year's speech carries an expectation that '...the (American) sanctions and (US-RoK) military exercises will come to an end...'¹

It appears that just when US-North Korean interactions were beginning to blossom, they are back to their old track. Recently, on December 10, 2018, the US Treasury Department sanctioned² three senior North Korean officials, further casting doubts on the upcoming nuclear talks. The sanctions pertain to DPRK's poor track record of human rights, and strict censorship. As per the US State Department's note, the sanctions are to ensure the continuity of the "North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act of 2016", that aims at reprimanding DPRK's instruments of human rights abuse, through severe economic sanctions.

It is noteworthy that one of the three high profile people involved is also the close aid of the North Korean leader; Choe Ryong Hae is the Vice Chairman (VC) for Organization, VC of the State Affairs Commission and Director of the WPK

Organization Guidance Department (OGD). He is known as one of the most powerful officials³ in the DPRK's formal hierarchy. The other two high profile individuals include- Jong Kyong Thaek, DPRK's minister of state security, and Pak Kwang Ho- the Director of the KWP' Propaganda and Agitation Department.

Previously too, during the Bush Administration, in 2005 the US- DPRK rapprochement was stalled due the American unilateral sanctions on Banco Delta.⁴ The problem is the US consistency of the sanctions approach has not been conducive in changing the DPRK's nuclear behavior. For the US, sanctions are the means to maintain pressure and signal that without any progress on the stated goal of de-nuclearisation, the US would continue to remain strict with DPRK. On the other hand, Kim insists, that the US drop its sanctions regime in order to expect some progress from him.

Unsurprisingly, in response to these sanctions, the DPRK has threatened to harm any progress on de-nuclearisation. In a statement released by DPRK the country has warned the US that, "... they (US) are falling victim to their "greatest miscalculation" if they believe they can force Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons program by ratcheting up human rights pressure..."⁵ Additionally, as per some media reports it is evident that since September 2018, even an eight nation coalition (Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand) formed to prevent illegal transfer

through sea has been able to exert only limited influence. The country is able to obtain 'black market fuel at sea often with the help of Chinese and Russian counterparts'⁶.

It is to be noted that in the past six months, no substantive progress even towards the timeline of de-nuclearisation has taken place. While, the DPRK seems to have dismantled its nuclear test site, some US non-proliferation experts have cautioned that "mass-produc[tion] and deploying of existing types of nuclear-armed missiles, still continue"⁷. This makes North Korea's nuclear intent suspect. In the course of six months the US has demanded from DPRK its list of nuclear and missile sites. But, none has been forthcoming from North Korea, which has yet again locked the two countries in a diplomatic standoff. While the Singapore Summit talked about achieving de-nuclearisation, the two countries in reality never really engaged in discussing the goalposts for the same. Thus, in this context, a second meeting assumes great importance. In-fact, the US National Security Advisor, John Bolton himself is of the opinion that the second summit would follow up on the commitments made until now and how to accomplish them.⁸

All this boils down to two outcomes, if the sanctions work in severing DPRK's efforts to obtain oil transfers, it would directly affect the people, possibly strengthening the leadership's narrative against the US. This would in turn adversely affect any possible progress. On the

other hand, if the sanctions don't work, it will help North Korea to engage for longer in buying time without any promise of progress on the prospects of denuclearisation.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ Jeffery Lewis, (2019), "My Thoughts on Kim Jong-Un's New Year's Speech: Will Pyongyang succeed in widening the divide between Seoul and Washington?" *National Interest*, 02 January 2019, Available at <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/jeffrey-lewis-my-thoughts-kim-jong-uns-new-years-speech-40332?mkt>, Accessed on 06 January 2019.

² Report on Serious Human Rights Abuses or Censorship in North Korea, US State Department Submitted in compliance with: Section 304 (a) of the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act of 2016, Public Law 114-122, enacted on February 18, 2016, 10 December 2018, Available at <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/287984.htm>, Accessed on 17 December 2018. And US sanctions 3 senior North Conor Finnegan, (2018), " Korean officials amid stalled nuclear talks", *ABC News*, December 10, 2018, Available at <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-sanctions-senior-north-korean-officials-amid-stalled/story?id=59730861>, Accessed on 17 December 2018.

³ Choe Ryong Hae , *North Korean Leader Watch*, Available at <http://www.nkleadershipwatch.org/leadership-biographies/choe-ryong-hae/>, Accessed on 18 December 2018.

⁴ U.S. Department Of The Treasury (2005),"Treasury Designates Banco Delta Asia As Primary Money Laundering Concern Under USA PATRIOT Act", Available At <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/Js2720.aspx>, Accessed On 01 January 2019.

⁵ "North Korea Threatens To Kill Nuclear Talks Over Human Rights Sanctions ", *Washington Times*, 16 December 2018., Available at https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/dec/16/north-korea-threatens-kill-nuclear-talks-over-huma/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter, Accessed on 19 December 2018.

⁶ Courtney Kube and Dan De Luce (2018), Top Secret Report: North Korea Keeps Busting Sanctions, Evading

U.S.-Led Sea Patrols, *NBC News*, 14 December 2018, available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/top-secret-report-north-korea-keeps-busting-sanctions-evading-u-n947926>, Accessed on 19 December 2018.

⁷ Conor Finnegan, (2018), " Trump Moving Ahead With Second Kim Summit Despite Working-Level Frustrations", *ABC News*, December 07, 2018, Available at <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-moving-ahead-kim-summit-working-level-frustrations/story?id=59650488>, Accessed on 19 December 2018.

⁸ By Donna Borak and Zachary Cohen, (2018) " John Bolton says North Korea failure to meet commitments requires second Trump-Kim summit", *CNN*, 04 December 2018, Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/12/04/politics/bolton-north-korea-summit-commitments/index.html>. Accessed on 18 December 2018.