While the oversize personalities of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump tend to dominate global attention on the continuing efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, the peace initiative of South Korean President Moon Jae-in — the man in the middle — is increasingly pivotal to how things evolve among all of the players in this complex diplomatic drama.
The Korean Peninsula has a long history of declarations and agreements to promote peace since the 1953 armistice in the Korean War, but bitter hostility and North Korea's nuclear policy have forestalled progress. In 2018, the inter-Korean summits and the US-North Korea summit helped ease tensions and create a feeling of possibility. Unfortunately, the failure of the Hanoi summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un — but now is the time to renew efforts to build trust and confidence.

**How to Move from Confrontation to Military Confidence-building**

**By Ki-jung Kim & Bo-hyuk Suh**

Since the end of the Korean War, there have been 14 agreements made regarding peace on the Korean Peninsula, starting with the 1953 Armistice Agreement, which was followed later by the 1991 Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, the North-South Joint Declaration of June 15, 2000, and last year’s Pyongyang Joint Declaration. But despite these and other agreements, accords and statements, what “peace” has been attained has been one of instability. Fundamentally, the Cold War-era armistice was a system for deterring war, but it was perpetually unstable. Provocations continued, and hostility was deeply embedded in both Koreas.

At the end of the Cold War, North and South Korea held a series of high-level talks that yielded the Basic Agreement. At the same time, the two Koreas signed a non-aggression pact as a part of the “three-annex” agreements, addressing for the first time non-aggression, peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for existing jurisdictions. These efforts fell through as the North Korean nuclear crisis came into play. Until June 2000, when the first inter-Korean summit since the division of the country was held, the Korean Peninsula remained a land of distrust and confrontation.

Based on the greater political trust instilled by the June 15 Joint Declaration, the two Koreas eased tensions through several reconciliation and co-operation projects, ultimately even discussing the establishment of a peace regime in the Summit Declaration of Oct. 4, 2007. Whereas the June 15 Joint Declaration signified trust-building, the Oct. 4 Declaration was notable in that the pursuit of permanent peace through denuclearization and a peace regime was agreed upon. These were the initial efforts to shift from peace-keeping to peace-making.

But peace was once again threatened as administrations with hardline policies towards North Korea took power both in Seoul and Washington. Peace-making even within the Peninsula proved to be a challenge. Until 2018, when the two Korean leaders met face-to-face in Panmunjom, North Korea’s efforts to upgrade its nuclear capabilities and US military threats generated a vicious cycle, like two trains bound to collide eventually. This underscores just how fragile peace-making is under the armistice system and that it can be put in jeopardy at any time.

**MILITARY CO-OPERATION: SUBSTANTIAL BUT INCOMPLETE**

With the Oct. 4 Declaration in 2007, the direct stakeholders on the Korean Peninsula — South Korea, North Korea, the US (and China) — devised a way toward denuclearization and a peace regime. Even so, the declaration was limited, because the path toward denuclearization remained ambiguous. On the contrary, last year’s April 27 Panmunjom Declaration reached by the two Korean leaders, agreed to work toward the establishment a permanent and stable peace regime: “The two sides confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.”

There was further promise in the form of the US-DPRK Joint Statement at the Singapore Summit on June 12 last year: “President Trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK, and Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” The statement added this clause: “Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” The statement thus linked denuclearization with the establishment of a peace regime as an objective for South Korea, North Korea and the US, which led to the Pyongyang Joint Declaration in September 2018 after talks between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Through these series of events, the three states proposed measures such as the dismantlement of nuclear and missile test sites, an end-of-war declaration, a peace treaty and a liaison mission. The signing of the Military Agreement for Implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration also demonstrated the possibility of an arms control deal on conventional forces between the two Koreas (see Figure 1 overleaf).

In 2017, the year in which Moon took office, the North Korea-US confrontation stirred great anxiety in South Korea and caused an immediate crisis for Moon’s new government. Compared to then, the state of the Korean Peninsula in 2018 was dramatically different. 2018 left behind an indelible mark on efforts for peace and unification. After three summit talks, we have seen the opening of a joint inter-Korean liaison office and planned humanitarian co-operation and exchanges in areas such as agriculture, transportation, health, sports, religion and family reunions. Of course, these prospects are all dependent on the peace process, but the changes in attitude are striking — and not just on an administrative level. Among North and South Korean citizens, favorable attitudes toward unification rose and hostility decreased. Polling put the level of South Koreans favoring unification at 59.8 percent, the highest level since 2007’s 63.8 percent and a rise of 5.9 percentage points on 2017. The level of South Koreans against unification declined to 16.1 percent, 5.3 percentage points less than in 2017. In addition, the level of those perceiving North Korea as an object of co-operation and support surged to 71 percent from 54.9 percent in 2017, while those viewing North Korea with hostility dropped to 24.4 percent from 38.8 percent a year earlier.

As inter-Korean relations improved, greater political trust helped prompt military trust-building. During the last period of amicable inter-Korean exchanges more than a decade ago, trust on economic and socio-cultural issues did not move the needle on military trust-building. This can be attributed not only to the sensitivity of

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6. In 2017, the year in which Moon took office, the North Korea-US confrontation stirred great anxiety in South Korea and caused an immediate crisis for Moon’s new government. Compared to then, the state of the Korean Peninsula in 2018 was dramatically different. 2018 left behind an indelible mark on efforts for peace and unification. After three summit talks, we have seen the opening of a joint inter-Korean liaison office and planned humanitarian co-operation and exchanges in areas such as agriculture, transportation, health, sports, religion and family reunions. Of course, these prospects are all dependent on the peace process, but the changes in attitude are striking — and not just on an administrative level. Among North and South Korean citizens, favorable attitudes toward unification rose and hostility decreased. Polling put the level of South Koreans favoring unification at 59.8 percent, the highest level since 2007’s 63.8 percent and a rise of 5.9 percentage points on 2017. The level of South Koreans against unification declined to 16.1 percent, 5.3 percentage points less than in 2017. In addition, the level of those perceiving North Korea as an object of co-operation and support surged to 71 percent from 54.9 percent in 2017, while those viewing North Korea with hostility dropped to 24.4 percent from 38.8 percent a year earlier.

7. As inter-Korean relations improved, greater political trust helped prompt military trust-building. During the last period of amicable inter-Korean exchanges more than a decade ago, trust on economic and socio-cultural issues did not move the needle on military trust-building. This can be attributed not only to the sensitivity of...
military issues, but also to the solemn nature of the nuclear issue. This time, however, conditions were more favorable due to the “final, fully verified denuclea rization” pledge made by Kim Jong Un and the first-ever US-North Korea summit. With proposals for preventing the recurrence of war, a guarantee of general co-operation between the two Koreas and a drive toward denuclearization, South Korea demonstrated its eagerness to build military trust. It is likely that North Korea, too, saw inter-Korean military trust-building as a way to lessen tensions and help build its economy. On Sept. 19, 2018, President Moon and Chairman Kim announced the Pyongyang Joint Declaration. The tenor of Moon’s remarks afterward to tens of thousands of people at Pyongyang’s massive May Day Stadium were encouraging: “Today, Chairman Kim Jong Un and I have agreed on concrete measures to completely eliminate the fear of war and the risk of armed conflicts on the Korean Peninsula.”

Through three inter-Korean summits in 2018, the two leaders discussed the development of inter-Korean relations as well as denuclearization and the establishment of a permanent peace. It is especially notable that military chiefs from both sides signed the Military Agreement for the Implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration as an annex to the Pyongyang Declaration. The declaration dealt with military trust-building and implementation of operational arms control, in addition to the creation of a joint military committee. The military agreement concerns the cessation of hostile acts, formation of inland and maritime peace zones, military assurance measures for inter-Korean exchanges and co-operation. From the start of 2018 through to May 2019, the two Koreas have achieved much: restoration of a line of communication, which began with the removal of propaganda materials; demilitarization of the Panmunjom Joint Security Area (JSA); suspension of hostile acts by air, land or sea; a pilot program for a joint recovery operation; and the removal of landmines and installation of connecting roads between the Koreas, among other measures. In addition, research is under way to create a common channel in the Han River estuary and troops from both sides have been removed from 10 guard posts in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the posts destroyed. One remaining guard post was preserved for memory and opened to the public on April 27, the first anniversary of the Panmunjom Declaration.

In general, the early stages of the military agreement have gone smoothly, with the prompt cessation of hostile acts and establishment of a terrestrial peace zone. The maritime peace zone and pilot joint fishing area project should take more time, because the details are to be agreed by the joint military committee. This is the most sensitive part of the military agreement, because decision-making will take place without a maritime border. In this process of inter-Korean military trust-building and operational arms control, talks must occur not only between the military authorities of the two Koreas, but also among the governments of the two Koreas and the United Nations Command under the existing armistice.
Yet, inter-military trust-building efforts so far are lacking. Of the military agreement’s five components, only the suspension of hostile acts has been completed, with the other four parts either partly executed or not executed at all. Military trust-building is also thus far insufficient in terms of operational arms control. Neither exchanges of military information nor military training notifications and observation have taken place. There has been a discussion of rebuilding an inter-Korean joint military committee, but in practice this has not happened. This is a result of the low motivation of the two Koreas to fully engage in military trust-building as well as the lack of preparation for negotiations. The stagnant denuclearization talks between North Korea and the US after the disappointing Hanoi summit is also a substantial factor. If a denuclearization agreement does not show progress, inter-Korean operational arms control will have a hard time.

**STUMBLING BLOCK IN HANOI**

After the Hanoi summit ended without progress, the non-nuclear peace process has gone nowhere. Perhaps as a result, inter-Korean military trust-building has made little progress. For example, the two Koreas agreed to a joint exca-vation team to search for the remains of Korean War victims as part of the Military Agreement signed last year. On March 6, the South Korean government informed Pyongyang about the formation of such a team, but failed to receive a response from and began the grim work unit-ter. Why are things going badly on inter-Korean military co-operation?

First, we need to examine the extent and rate of arms control. Though the notion and method may vary, it can largely be divided into operational and structural arms control. The two Koreas have partially exercised operational arms control since the signing of the Sept. 19 Military Agree-

ment as a means towards military trust-building, but the specifics of the agreement have not yet been completed. Of course, through the Panmunjom Declaration, the leaders of the two Koreas reached a consensus: “The two sides agreed to carry out disarmament in a phased manner, as military tension is alleviated, and substantial progress is made in military confidence-building.” While military trust-building measures post-2018 have been rudimentary, they have at least reduced tensions and promoted reconciliation and co-operation. Along with this occurred polit-ical trust-building, which is encouraging. Even yet, the stalled US-North Korean negotiations on denuclearization are a major obstacle to mov-ing from trust-building to operational arms con-trol. It is imperative that the future expansion of inter-Korean military co-operation and the ways it can facilitate denuclearization be actively dis-cussed not only at the inter-Korean level, but also between South Korea and the US.

Second is the issue of establishing a West Sea peace zone and inter-Korean joint fishing zone. Although this has been discussed twice at the inter-Korean summit talks, nothing has been put into practice because the related states have not confirmed a maritime border. Consequently, the two Koreas have only affirmed their differing points of view. One may also point out that the views of the South Korean fishing industry on the establishment of a joint fishing zone in the West Sea Northern Limit Line have not been sufficiently reflected. While these fishermen are not against establishing a joint fishing zone, they argue, and reasonably so, that the government’s first order of business must be to guarantee their fishing rights by strengthening the crackdown on illegal fish-ing by Chinese fishing boats. Amid these concerns, the Moon government has extended the West Sea fishing zone from 3,454 km² to 3,699 km² and added an hour to the fishing time since February of this year. Another option would be to start by tackling the East Sea (where the maritime border discussion is less sensitive) rather than the West Sea for a joint fishing zone.

The third issue is the use of the DMZ as a peace zone. Normalization of the DMZ is at the core of armistice normalization. In getting there, commu-nication among South Korea, North Korea and the UN Command (basically the US) can lead to a meaningful reduction in tension and preparations for a future turnover from a state of armistice to peace. Numerous opinions have been expressed in South Korea on the future of the DMZ. Plans have been put forward for a “great peace zone,” a historical-ecological zone and an inter-Korean joint agricultural zone. Some have even called for the DMZ’s registra-tion as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage site. In preparing for change, civilian and inter-national organizations ought to be involved, which could help the DMZ to serve as a basis for sustainable peace-building.

The fourth issue concerns the institutionaliza-tion of inter-Korean military co-operation. So far, the two Koreas have dealt with this subject through a joint military committee, high-level military talks, ministerial-level talks and sum-mit talks. Despite agreeing on the operation of a joint military committee in the Pyongyang Joint Declaration, the committee is not yet in force. Operation of the committee itself does not face difficulties, as the two Koreas already signed an agreement on the organization and adminis-tration of a joint military committee as far back as the 7th Inter-Korean Ministerial Talks in May 1992. The key, again, is whether North Korea-US denuclearization talks will make any pro-gress. If denuclearization talks gain momentum, inter-Korean military co-operation will progress toward an institutional basis. Preparations must be made for that moment.
The fifth issue is the need to devise a multifaceted model of security, which consists of more than state-led, traditional military security. Based on the changes in the global and regional security environment along with the Korean Peninsula’s particular nature, security policy should be diversified. Inter-Korean military agreement is an example of co-operative security that can also incorporate aspects of private security.3

ONE STEP BACK, TWO FORWARD
The shift in the Korean Peninsula’s security status in 2018 was dramatic. The transformation from being on the verge of nuclear war to a non-nuclear peace process created an opportunity to clear away the last vestiges of the Cold War system. Needless to say, settling peace immediately is far-fetched. The slow pace during the first quarter of 2019 can be considered a needed step backward in order to take two steps forward later. Given decades of intractable disputes, peace on the Korean Peninsula will continue to advance and retreat along its own path. This is precisely why co-founding and sharing a vision of peace and establishing the first stages of peace-building are extremely important.

A permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, of course, is hard to imagine without settling the political and military hostilities between the parties involved in the war. In order to do so, a declaration ending the war, a peace treaty and normalization of relations are necessary. Peace education that challenges antagonisms in the legal system, consciousness and domestic policy is also crucial, along with a measure of socioeconomic trust-building between the two Koreas. Because confrontation has been a fact of life for as long as anyone can remember, establishing a peace regime in a short period of time is impossible. Therefore, joint efforts to steadily move along that path are needed. This is why calls for an end-of-war declaration between the US and North Korea have been growing since the US-North Korea summit in Hanoi collapsed last February. The declaration would help ease distrust and promote non-nuclear peace negotiations. The efforts by the two Koreas to create peace in the DMZ have emerged as a new pillar to be carried out along with the non-nuclear peace process. The implementation of the Pyongyang Military Agreement is a major task in gauging the success of inter-Korean arms control. Since the Hanoi Summit, North Korea has been lukewarm about following through with the military agreement, which demonstrates the linkage between inter-Korean arms control and North Korea-US negotiations. South Korea and the US must actively try to convince North Korea to be proactive. The North’s firing of several short-range projectiles in early May this year was the first such action since the current thaw began in 2018 and should be seen as a warning sign.

The failed Hanoi Summit was the result of an unyielding negotiating stance without adequate efforts to alleviate hostility and build trust between North Korea and the US. Still, the fact that top leaders of the two countries have mentioned the need to engage in dialogue again since Hanoi is a good sign. When the day finally comes that political, military and humanitarian peace-making efforts all take place with the agreement of South Korea, North Korea and the US, then the establishment of a peace regime will sail through.

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