



# De-nuclearisation in Korean Peninsula: Looking in the Same Direction or Looking at Each Other?

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On May the fourth, North Korea tested a new short-range missile.<sup>1</sup> It is important that this is the first missile test that 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 in the long term, mainly for two reasons one) Because there was no mutually agreed vision on the goal of de-nuclearisation as promised and two) A mismatch of perceptions within the White House on how to approach the goal in the near and long term.

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 iii) And a defined pathway towards this end, including a step by step approach of reciprocal sanctions relief along with the dismantlement efforts.

The goal of de-nuclearisation managed to drag itself from Singapore to Hanoi, with some setbacks of US sanctions on DPRK's influential 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 denuclearization 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 in-fact 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 had 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. 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.

***(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

<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>, and Accessed on 06 May 219.

<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, Available at May 3, 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/>, 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-idINKCN1RA20C>, Accessed on 04 April 2019

<sup>9</sup> "Trump was open to easing sanctions at Hanoi summit: N.K. official", *Yonhap 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 and 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.