

## US-NORTH KOREA RAPPROCHEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON REGIONAL STABILITY

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### **Abstract**

*The Korean Peninsula has remained a flashpoint and international hot spot since the Korean War (1950-1953). The US, a victor of the Second World War, in this theatre had to suffer reversals just after five years despite overwhelming military power and glory of past victory. The changes in the regional environment and dynamics of Chinese involvement in support of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) played a significant role in altering the ground situation. President Trump after taking over office initiated a series of provocations against DPRK leadership, which brought both countries to the brink of a nuclear showdown. However, dramatic events unfolded after Chairman Kim's New Year speech in December 2018, where peace and rapprochement became the international buzzwords and gained a lot of popularity which are now fading due to dimming enthusiasm by all stakeholders. The sudden breakdown of diplomatic relations between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) due to propaganda posters allegedly flown from the ROK and blowing up of liaison office at Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) by the DPRK on June 16, 2020, has added new dimensions to the fragility of the situation. This research article, therefore, explores the causes of breakdown of the past two summits between President Trump and Chairman Kim, the current stalemate and future prospects of peace in the Korean Peninsula along-with impact analysis on regional stability.*

**Keywords:** Denuclearization, Enduring Peace, Regime Survival, Regional Stability.

### **Introduction**

**U**S President Donald Trump's speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2017 using the words of fire and fury, rocket-man and destruction of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) indeed created a doomsday scenario due to extraordinary tension in the Korean Peninsula. Such a scenario created anxiety for the regional and global players, who were trying hard to defuse the situation and avoid another Korean War involving nuclear weapons. The exchange of rhetoric between President Trump and Chairman Kim was extraordinary, which created unnecessary tension with serious consequences. The forum of six-party talks<sup>1</sup> played a significant role in containing further nuclear ambitions of the DPRK and provided a multilateral forum for a negotiated settlement of the dispute. The Chinese government independently and using multilateral forums like six-party talks and the

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United Nations Security Council (UNSCR) started intensive diplomatic efforts in convincing all parties to show restraint and avoid a nuclear holocaust. Additionally, the forward deployment of forces along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was also to be deescalated to avoid any miscalculation by either side involving military conflict.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) also proposed to postpone joint drills with the US military and remove propaganda speakers installed along DMZ to deescalate the situation.<sup>2</sup> Chairman Kim's tactful move of offering to participate in the Pyeong Chang Winter Olympics surprised the world and paved the way for the exchange of pleasantries between the two Koreas resulting in a calculated de-escalation of the situation. The damage of fire and fury speech rhetoric was contained with the cautious optimism of advancing peace overtures into a durable settlement between the US, the DPRK and the ROK. The former UK diplomat, James Hoare, who had served in Pyongyang, remarked: "North Korea is trying to break out of the increasing international hostility they face, the isolation and the sanctions. The Olympics is a chance to present a different face to the world."<sup>3</sup> As these overtures were widely appreciated, the South Korean President also remarked that the games are a "precious opportunity" to seek peace on the Korean Peninsula and called these games the "Peace Olympics."<sup>4</sup> This article, therefore, critically analyses the peace efforts of the last two years, predicts the future course followed by viable recommendations for lasting stability in the region.

## Genesis of the Conflict

Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, both the US and the DPRK have maintained hostile posturing against each other. US presence in the ROK and Japan is considered as a serious national security concern by regimes in Pyongyang. The hostile military posturing, regime survival, internal consolidation and effective deterrence against provocations from the US and the ROK assumed prime national security priorities for the DPRK. While the US has used sanctions as coercive tools of diplomacy to change the DPRK'S behavior in order to either cause internal implosion or surrender in the face of a military threat and economic hardships. On the other hand, successive regimes in the DPRK have done reasonably well on all above-highlighted fronts and remained consistent in acquiring credible nuclear deterrence to ensure regime survival. The acquisition of nuclear capability was pursued as a supreme national security priority with the help of the Soviet Union in 1956. To consolidate its strategic deterrence, the DPRK successfully conducted a series of nuclear and missile tests commencing from 2006 until 2017. The antagonizing pre- and post-election speeches of President Trump, joint military drills of the US and the ROK for an invasion of the DPRK and extensive propaganda campaign by the ROK contributed significantly to deteriorating the situation. The urgency was, therefore, generated for diplomatic overtures by Russia and China.

While there is unanimity of views within the six-party platform and other world players that denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula is a must goal for lasting peace, however, they differ in methodology to approach the issue. Where China

and Russia support negotiated settlement giving due consideration to national security requirements of the DPRK by eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) from all parties and immediate secession of hostilities. On the other hand, the US, the ROK and Japan support unilateral denuclearization of the DPRK as proposed by the US. It is widely believed that the change in Chinese policy towards nuclear posturing of the DPRK has been instrumental in policy review by Chairman Kim. China initially maintained a policy of “watching from sidelines”<sup>5</sup> till 2002, which means that China was not paying much attention towards the development of strategic capabilities of the DPRK, however, from 2002-2009, China adopted a policy of “active intervention”<sup>6</sup> in order to ensure strategic stability in the region and refrain DPRK from unnecessary provocations.

However, President Trump’s speech of September 19, 2017, at the UNGA in which he threatened to “destroy North Korea”<sup>7</sup> by declaring that the era of strategic patience of the US is over, which suddenly changed the regional scenario where nuclear showdown was perceived as a most likely possibility. However, behind the curtain, the intervention of China for diplomatic engagement to avoid military confrontation prevailed and Chairman Kim surprised the world by offering peace through a New Year message.<sup>8</sup> The dramatic de-escalation and holding of one-on-one summits between President Trump and Chairman Kim in Singapore were positive indicators with the potentials of lasting stability.

### **Active Diplomacy to Ease Tension**

Chairman Kim’s sudden decision to participate in the Pyeong Chang Winter Olympics brought a pleasant surprise for the international community. After months of rhetoric, provocations and active hostilities, smart diplomacy provided new opportunities of hope, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and prosperity. The ROK welcomed the offer and immediately travel formalities completed to enable DPRK teams to participate in the Olympics. A series of events followed where intense diplomatic engagement by China, Russia, ROK and Japan paved the way for the first-ever summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim in Singapore in 2018 and later at Hanoi in 2019. While it is a fallacy to assume that the immediate results of denuclearization would happen, however, the ice-breaking had already paved way for sustained future dialogues. As a whole, the 2018-Olympics provided a unique opportunity for all parties to look for alternate options away from confrontation. For the DPRK, it helped to break isolation and taking lead as a potential peacemaker. Similarly, for the US and the ROK, it provided an opening for sustained dialogues and future summits.

### **Chairman Kim and President Moon Jae- in Summit**

Chairman Kim’s landmark visit to the ROK across DMZ on April 26, 2018, provided an opportunity for both North and South Korean leaders to discuss the future course of action of eventual peace and stability. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment that “there will be no more war on the Korean peninsula and a new age of

peace has opened.”<sup>9</sup> At the signing ceremony of the joint communique, Chairman Kim pointed out on reunification that “the current state of the truce and establishing a firm peace is a historic task that [the two Koreas] can no longer delay.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the process of goodwill and exchange of pleasantries initiated a new era of hope and durable peace amid suspicion and frustration.

### **Singapore Summit (2018)**

After incremental diplomatic steps and confidence-building measures, the world witnessed the historic moment of a direct meeting between President Trump and Chairman Kim on June 11, 2018, at the Capella Hotel, Singapore. Chairman Kim visited Beijing before the summit and had lengthy sessions with President Xi Jinping. The Chinese leadership also played a key role in convincing Chairman Kim for the summit. The banter exchanged created a congenial atmosphere for the summit and both leaders demonstrated marked statecraft in pragmatically concluding the summit. US President, while talking about the special bond with the North Korean leader, said that he was “absolutely willing to invite him to the White House.”<sup>11</sup> Another significant outcome of the Singapore Summit was the cessation of hostilities between all three main parties, i.e., the US, the DPRK and the ROK. President Trump declared Chairman Kim an honorable partner and “promised to improve relations and suspend military exercises with the ROK.”<sup>12</sup> Later in a Twitter message, President Trump stated, “there is no longer a nuclear threat from North Korea despite the absence of any timetable for denuclearization.”<sup>13</sup> In a rational analysis, the Singapore Summit can be termed as a great success as it provided a unique opportunity for both leaders to one-on-one meetings and pragmatically move forward on all issues of conflict and cooperation for enduring stability.

### **Hanoi Summit (2019)**

While the Singapore Summit (2018) ended without any conclusive and tangible outcome, yet it was a great success given that the world, a few months ago, was concerned about the future of the Korean Peninsula after President Trump’s remarks of the destruction of North Korea. Secondly, it was the first time that the heads of governments of the US and the DPRK met personally since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Thirdly, it provided a unique opportunity for both leaders to understand each other, break the past path of rhetoric, and evaluate their respective compulsions and positions. Certainly, no one expected a miracle or breakthrough in the first-ever meeting.

President Trump’s approach towards the DPRK since then has been more rational, and choice of words, thereafter, has been carefully articulated, keeping in view the self-respect of the DPRK as a state and its leadership. For Hanoi Summit, both sides remained involved in detailed deliberations. Chairman Kim made exhaustive train journeys to Beijing, and later to Hanoi and extensive consultative process with the Chinese leadership. Similarly, on the US side, comprehensive preparations were made for a second summit. Jenny Town, a research analyst at Stimson Center, opines that “a

second summit with no outcome will be highly criticized, especially in the US and especially when Trump is in a state of domestic turmoil.”<sup>14</sup> The Hanoi summit commenced with immense fanfare and the world was eagerly anticipating a viable outcome. However, the summit abruptly ended with clouds of disappointment over the Korean Peninsula as the world was watching with a lot of anxiety of positive outcome for this summit.

The stalemate provided a new stimulus to the leadership of DPRK, US and ROK to put in more efforts and deliberate consultations to make systematic progress, instead of seeking a conclusive agreement. President Trump described the summit as “it was about the sanctions basically,”<sup>15</sup> at a press conference in Hanoi and elaborated that “they wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety and we couldn’t do that ... sometimes you have to walk and this was just one of those times.”<sup>16</sup> The DPRK Foreign Minister, Ri Yong Ho, in a midnight press conference, clarified his government’s position on the failure of the talks. He stated that Pyongyang had only demanded partial sanctions relief in return for closing Yongbyon. He said that the US had wasted an opportunity that “may not come again.”<sup>17</sup> President Trump summarized the overall situation by saying that “status quo will continue, with North Korea continuing to suspend nuclear and missile tests, while the US will not take part in joint military exercises with South Korea.”<sup>18</sup>

ROK President also gave his version of the events by stating, “I believe this is part of a process to reach a higher level of agreement. Now, our role has become even more important.” He said, “My administration will closely communicate and cooperate with the US and North Korea, so as to help their talks reach a complete settlement by any means.”<sup>19</sup> President Trump concluded by praising Chairman Kim, “We spent all day with Kim Jong-un ... He’s quite a guy and quite a character. And our relationship is very strong.”<sup>20</sup> Professor Leif Eric Easley from Ewha University Seoul opines that “the problem with the Hanoi summit was that it failed to achieve sanctions relief, and hence, did not empower South Korea to offer sufficient carrots to keep the engagement going.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Panmunjom DMZ Summit (July 2019)**

At the end of the G-20 Summit at Osaka on June 29, 2019, President Trump indicated to meet DPRK leader at DMZ during his official visit to South Korea on June 30, 2019. This was named as Hand Shake Summit, and helped in a greater level of confidence-building after the Hanoi Summit of February 2019. President Trump stepped across DMZ to the DPRK and Chairman Kim to the ROK, and this handshake was significant from the perspective of confidence-building and acknowledging the legitimate rights of each other’s national security concerns. President Trump expressed his sentiments that “we’ve developed a great relationship ... the relationship that we have developed has meant so much to so many people, and it’s just an honor to be with you and it was an honor that you asked me to step over that line and I was proud to step over the line.”<sup>22</sup> The haze surrounding the abrupt ending of the Hanoi summit was cleared to a large extent as both leaders got an opportunity once again to speak in

cordial and informal environments and build on the positive sentiments demonstrated by both leaders. In the overall context, this summit helped “the reintroduction of working-level envoys and their presumptive continuation of talks.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Critical Analysis on Breakdown of Summits**

President Trump since assuming the office has demonstrated statesmanship abilities to make tough decisions to serve the core national interests of the US. Due to his uncompressing election speeches on the DPRK, he took, unusually, harsh posture after inauguration as President. However, with pragmatic handling on both sides, the temperature gradually started to cool down; global and regional players felt a sigh of relief, who were struggling to avoid any further conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Both the leaders deserve credit for their hard work in pursuit of peace, though, fifty-years-long issues cannot be expected to be resolved in few summits. However, strong signaling of peace overtures has been initiated, which will continue to be capitalized in times to come. As a whole, even though two summits failed to produce any tangible outcome, yet provide a realistic future course of action to be adopted. Significant aspects, which led to the breakdown of summits, are multiple but two things are worth mentioning here. First, the unusual expectations of outcome and the second one was jumping to conclusions without adequate groundwork.

From the US perspective, DPRK’s refusal to complete denuclearization was the main sticking point, while from DPRK’s perspective, the US refusal to complete sanctions lifting despite the destruction of Yongbyon before the summit. Later, the US State Department special representative, Stephen Biegun, stated that North Korea had committed to destroy all Plutonium and Uranium enrichment facilities in a pre-summit commitment. These two contrasting claims demonstrate that inadequate preparations and unusual expectations led to the failure of talks. For the members of the Six-Party Talks Forum, such developments were regrettable, yet the exchange of pleasantries was a positive outcome. It must be remembered that the core national interests of both the US and the DPRK have to be understood in their respective perspectives to allay any fears of miss-appreciation of each other’s intentions. Any future settlement cannot happen without strong guarantees of the regime and national survival for the DPRK, where nuclear capability cannot be easily negotiated in a few summits. However, on a positive note, these summits facilitated unprecedented face-to-face meetings between the two leaders and provided a forum for future dialogues in a more substantive manner.

### **Prospects of Future Summits During 2020**

The atmosphere of goodwill and review of harsh positions both by the US and the DPRK were welcome gestures despite the breakdown of the Hanoi Summit. Both leaders have demonstrated extraordinary statesmanship abilities, and have made significant progress towards confidence-building at a steady pace. While the journey to peace will be full of challenges, yet the path of negotiated settlement selected by all stakeholders will yield positive results, if all sides with the help of the international

community remain firm towards delivering peace a chance to resolve the most complex issues of the century. Both President Trump and Chairman Kim have indicated the possibility of another summit during 2020. The ROK has also stepped up its diplomatic efforts to re-energize the stalled process. The ROK Foreign Minister stated at Geneva Forum on February 24, 2020, that “speedy resumption of the US-DPRK negotiations is critical so that all stakeholders maintain and build upon the hard-won momentum for dialogue. We stand ready to engage with North Korea in a way that facilitates and accelerates the US-DPRK dialogue.”<sup>24</sup> Professor Cheehyung Harrison Kim at Hawaii University gave his analysis of the last two summits: “I think in the past year, there has been a very positive increase in the amount of meaningful public debate about North Korea. The Korean War, peace issues, sanctions and the negative impact of sanctions are all becoming general knowledge in the public”. He added, “we are moving on from the simple, one-sided view of North Korea, and I think that’s a very positive change.”<sup>25</sup> Professor Charles K. Armstrong, from Columbia University states: “What lies ahead is likely neither an explosive conflict nor a breakthrough to peace, but a return to the status quo ante of Korea’s never-ending Cold War.”<sup>26</sup> The extremely explosive developments of June 15, 2020, where the DPRK blew up the liaison office at DMZ on alleged propaganda leaflets sponsored by the ROK has created a sudden summersault scenario and point towards the serious escalation in tension dimming the prospects of future talks and eroded the goodwill environments created in last two years. One possible reason could be the overwhelming expectations and frustrations demonstrated by key parties to the conflict and lack of progress on promised sanctions relief by the DPRK. Constructive engagement and comprehensive road map for enduring peace is the need of time, which must be announced especially by the US, the ROK as time is premium, and any delay in this context may lose the last opportunity for peace and stability.

## **Perspectives of Six-Party Talks on Peace in the Korean Peninsula**

### **Perspective of China**

The region of the Korean Peninsula and wider Northeast Asia is very important from a political and economic point of view. On one hand, it involves strategic issues of denuclearization, the perpetual state of hostility and competition between the DPRK and the US, and on the other hand, there is intense economic engagement on part of all major players, therefore, this region is “rife with political-economic paradox.”<sup>27</sup> The rising tension amid a heated exchange of rhetoric between DPRK and US leaders created anxiety around the globe of any miscalculated action that could lead the entire region into highly destabilizing chaos. Additionally, deployment of US THAAD anti-missile system in the ROK in 2017, US joint military drills with the ROK and Japan and regular maneuvers of US aircrafts in the peninsula had generated a sense of insecurity in the DPRK.

China has huge stakes in the stability of the Korean peninsula, being it’s near abroad, therefore, China has been playing an active role in defusing the crises. China has repeatedly professed restraint and negotiated settlement. There has been a consistent transformation in Chinese policy towards the DPRK. In the beginning, China

maintained a policy of “watching from the sidelines; a policy of non-intervention through 2002 and was unconcerned with DPRK’s nuclear program.”<sup>28</sup> During the period from 2002 to 2009, Chinese policy changed to “active intervention due to DPRK’s unilateral withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT),”<sup>29</sup> and supported for the creation of multilateral Six-Party Talks forum for a comprehensive response. The nuclear tests conducted by the DPRK in 2009 brought a policy shift in China, where the focus now shifted towards maintaining regional stability and denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula. In short, the Chinese current strategic orientation involves parallel efforts in four key areas as highlighted by President Xi during his address at the Seoul National University on July 4, 2014, i.e., “economic integration and development; long-term political interests; peaceful unification between South and North Korea; and public diplomacy.”<sup>30</sup> China has always advocated peaceful and negotiated settlement avoiding provocations and applying restraint for all sides.

### **Perspective of the Republic of Korea (ROK)**

The current South Korean leadership has remained actively involved in defusing tension between the DPRK and the US, especially in the aftermath of Chairman Kim’s New Year speech and participation of the DPRK in the winter Olympics in 2018. There has been much restraint applied in removing propaganda speakers along DMZ, halting joint drills with the US, and facilitating the past three summits between President Trump and Chairman Kim. President Moon advocates “Sunshine Policy”<sup>31</sup> in his relations with Pyongyang.

The first-ever summit at Panmunjom on April 27, 2018, “South and North Korea confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, along with the promise of huge economic incentives by way of investment by the ROK to alleviate ailing economy of the DPRK.”<sup>32</sup> Since then, President Moon has made DPRK a foreign policy preference and lost no opportunity for creating conducive environments where President Trump and Chairman Kim can sit together again in 2020 and hammer out a respectable deal which is win-win for all sides. Additionally, the ROK has remained actively engaged in Six-Party forums for continuous engagement of the DPRK on the table and has helped in diffusing tension especially after President Trump’s UNGA speech. Overall, it is in the interest of the ROK to ensure that peace and harmony prevail in the Korean peninsula and denuclearization of the entire region is a must for lasting peace and stability. The unfortunate incidents of June 15, 2020, which has created a diplomatic breakdown between North and South Korea, President Moon is still actively pursuing diplomacy to ease tension and bring the DPRK back on the negotiating table. The damage done by propaganda leaflets is enormous and needs to be carefully handled.

### **Perspective of Japan**

The peace and stability in North-east Asia are contingent upon the future engagements between the DPRK and the US when it comes to the issues of regional security. The tit for tat provocations and war of words had created anxiety among



Japanese policy circles as the region cannot afford another war and instability. In the case of a military standoff between the US and the DPRK, it is conceivable that the “first target of attack could include US bases in Japan.”<sup>33</sup> Another fear is that most of the test missiles overflowed Japan, therefore, “any malfunction can create havoc in mainland Japan, having thickly populated and highly advanced industrial base.”<sup>34</sup> Japan, therefore, actively participated at six-party talks forums and has remained committed towards a peaceful and negotiated settlement of Korean issues along with denuclearization of the entire region.

### **Perspective of Russia**

While the Russian approach towards the DPRK has generally remained quiet and watching from the sidelines, however, it has played an important role in maintaining and projecting six-party talks forum as an effective platform for comprehensive discussions and keeping the DPRK engaged in the process of dialogue. During Putin-Kim Summit in April 2019, President Putin “reiterated the importance of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, but he also backed North Korea’s advocacy of a phased process involving confidence-building measures with the US.”<sup>35</sup> Russia closely observed Trump-Kim summits and intends to remain constructively engaged and contribute towards negotiated settlement and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

### **Prospects of Enduring Stability in the Region**

The era of conventional wars and armed conflict appears to be drawing down with the international community feeling tired of deaths, devastations and refugees because of instability in the Middle East and adjoining regions. The realist notion of accumulation of power at the cost of others, though relevant but losing its significance due to more accommodative and cooperative order professed by China. The Korean Peninsula has been an international hot spot since the Korean war of the 1950s but has become even more complex due to nuclear dimensions and anxiety of US and DPRK leadership in dealing with each other based on the international norms of sovereign equality and reciprocity. The regional environments have been taking a positive turn after three summits between President Trump and Chairman Kim along with active diplomacy demonstrated by other regional stakeholders, like China, Russia, Japan and the ROK. While the year 2020 is marked by two important events, one is US elections and second is President Trump’s desire to achieve a breakthrough with Kim before elections to make a history never witnessed before in the US approach towards the North-east Asian region. While on the negative side of events, any small miscalculated gesture can create a sudden breakdown of relations as has been witnessed since June 15, 2020. Damage control in such cases becomes extremely crucial and all-out efforts are needed by all the stakeholders for comprehensive engagements to defuse tension and recommence stalled dialogue process.

Following suggestions are offered for lasting peace and stability in the region and averting a potential nuclear holocaust:

- A gradual approach is suggested for US-DPRK future summits, whereby, intensive groundwork at working level groups followed by ministerial-level meetings should be extensively held to fine-tune the agreed agenda items with due regards to sensitivities of each other.
- Regional approach and forum of six-party talks should continue as an alternate platform for negotiating teething issues requiring substantial input from the regional stakeholders. Also, these countries should be engaged to make credence to any future settlements and all must be made partners in such peace efforts.
- The provocations like joint drills, media rhetoric, leaflets and public statements with destabilizing potentials should be avoided for maintaining a congenial atmosphere.
- Hotline communication between DPRK, ROK and US leaders should be established for a direct conversation to address any emergency.
- No provocations should be allowed to avoid strategic miscalculation by any side.
- Confidence-building measures should be taken for creating an atmosphere of goodwill and exchange of pleasantries that can help in achieving such goals.
- Denuclearization should be carefully articulated, and should not appear to be one-sided over-exuberance on part of the US.
- DPRK regime survival and internal consolidation should be preserved as the country cannot afford to implode from within as a result of sudden regime collapse with serious consequences.
- DPRK should be incentivized for its change in conduct by way of sanctions relief and economic assistance for improving the quality of life of its citizens. Otherwise, the leadership's decisions may not gain public support in the long run.
- All parties should put in hectic diplomatic efforts to keep the current momentum of talks moving forward during 2020 for tangible and result-oriented outcomes.
- The reunification of two Koreas should eventually happen as a part of a comprehensive peace deal. It is a long desire of the people of both Koreas and the ROK has dedicated ministry for reunification.

## Conclusion

The Korean Peninsula has remained divided and unstable since the Korean War. Despite several diplomatic efforts, the temperatures kept rising due to overt nuclearization of the DPRK and hostile posturing of the US and the ROK. The scenarios like implosion from within, forceful regime change, and altering state behavior by coercive means remained the language of the US, especially since President Trump assumed office. The nuclear ambitions of North Korean leader Kim and demonstrated nuclear capability backed by delivery means have put the Korean peninsula on the verge of showdown with the US. President Trump's speech of fire and fury and response by

the North Korean leadership aggravated the tension in the bilateral relations of US-DPRK and enhanced instability in the region. However, realizing the gravity of the problem at hand, Chairman Kim demonstrated pragmatic statecraft and mature diplomatic overtures and participation in the 2018-winter Olympics, helped in reversing tense paradigm into a cordial atmosphere. It is also noteworthy to mention the intense engagement by ROK President Moon, who not only hosted North's Olympic team but also held summits with Chairman Kim. President Moon also played a major role in facilitating US-DPRK summits and is making earnest efforts for holding the same during 2020. However, the dramatic breakdown of DPRK-ROK relations since propaganda leaflets allegedly sponsored by the ROK Government has created new challenges of rebuilding the trust and atmosphere of goodwill invested in the last two years. It is strongly felt that all stakeholders should maintain constructive engagement and no opportunity should be lost for attaining the objectives of lasting peace and prosperity and saving the world from an impending nuclear showdown. At the same time, the available forum of Six-Party Talks should also continue to engage all parties through constructive dialogue mechanisms so that momentum is maintained in the coming years and negotiated settlement should be realized for enduring peace and stability in the region.

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