



【Feb. 26, 2019】 Special Essay on upcoming US-DPRK Summit in Hanoi

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AT THE HANOI SUMMIT

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Concrete commitments, not the hyperbole of President Trump’s defenders or detractors, will determine how successful the Trump-Kim summit in Hanoi should be judged by objective observers.

From the U.S. vantage point, four commitments matter. First, will North Korea completely halt the production of plutonium and enriched uranium and commit to the dismantlement of all its fissile-material production sites, not just those at Yongbyon? Second, will it stop making intermediate- and intercontinental-range ballistic missiles? Third, will it permit inspections at its reactor and reprocessing plant at Yongbyon and all its enrichment sites, as well as its nuclear test sites, uranium mines and sites where the uranium ore is refined and turned into a gas for enriching in order to bound uncertainty over how much fissile material it may have produced and used in the past? And fourth, has it committed in writing to its moratorium on nuclear and missile testing?

From the DPRK vantage point, will the United States move away from enmity by declaring an end to the Korean War, opening the way to a peace process that can culminate in a peace treaty? Second, will the United States relax some sanctions by exempting the delivery of humanitarian aid, use of the Mount Kumgang resort and reopening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex in North Korea, as well as lifting U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act sanctions? Third, will the two sides be willing to open liaison offices in each other’s capitals?

Critics will claim that the Yongbyon facilities are old, as if shutting them down is not worth much. That is nonsense. Those “old” facilities, some of which have been operating for less than a decade, can produce three or four bombs’ worth of plutonium and highly enriched uranium a year, as well as the tritium without which the North’s thermonuclear weapons will no longer function after some dozen years or so.

Critics will also object that the North still retains an unknown quantity of fissile material and nuclear weapons and the summit did not yield a complete declaration of the North’s nuclear

inventory including how much it has made. But the Trump administration is right to phase in that inventory declaration, starting with the location of its plutonium reactors, reprocessing and enrichment sites. Before seeking an accounting of fissile material and number of weapons, it is prudent to seek access to these locations as well as the North's nuclear-weapons test sites, its uranium mines, its ore refining plants, and its uranium hexafluoride plant to take various measurements. This nuclear archeology will reduce uncertainty and better enable it to assess how much fissile material the North could have produced. U.S. intelligence estimates vary widely so any number the North would turn over is certain to be controversial, as it was in the initial declaration to the IAEA in 1992, which is now nearly forgotten but for years complicated efforts to contain the growing security threat posed by North Korea's continued fissile material and missile production.

It is essential to understand that verification is a political judgment in technical guise. Verification is sometimes confused with playing "gotcha," seizing on a suspected breach—however minor—as evidence of cheating and using it to discredit a deal. While no agreement can be absolutely verifiable and any breach takes on political significance because of what it implies about a violator's intention to some, to say that an agreement is adequately verifiable is to assert that residual uncertainties are less consequential than the benefits of keeping the agreement. Absolutism in verification may pose as great a risk to U.S. and allied security as some North Korean violations.

Getting most, if not all, of the above commitments would be a remarkable achievement. Implementing them will take the two sides further down the road to denuclearization than they have ever gone before. Critics will no doubt carp that such an outcome stops short of complete denuclearization and question whether Kim Jong Il will ever give up his nuclear weapons, but the only way to find out is to continue the negotiations while keeping U.S. commitments, and see how far they can get.

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