

President Moon's North Korea policy: mid-term results

Issue 2019/10 • Oct 2019

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Since his inauguration in May 2017, representing the wishes of the people, President Moon Jae-in is reaching the halfway point of his term next month in November. When he first took office, the situation on the Korean Peninsula was overcast with dark clouds of war. US President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong-un were pointing fingers and threatening each other with nuclear armaments. However, for a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and a restoration of inter-Korean relations, President Moon has dedicated many efforts towards his North Korea policy. At the start, the Moon government has set 'A Peninsula of Peace and Prosperity' as the governmental index, and pressed hard for a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, the establishment of permanent peace, and the realisation of a new economic community on the Korean Peninsula. As a result, there has been quite a number of changes and developments in inter-Korean relations.

First, the Moon government has worked to remove the actual military threat on the peninsula and has prepared a turning point for peace and improvements in inter-Korean relations. Through three inter-Korean summits, the Moon government has not only brought about critical improvement in inter-Korean relations and an agreement for a complete denuclearisation, but it has also initiated developments in inter-Korean relations and a virtuous circle in denuclearisation. As a result, the number of nuclear and missile threats from North Korea, that had summed up to sixteen in 2017, has reduced down to zero in 2018. Also, in the third inter-Korean summit, the Moon government was able to sign the Inter-Korean

When Moon Jae-in's government first took office, the situation on the Korean Peninsula was overcast with dark clouds of war. However, for a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and a restoration of inter-Korean relations, President Moon has dedicated many efforts towards his North Korea policy. As a result, there has been quite a number of changes and developments in inter-Korean relations. First, the Moon government has worked to remove the actual military threat on the peninsula and has prepared a turning point for peace and improvements in inter-Korean relations. Second, the Moon government had led North Korea into inter-Korean and international dialogue. Third, various channels of dialogue between the two Koreas were created and inter-Korean communication was normalised. Fourth, ethnic homogeneity was restored and inter-Korean exchange and cooperation was initiated. Although inter-Korean relations show a momentary lull as of now due to the recent missile tests by North Korea, more developments and results are expected in inter-Korean and North Korea-US relations in the second half of the Moon government.

Military Agreement on September 19 and begin the overhaul of the 70-years old military confrontational disposition by taking concrete measures to ease military tensions. These efforts led to a series of events relevant to the cessation of hostilities, such as the termination of mutual hostile actions, dismantlement of guard posts at the demilitarised zone (DMZ) and disarmament of the Joint-Security Area (JSA).

Second, the Moon government has led North Korea into inter-Korean and international dialogue. The inter-Korean

dialogue has seamlessly led to North Korea-China and North Korea-US dialogues, and President Moon performed his role as a facilitator to make the first ever North Korea-US summit possible. Chairman Kim had a series of three inter-Korean summits, two North Korea-US summits, five North Korea-China summits, and one North Korea-Russia summit. After failing to hold any summits before 2018, Chairman Kim was able to take his step into the international stage with the inter-Korean summits as the start.

Third, various channels of dialogue between the two Koreas were created and inter-Korean communication was normalised. The 'Panmunjom Communication Channel' which had not been used for the past 23 months was restored and the 'Inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office', where officials of both Koreas reside, was opened on September 14, 2018. This led to the start of an era where inter-Korean communication became possible throughout the year. Upon systematically organising inter-Korean high-level and working-level talks per sector, the number of inter-Korean talks in 2017 which had stayed at zero has increased to thirty-six in 2018.

Fourth, ethnic homogeneity was restored and inter-Korean exchange and cooperation was initiated. With the participation of 500 North Koreans, the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics was not only a stage embodying reconciliation and peace, but also the starting signal for sports exchange between the two Koreas. With the Olympics as the start, the two Koreas have participated together in various international sports competitions as a single team, such as the 2018 Asian Games. In culture and arts, there has been an active exchange initiated by private groups, such as the mutual visits made by a North Korean art group (February 8-11, 2018) and a South Korean art group (April 1-3, 2018), and the Conference for National Unification (October 4-6, 2018). As a result, people exchange between the two Koreas increased significantly. The number of South Koreans visiting North Korea has increased 118 times in 2017-2018,

from 52 to 6148 persons. The number of North Koreans visiting South Korea increased about 12 times, from 63 to 806 persons, in the same time period.

In this way, since the Moon government has taken office, there were many developments in inter-Korean relations. Last May, the second year of its term was celebrated and people were asked to participate in a survey to give feedback about the performance of the Moon government. It was found that people gave the highest score for its North Korea policy.

There have been many changes since, in terms of inter-Korean and North Korea-US relations, and it is expected that there will be more developments and results. As President Moon is now facing his term's halfway point, and as President Trump is looking towards a re-election next year, a concrete result in terms of North Korean relations must be produced. For this, the two leaders must work more actively towards improvement of North Korean relations and denuclearisation of North Korea. In a recent Korea-US summit (September 23, 2019), the two leaders announced that "Korea and the US will 'transform' our relations with North Korea to put an end to the 70-years old confrontational relationship, and we have reconfirmed our intentions to establish a permanent peace system in the peninsula". Also, the US and North Korea have held working-level denuclearisation negotiations in Sweden again on October 5, 2019. Considering how President Moon also seems to be working make the third North Korea-US summit and the fourth inter-Korean summit successful, various changes in terms of inter-Korean and North Korea-US relations are expected in the future.

Inter-Korean relations show a momentary lull as of now, due to the recent missile tests by North Korea, but when relations improve and peace is established in the peninsula through increased exchanges between the two Koreas, unification will be realised naturally someday through an agreement between the South and the North.

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The present publication has been conducted by IES-VUB in full independence.

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