

North Korea: What Price Peace?

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First it was the Panmunjom Declaration and now, after some two months, on 12 June the Singapore Joint Declaration was signed, the former between the leaders of the two Koreas, Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea and President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea (ROK) or South Korea. The latter, meanwhile, was inked by Donald Trump, the President of the United States, and Kim. The central theme for both is peace for the Korean Peninsula premised on its denuclearization.

Item 3 of the Singapore Declaration was unequivocal:

“Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

The continuity between the two declarations then is unmistakable.

Unfortunately, reasons exist to cast a shadow over this ray of hope. Indeed the Singapore Declaration was much anticipated and is well received. But there is, too, much pessimism. The recent unilateral abandonment of the Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by the United States is one. Iran, naturally, advised Kim to be wary. Simply put, Washington's words are not worth the paper they're printed on because there have been many previous instances where it reneged on its commitments. For example, one of Trump's earliest moves was to withdraw from the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), a trade agreement signed and awaiting ratification by the 12 participating Pacific rim countries. NATO's eastwards expansion towards the Russian border is another case of words betrayed. This was by the administration of Bush senior.

Not unnaturally, when the Singapore Declaration speaks of establishing US-DPRK friendly relations and for both parties to work at building peace for the Korean Peninsula hopes were kept realistic despite Trump's announcement that US military exercises in South Korea will be suspended for the time being. This surprised even the ROK President. The US therefore, appeared to make good its intentions for peace. North Korea on its part had destroyed its missile test site even while the status of the summit was still uncertain.

However, the devil is in the details, which the Singapore Declaration left vague. Extensive negotiations then are inevitable. If the JCPOA took nine years to achieve could peace for Korea be arrived at faster? And, if the JCPOA is anything to go by could America's cavalier attitude to peace be a major spoiler?

The United States foreign policy is one of perpetual war. Where its soldiers are not on the ground, proxy armies are used to destabilise countries, as in Libya and Syria. To then be wholeheartedly optimistic about Korea is difficult, if not impossible especially when NATO military forces are building up along the Russia-Europe border, replete with military exercises which grow in intensity with every passing year.

America's perpetual war policy is part of its imperial design to establish the so-called New World Order (NWO). Economic and military hostilities towards even superpowers Russia and China is indication of this malevolent inclination. And so, before a peace agreement can be signed and the Korean War well and truly ended the imperative is for a paradigm shift to occur in American foreign policy; one where there is acceptance that American hegemony is resented and a multipolar world is emerging. But no such thing is happening.

Does this mean that a Korean peace can be dismissed off hand as nothing but a pipe dream and the Singapore Declaration more an entrapment strategy than a liberating one? After all, Trump has said that sanctions on the DPRK stays.

But something odd occurred at the Summit. Trump played a 4-minute documentary on the options open to North Korea: a state of perpetual insecurity and war or prosperity through economic cooperation with America. Pyongyang is being placed squarely between a rock and a hard place.

Over the years North Korea has shown its resilience, circumventing American and international sanctions even as the noose tightens with every alleged breach. Rebuilding its cities from the ground up after having been razed to the ground by American bombing during the Korean War testifies to the people's ingenuity. Reports of a backward, isolated country have proven false with recent visitors extolling its modern cityscapes. With the memories of a devastated country and a population decimated by at least 20 per cent still fresh in the Korean consciousness it is hard, therefore, to factor in an unforced capitulation by Pyongyang.

The Korean Peninsula is a flashpoint. For as long as tens of thousands of American soldiers are stationed in South Korea, North Korea cannot feel safe. But the Panmunjom Declaration demonstrated the two Koreas desire for peace. Yet Seoul does not decide its own security preferences.

Furthermore, even if Trump had the will can he successfully undermine the deep state which has placed obstacles in his path throughout the 18 months he has been in office? Indeed, the dithering over the Summit could be an indication of him trying to override the neoconservatives in his administration, namely, John Bolton his National Security Advisor and Mike Pompeo, his Secretary of State. But this does not mean that neoconservatives want only war.

North Korea is reputedly rich in untapped natural resources. Must Pyongyang then surrender its economic sovereignty to Washington before peace is possible for the peninsula?

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