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# **Where Does Korea Go From Here?**

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Senior Advisor, *Ilmin* International Relations Institute

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**일민국제관계연구원**  
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Welcome back to Korea and good to see you all, friends and colleagues. For those of you who sometimes visit here, usually, something serious, whether exhilarating or depressing, seems to be happening, timed with your visit here. This time is no exception. Only more so than usual.

I'm sure you all have in mind the forthcoming Moon-Kim and Kim-Trump meetings. I was told by people close to President Moon that the current process actually originated from Pyongyang and, therefore, there are few issues, if any, in which there are disagreements between the North and the South. So here is my take on the current state of affairs.

It Kim Jong Un indeed came up with the idea of the so-called "peace momentum" getting started, it was indeed a jackpot of an idea. He would have wanted to do the following:

1. To uplift Kim Jong Un's stature and North Korea's image;
2. To break up, or at least weaken, international sanctions on North Korea;
3. To help rehabilitate North Korea's economy;
4. To make North Korea's status of being a nuclear weapons state a fait accompli and make that status accepted or recognized; and
5. To weaken the rationale for Korean-American alliance and U.S. troops stationing in Korea.

In seeking these objectives, Kim Jung Un saw an opportunity coming from three key countries: South Korea, the United States, and China.

One, there is a sympathetic and pliable South Korea eager and willing to help North Korea.

Two, the United States has a president who is self-indulgent, impulsive, and politically and legally strapped.

Three, China is looking for an opportunity to deepen its political foot

print on the affairs of the Korean Peninsula.

As it happens, things have been working out according to the scenario that Chairman Kim Jong Un envisaged, probably with the help of President Moon Jae-In, since late last year.

The only uncertainty was, whether and how President Trump would accept Chairman Kim's proposal for a face-to-face meeting. But President Trump did accept the proposal almost on the spot and, for Chairman Kim, that was, if unexpected, a real bonus.

So where does Korea go from here? We can only hazard a guess, which nevertheless is quite likely to become a reality.

Despite their brave talks, Chairman Kim Jong Un and President Trump will agree to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. Never mind what "denuclearization" means and that Korean peninsula does not mean only North Korea.

Neither President Trump nor Chairman Kim would want to return home empty-handed. Whatever agreement they can reach, both will spin, construe, and claim that they have achieved a great success and victory that none of their predecessors have been able to do.

President Trump will expect that he is off the political hook back at home.

Chairman Kim will claim that North Korea's status as a nuclear power has been recognized and therefore any negotiation with the U.S. on denuclearization will be an arms control talks between nuclear powers.

President Moon gets both thanks and criticism at home for peace breaking out (at least for a while) in Korea, but also for misleading people that denuclearization of North Korea is at hand.

Seoul and Beijing will find ways of getting exceptions or relaxation of

sanctions *vis-à-vis* North Korea.

Japan will remain nervous and Russia will find an opportunity to fish in troubled waters (i.e, advance influence and economic opportunities).

Thank you and I trust you will have a great meeting during the next two days.